

The Role of Life Skills in Higher Education

Dr. E. Brijesh

Associate Professor of English, Government Degree College, Malkajgiri
Hyderabad, Telangana, 500047

Article Received: 17/07/2026

Article Accepted: 18/08/2026

Published Online: 31/08/2026

DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.08.745

Abstract

Education is the process of enlightening students and empowering them to achieve a better quality of life. The field of education is expanding day by day due to globalisation, and hence it is essential to incorporate life skills into the teaching and learning process for the sustainable development of students and teachers. Regardless of cultural diversity or the socio-economic and political structures of a democratic India, all people share well-defined and common goals. Remembering the pace of an individual in a changing nation, teachers are required to have recent knowledge on life skills. Adolescence is a period when intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and all other capabilities are very high, but, unfortunately, most adolescents are unable to utilise their potential to the maximum due to various reasons. The cutthroat competition, unemployment, lack of job security, etc. are some of the major concerns for the educated, and as a result, they are caught in the mad race. This new challenge requires immediate and effective responses from a socially responsible system of education. 'Education' is important, but education to support and live life better is more important. It has been felt that life skills education bridges the gap between basic functioning and capabilities. It strengthens the ability of an individual to meet the needs and demands of the present society and helps in dealing with the above issues in a manner that makes the desired behaviour practical. Imparting life skill training through inculcating life skill education will help youth overcome such difficulties in life. . They face many emerging issues such as global warming, famines, poverty, suicide, and population explosion, as well as other issues like alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual abuse, smoking, juvenile delinquency, anti-social acts, etc. that have an adverse effect on them and others too, to a large extent. This paper focuses on the significance and role of life skills in higher education in improving quality of life.

Keywords: globalisation, life skills, skill education, challenges, higher education.

Introduction

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable humans to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of life. This concept is also referred to as psychosocial competency. Life skills are the abilities that enable an individual to adopt an adaptive behaviour to fulfil the needs and demands of life so that they face the challenges effectively in life. Life skills inculcate healthy, positive, and productive progress in an individual, establish moral and ethical maturity, and enhance psycho-social skills. Life skills have become the salt and pepper of all individuals related to all aspects of life. Within education, the impact of life skills has become the essence of the teaching and learning process.

In the new millennium, education is undergoing a revolutionised change regarding science and technology, globalisation, privatisation, urbanisation, industrialization, etc. Today's youth are facing many emerging issues, such as global warming, famines, poverty, suicide, and population explosions, as well as social, emotional, physical, and psychological issues. Cutthroat competition, unemployment, lack of job security, etc. are some of the major concerns for the educated, and as a result, they are caught in the mad race. No one has time for his or her'self', to develop empathy with others, and to have harmony in society. The young mind is being considered the most productive members of society due to their physical and intellectual capability. But in a real-life scenario, most of them are unable to utilise their potential in an appropriate way due to a lack of guidance and motivation. Social problems like alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual abuse, smoking, juvenile delinquency, anti-social acts, etc. have an adverse effect on them and others too, to a large extent. This new challenge requires an immediate and effective response from a socially responsible system of education. Education is now very important, but the kind of education needed to support and live life better is more important. Thus, the cardinal focus of education needs an extraordinary emphasis on developing such skills in students, as they are the important building blocks for a dynamic citizen who can cope with future challenges and survive.

Core dimensions of life skills

- **Problem solving:** The problem-solving life skills allow an individual to solve problems efficiently and effectively. Students can resolve conflict, and they can even lead to the settlement of any kind of issue. The problem-solving skills enable the students to overcome difficult situations in their daily lives. The power of critical thinking and creative thinking increases among students due to problem-solving skills.

-
- **Decision-making** skills enable an individual to choose the best alternative by weighing the pros and cons of various alternatives. Decision-making skills enable a person to become confident, independent, affirmative, and responsible to meet the needs and demands of life. Constructive and positive decisions will be taken for the smooth functioning of any activities taken up in life. Only after proper assessment, analysing different options, and working on the consequences will students make the right decisions for their and others's betterment.
 - **Effective Communication:** Effective communication skills are the idea of sharing knowledge, feelings, facts, emotions, thoughts, and beliefs through verbal and nonverbal forms. Effective communication skills enable a person to express his views, desires, values, etc. with confidence. Good rapport and proper relationships can be maintained through effective communication skills. Social relations through active interactions can be established through effective communication skills. Leadership qualities can be inculcated among learners for their overall personality development through effective communication skills.
 - **Empathy:** Empathy life skills are the capacity and ability to accept, assist, care for, and understand others's problems, situations, and circumstances that they face in their lives. Empathy is the ability to understand and identify the emotions, goals, desires, and motivations of another person, resulting in improved prosocial behaviour. Empathy allows a person to develop listening, observing, and understanding skills while also providing mental and emotional support. Empathy is the ability to think mentally and accept the opinions of other people impartially with complete justification.
 - **Coping with stress, trauma, and loss:** Coping with stress, trauma, and loss will help a person conquer the stress, trauma, and loss in his and others's lives. To deal efficiently with the tensions, frustrations, or anxiety caused by stress and trauma well in advance of their adverse effects on an individual's life. To control the emotions and balance the cognitive level, relax before the situation gets worse. This skill helps to maintain balance between positive and negative stress and how to deal with it through the most appropriate solutions. Coping with stress, trauma, and loss of life skills permits an individual to find out the source and effect of stress and how to overcome them.

Review of Literature

According to Albertyn et al. (2004), life skills training enhances critical thinking abilities, which further impacts living life actively, being responsible on the job, and future planning too.

Ramesh and Farshad C. (2004), in their study, proved the effectiveness of skills training in increasing mental and physical health, pro-social behaviour, and decreasing behavioural, social, and self-destructive behaviours.

Tuttle et al. (2006), during their investigation, added life skills to the students' curriculum. The results of this study suggested the extraordinary capability of teens for positive promotion and flexibility.

Puspakumarag (2013), in his study, showed that life skills training was effective in preventing a wide range of problems such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, violence, bullying, and promoting self-confidence and self-esteem among adolescents.

Roodbari, Sahdipoor, and Ghale (2013), in their research, showed that life skills training has a positive effect and improves social development and emotional and social adjustment, suggesting an increase in the compatibility of children and public health. The present paper focuses on how enhancing social, emotional, and thinking skills through life skills education helps 21st-century youngsters achieve their goals and strengthens their abilities to meet the needs and demands of the present society and be successful in life.

Haas et al. (2015) have examined the effects of age, gender, and 4-H involvement on the development of life skills among youth in the age group 8 to 18 for 1 year. Regression analysis had shown a significant influence of gender, age, and 4-H involvement on the development of life skills. Results revealed that the level of competencies of females was higher than that of males at the beginning of the programme, which changed during the year, suggesting changes in the design of the programme for engaging, retaining, and affecting males in a better way in life skills development.

Chakra (2016) has conducted a study to find the influence of personal variables on core affective life skills among 544 adolescents, of which 292 girls and 252 boys were selected. A life skills assessment scale developed by experts was used to assess the level of life skills, and a tool in the questionnaire form was used. The results show that birth order and income of the family have significantly influenced the interpersonal relationship dimension of life skills. Family type, a sibling's number, and gender have no significant influence on core affective life skills.

Bhuvaneshwari et al. (2017) studied the assessment of life skills among 40 nursing students (B.Sc., 1st year) from nursing colleges in Tamil Nadu. A cross-sectional descriptive survey

design using the standardised life skills assessment scale was used to reveal the life skills score. The majority (75 percent) of them had an average level of life skills, and others had low scores in life skills. The result was found to be that there is no association between life skills scores and socio-demographic variables in nursing students.

The significance of the study

Students play a crucial role in the preparation of communities or societies to explore innovative horizons and to gain higher levels of progress and development, and this is possible to the fullest extent only if they are well equipped with life skills. And to be well equipped with life skills, one first needs to be aware of life skills and their significance in one's personal, social, and professional lives. The collaboration of life skills with teaching skills or techniques will surely find a solution for the development of the desired behaviour, attitudes, knowledge, values, and skills of the students. Awareness of life skills will reduce bullying, violence, crime, antisocial behaviour, sexual abuse, alcoholic consumption, drug abuse, smoking, premarital pregnancy, peer conflicts, suicidal attempts, stress, trauma, etc. and allow students to face the challenges and meet the demands in their lives. There is a necessity for awareness of life skills to improve the quality of life. Life skills awareness will enhance the ability and positive attitude to search for and acquire more knowledge on life skills. Self-reflection will help the students transfer their knowledge from the classroom to the real world. Overall, life skills education is an effective social and psychological adjustment strategy. This education plays an important role in empowering adolescents physically and mentally. It helps in developing self-confidence, emotional intelligence, problem solving, thinking ability, and critical thinking. Nowadays, it is important to integrate life skills education into the curriculum. The mental health of students should be enhanced; they should be fully developed and functional to face the challenges of life-changing situations. Life skills education contributes significantly to the overall development of students. It empowers young people to achieve their goals in the 21st century. Life skills education helps in strengthening the mental capacity so that they do not become disoriented and forget their non-existence. This paper discusses the importance of life skills in building a better life by dealing with various problems faced in the modern context.

Objectives of the study:

1. To assess the role of life skills in higher education
2. To study how life skills are important in employment opportunities.
3. To analyse 21st century life skills and higher education
4. To study the National Educational Policy 2020: Building 21st-Century Skills in Students.

Research Methodology

The current research will be totally based on secondary information. The secondary resources would include journals that are reviewed by peers, articles, magazines, and other sources. For collecting secondary information, researchers will be using the data that is available on the topic that was proposed in books, journals, research work that was not published, research papers, newspapers, research articles, government sites, eBooks, and websites.

Life skills and higher education:

Life skills include psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathise with others, and cope with managing their lives in a healthy and productive manner. Essentially, there are two kinds of skills: those related to thinking, termed "thinking skills," and those related to dealing with others, termed "social skills." While thinking skills relate to reflection at a personal level, social skills include interpersonal skills and do not necessarily depend on logical thinking. It is the combination of these two types of skills that is needed for achieving assertive behaviour and negotiating effectively. "Emotional" can be perceived as a skill not only in making rational decisions but also in being able to make others agree to one's point of view. To do that, coming to terms first with oneself is important.

According to UNICEF, life skills are a behaviour change or behaviour development approach designed to address the balance of three areas:

- Knowledge
- Attitude
- Skills.

The world bodies such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and WHO list the ten core life skills as:

1. Self-awareness
2. Critical thinking
3. Creative thinking
4. Decision making
5. Problem Solving
6. Effective communication
7. Interpersonal relationship
8. Empathy
9. Coping with stress
10. Coping with emotion

Life skills training and education consider psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help students take the right decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathise with others, and cope with managing their lives in a healthy and productive manner.

(WHO) defines life skills as the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Life skills have been classified into three broad categories:

- **Thinking skills:** Thinking skills are the skills that enhance the logical faculty of the brain by using an analytical ability, thinking creatively and critically, developing problem-solving skills, and improving decision-making abilities.
- **Social skills:** Social skills include interpersonal skills, communication skills, leadership skills, management skills, advocacy skills, co-operation and team-building skills, etc.
- **Emotional skills:** Emotional skills involve knowing and being comfortable with oneself. Thus, self-management includes managing and coping with feelings, emotions, stress, and peer and family pressure.

Imparting 'Life Skills Education' in the Classroom Imparting Life Skills Education in classroom has been researched meticulously. In light of the above literature review, it is now a proven fact that it has a positive outcome when taught as a part of the curriculum. Yadav P. and Iqbal N. (2009).

There are various past research indications that life skills should be implemented as a training programme, as an intervention approach, and as a model contributing to the healthy development of adolescents. Thus, the significance of life skills education is discussed, and in the following section, researchers have tried to attempt to explain how, with the help of simple activities, it can be implemented in classroom settings.

Different activities that can be used to enhance life skills in students are as follows:
Classroom Discussions:

An activity providing opportunities for students to learn and practice turning to one another in solving problems. It enables students to deepen their understanding of the topic and personalise their connection to it. Develops skills in listening, assertiveness, and empathy.

Brainstorming allows students to generate ideas quickly and spontaneously. It helps students use their imagination and think outside the box. Good discussion starter because the class can creatively generate ideas. It is essential to evaluate the pros and cons of each idea or rank ideas according to certain criteria.

Role Plays: Along with being a fun activity and involving the whole class in being active and participative, it also provides an excellent strategy for practicing skills, experiencing how one might handle a potential situation in real life, increasing empathy for others and their point of view, and increasing insight into one's own feelings.

Groups: Groups are helpful when time is limited as they maximise student input. It allows students to interact and get to know one another better, which in turn enhances team building and teamwork.

Educational Games and Simulations: It promotes fun, active learning, and rich discussion as participants work hard to prove their points or earn points. They require the combined use of knowledge, attitudes, and skills and allow students to test out assumptions and abilities in a relatively safe environment.

Analysis of Situations and Case Studies: It gives a chance to analyse, explore challenges, dilemmas, and safely test solutions, providing opportunities for working together in groups, sharing ideas and new learnings, giving insight, and sometimes promoting seeing things differently.

Higher Education in India

It is clear from higher education that the global competitiveness and job creation potential of Indian industries depend on the skills and skilled workforce required. Higher education should be accessible to everyone. It should be emphasized that the adaptability of higher education systems must be strengthened to continue to provide skills and skilled workers. Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable humans to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of life.

This concept is also referred to as psychosocial competency. The subject varies greatly depending on social norms and community expectations, but skills that function for well-being and aid individuals in developing into active and productive members of their communities are considered life skills. Improving the skills of those involved in higher education can make a significant contribution to placing higher education at the centre of our society. In many ways, scholars have serious doubts about the direction of our society. However, higher education students become citizens who determine the nature of our society. Higher education therefore provides a significant opportunity to influence the future of our society by significantly improving the developmental skills of its citizens.

The Life Skills approach is an interactive learning style that focuses more on information. Influencing behaviour requires combining an information-based approach with behavioural and interpersonal skills (also known as “life skills”) to reinforce behaviour change. Life skills help students get to know themselves better, live more consciously and

consciously, achieve personal satisfaction, and achieve personal and scientific goals. (Kawalekar, 2017)

How life skills are important for employment opportunities

The problem with India is not only unemployment but also unemployability. There are **650 million Indians under the age of 25**, the largest youth population in the world, which presents a unique situation: Almost 22% of the incremental global workforce over the next three decades will come from India. With the right interventions, this demographic dividend can easily be converted into a sustainable opportunity.

What do we understand by life skills?

Life skills are a set of abilities, attitudes, and socio-emotional competencies that enable individuals to learn, make informed decisions, and exercise their rights to lead a healthy and productive life and subsequently become agents of change.

Life skills promote mental well-being and competence in young people as they face the realities of life.

These skills support the development of foundational skills such as literacy, numeracy, and digital skills and can also be utilised in several areas, such as gender equality in education, environmental education, peace education, or education for development, livelihood and income generation, and positive health promotion, among others.

Life skills empower young people to take positive action to participate in their communities, engage in continuous learning, protect themselves, and promote health and positive social relationships.

What is the need for life skills in the Indian context?

- **Adapting to the Situation:** Time management skills for kids, student self-awareness, and interpersonal relationship skills give the ability to adapt to situations, persevere, and constantly reevaluate, reassess, and restructure life.
- **Allow Students to Comprehend and Address Situations:** Critical thinking skills allow **students to** comprehend and address situations based on the available information and facts.
- Critical thinking involves organising and processing facts, information, and other data to outline a problem and develop effective resolutions.
- **Creative Thinking Skills:** Having the ability to think creatively allows us to reconsider things from a fresh perspective and from new angles.
- It's an innovative thought process that results in surprising deductions and new ways of doing things.
- Creative thinking can be aided by lateral thinking or brainstorming to create ideas.

-
- **Fragile Knowledge Society:** Knowledge is the core of a productive society; however, the ability to learn and apply critical thinking skills to solving problems (both defined as “skills”) is more important than the accumulation of knowledge.
 - This ability supports individuals to invent and innovate, leading to social and economic growth.
 - In India, children and adolescents have low levels of understanding and conceptual clarity around learning, analytical skills, and knowledge of human rights, including gender equality.
 - **The National Achievement Survey (NAS), State Learning Achievement Surveys (SLAS), Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)** are large-scale assessments that have consistently pointed to the poor learning levels of children in language and mathematics even after eight years of education.
 - **Depleting Human Capital:** A fragile knowledge society has ramifications for the ability of its members to understand and apply learning to gain opportunities and build a productive society.
 - This is driving inequalities in health, education, and life chances and is most pronounced in some states and pockets of India.
 - The country is experiencing abject poverty and underdevelopment in several geographical concentrations, where young people do not have the necessary skills for productive employment and livelihoods, lack key competencies aligned with the changing demands of the dynamic market, and lack workforce readiness.
 - This is driving inequalities in health, education, and life chances and is most pronounced in some states and pockets of India.

Inequity:

Post-independence, patterns of inequality and exclusion continue to exist in India, largely due to deep-rooted social (e.g., caste, tribal, minorities, and gender) and class structures that perpetuate and limit opportunities for people, systematically blocking them from availing of the rights, opportunities, and resources that are usually available to all members of society.

Within these groups, girls are further discriminated against due to their sex. The degree to which inequity exists varies between regions and geographies.

What should be the way forward?

Creating a Common Vocabulary: Without an agreed-upon vocabulary and assessment framework, it is not possible to effectively scale up life skills delivery in India.

The most meaningful way to enable this is to create a common vocabulary at the national level.

If the 2005 National Curriculum Framework (NCF) helped create a baseline for academic competencies, the new frameworks envisioned by NEP 2020 are expected to do the same for life skills education. The groundwork for this has already begun.

The Life Skills Collaborative, a consortium of over 30 organisations with multi-sector expertise, working in tandem with state governments and educational institutions, has spent the last 18 months coming up with a glossary of key life skills terms and a framework for life skills training.

Creating Assessment Tools: A robust assessment tool would enable us to assess the impact of each framework of life skills training and organise our efforts towards implementing the most effective framework.

For instance, the **“Future Readiness” assessment tool deployed across the 15 different pilots** under Young Warrior NXT was designed to provide comparable evaluations and learning across three key metrics: enrollment, engagement, and learner feedback.

It would inform sustainability and future scalability, which becomes particularly important when dealing with large systemic shifts in education departments that span millions of students.

Curating Content on Life Skills: Making age-appropriate, relevant, and contextual learning content available to all is the cornerstone to building life skills for the 21st century.

Multiple e-learning solutions that aggregate high-quality learning content on the most basic of academic **subjects** have indeed revolutionised education.

A similar solution to curate content on life skills could greatly benefit stakeholders invested in transacting life skills at scale. This would not only enable young people to take charge of their own learning but also offer opportunities for collaboration with learning experts in the space and building on existing efforts in the ecosystem.

Using our Existing Systems

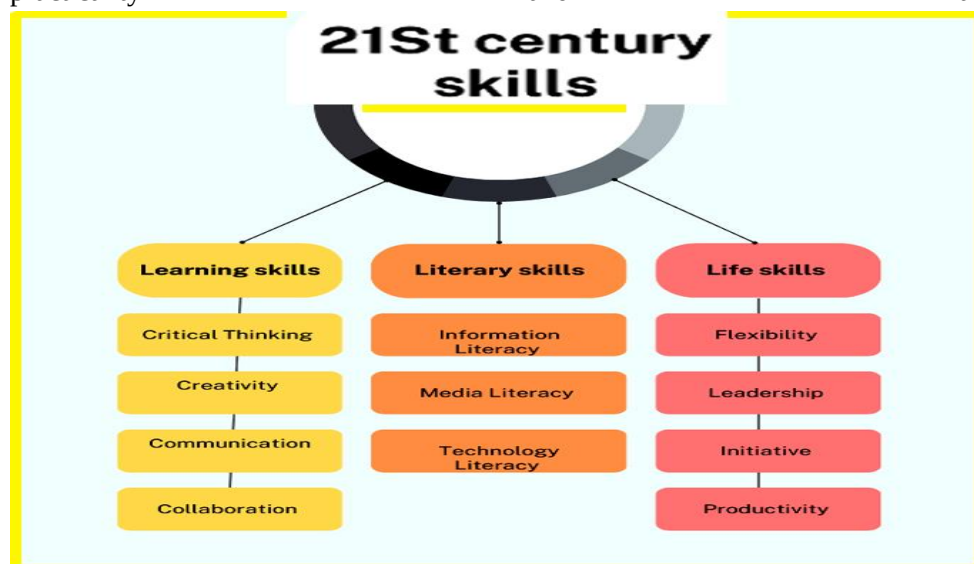
Finally, to deliver life skills at scale, existing school systems and vocational training infrastructure must be leveraged. There are over 10 million teachers and over 1.5 million schools in India, a significant asset base and delivery channel that can be tapped into. However, it is important to note that **teachers are already overburdened**, and the pressure of post-Covid catch-up is putting more stress on the system.

Hence, it is essential that we adequately aid, support, and guide the teachers with pedagogical frameworks, lesson plans, and assessment tools to enable the delivery of life skills training within the mainstream curriculum.

21st century skills

The term 21st century skills refers to a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed by educators, school reformers, college professors, employers, and others to be critically important to success in today's world, particularly in collegiate programmes and contemporary careers and workplaces. Generally speaking, 21st century skills can be applied in all academic subject areas and in all educational, career, and civic settings throughout a student's life.

It should be noted that the "21st century skills" concept encompasses a wide-ranging and amorphous body of knowledge and skills that is not easy to define and that has not been officially codified or categorized. While the term is widely used in education, it is not always defined consistently, which can lead to confusion and divergent interpretations. In addition, a number of related terms, including applied skills, cross-curricular skills, cross-disciplinary skills, interdisciplinary skills, transferable skills, transversal skills, non-cognitive skills, and soft skills, among others, are also widely used in reference to the general forms of knowledge and skill commonly associated with 21st century skills. While these different terms may not be strictly synonymous and may have divergent or specialised meanings in certain technical contexts, these diverse sets of skills are being addressed in this one entry for the purposes of practicality and usefulness.



Source: <https://vdmcbse.jayapriyavidyalaya.com/21st-century-skills>

While the specific skills deemed to be “21st century skills” may be defined, categorised, and determined differently from person to person, place to place, or school to school, the term does reflect a general if somewhat loose and shifting consensus. The following list provides a brief illustrative overview of the knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits commonly associated with 21st century skills:

- Critical thinking, problem solving, reasoning, analysis, interpretation, and synthesising information
- Research skills and practices, interrogative questioning
- Creativity, artistry, curiosity, imagination, innovation, and personal expression
- Perseverance, self-direction, planning, self-discipline, adaptability, and initiative
- Oral and written communication, public speaking and presenting, listening
- Leadership, teamwork, collaboration, cooperation, and facility in using virtual workspaces
- Information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, media and internet literacy, data interpretation and analysis, computer programming
- Civic, ethical, and social-justice literacy
- Economic and financial literacy, entrepreneurialism
- Global awareness, multicultural literacy, and humanitarianism
- Scientific literacy and reasoning, the scientific method
- Environmental and conservation literacy, ecosystem understanding
- Health and wellness literacy, including nutrition, diet, exercise, and public health and safety

While many individuals and organisations have proposed definitions of 21st century skills and most states have adopted learning standards that include or address cross-disciplinary skills, the following are three popular models that can serve to illustrate the concept and its applications in education:

Framework for 21st Century Learning (The Partnership for 21st Century Skills)

Four Keys to College and Career Readiness (David T. Conley and the Educational Policy Improvement Center)

Seven Survival Skills (Tony Wagner and the Change Leadership Group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education).

Blending life skills with 21st-century skills

Generally speaking, the 21st century skills concept is motivated by the belief that teaching students the most relevant, useful, in-demand, and universally applicable skills

should be prioritised in today's schools, and by the related belief that many schools may not sufficiently prioritise such skills or effectively teach them to students. The basic idea is that students, who will come of age in the 21st century, need to be taught different skills than those learned by students in the 20th century, and that the skills they learn should reflect the specific demands that will be placed upon them in a complex, competitive, knowledge-based, information-age, technology-driven economy and society.

What are the skills students will need in the 21st century?

The 21st century dawned as the beginning of the Digital Age, a time of unprecedented growth in technology and its subsequent information explosion. Never before have the tools for information access and management made such an impact on the way we live, work, shop, and play. New technologies and tools multiply daily, and the new technologies of today are outdated almost as soon as they reach the market. Numerous studies and reports have emerged over the past decade that seek to identify the life, career, and learning skills that define the skills needed for success in the 21st century world. While there are some differences in how the skills are categorized or interpreted, there are also many commonalities. Common skills across most of the studies include:

Creativity and Innovation: Using knowledge and understanding to create new ways of thinking in order to find solutions to new problems and to create new products and services.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving: applying higher-order thinking to new problems and issues, using appropriate reasoning as they effectively analyse the problem and make decisions about the most effective ways to solve the problem.

Communication: communicating effectively in a wide variety of forms and contexts for a wide range of purposes and using multiple media and technologies.

Collaboration: working with others respectfully and effectively to create, use, and share knowledge, solutions, and innovations.

Information Management: Accessing, analysing, synthesising, creating, and sharing information from multiple sources.

Effective Use of Technology: Creating the capacity to identify and use technology efficiently, effectively, and ethically as a tool to access, organise, evaluate, and share information.

Career and Life Skills: Developing skills for becoming self-directed, independent learners and workers who can adapt to change, manage projects, take responsibility for their work, lead others, and produce results.

Cultural Awareness: Developing cultural competence in working with others by recognising and respecting cultural differences and working with others from a wide range of cultural and social backgrounds.

National Educational Policy 2020: Building 21st-Century Skills in Students

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was a landmark initiative for the Indian education system, calling for deep sector reform and a systemic overhaul. The policy **recommended incorporating life skills as part of the curriculum**, considering the view that education must go beyond academic outcomes to focus on the holistic development of our future generations. The knowledge, life skills, habits, traits, and career skills that are crucial for the success of a student in the current world are referred to as 21st-century skills. These are helpful for students as they move on to college and work in their adult lives. 21st-century skills are included in the strategic plans of educational institutions for preparing students better for their careers and lives. The most relevant skills include critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.

The Essence of 21st-Century Skills for Students

- 21st-century learning and innovation skills matter today because of the following reasons:
- Soft skills drive success in high-level courses and workplaces.
- Students are being prepared for jobs that are not yet popular today. Such career readiness needs to equip them with skills that keep them prepared for the unknown.
- The internet era has made vast amounts of information accessible to students. They need to have the skills to process and analyse this information by overcoming the challenges occurring while navigating social situations and other circumstances.
- Theoretical knowledge from textbooks is no longer sufficient. Students need to understand their practical application to efficiently solve complex problems.

Important 21st-Century Skills for Students

The list of 21st-century learning skills that must be woven into the learning experiences of students is as follows:

- Creativity
- Problem-solving
- Perseverance
- Collaboration
- Information literacy
- Media literacy

- Civic literacy
- Social responsibility
- Innovation skills
- Thinking skills
- Global Awareness
- Self-direction
- Social skills
- Literacy skills
- Critical thinking
- Communication skills
- Technology skills and digital literacy

Besides learning the key academic subjects, the following 21st-century skills need to be inculcated in the students: All the above skills are classified into the following categories:

Learning Skills: These include critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration skills.

Life Skills: These include learning to be flexible, social, productive, and a good leader.

Literacy Skills: These involve learning about technology and media to be well-equipped with information technology.

Building 21st-Century Skills: Learning 21st-century skills to ensure relevance in the current era is the first step towards progress. So, a proper plan has to be made to ensure that students acquire the required skills. Some ways of doing this are explained below:

Creating staff capacity: The teachers and staff need to understand and model the skills that students need to learn. The 21st-century skills need to be integrated into staff personal development so the competencies can grow in the students. Various ideas, activities, and worksheets can be implemented for building adult SEL.

Creating an inquiry-based environment in the classroom: Students learn when they freely ask questions and get answers to them. The best way to achieve this is to follow a KWL chart in which K stands for knowledge in what the students know so far, W stands for want in what they want to know, and L stands for loud in wondering out loud to the teachers when they come across some new information. Inquiry-based learning can keep students self-motivated on their learning path.

Encouraging collaboration: An optimum, positive classroom environment is crucial for enhanced collaboration. Students are social creatures, and hence every opportunity must be used to help them form pairs and small groups. This helps boost their speaking and language skills. Moreover, they also learn to attain their goals together.

Focus on the development of critical thinking skills: Learning doesn't involve just memorising and remembering things; it involves the development of critical thinking skills. This helps students move beyond simple comprehension of any information. With such skills, they can resolve issues, come to conclusions and generalize things, form new patterns by combining the available information, and form judgments based on certain evidence and criteria. Because of all these advantages, teachers introduce activities in classrooms that develop critical thinking and language skills.

Encourage creativity among students: When students are creative, they can express everything they have learned in a new way. So, when efforts are made to synthesize and personalize knowledge, it creates an experience that stays with the students even when their schooling is over.

Assessing the skills of students: When something is measured, it gives the impression that it is important. So, it is important to regularly collect data about the progress of students in acquiring 21st-century skills. This can be qualitative, quantitative, or anecdotal data. Teachers can encourage students to add comments to report cards about their skills.

Paying special attention to students who are off track: The data collected about the 21st-century skills of students should be actionable for teachers. Certain districts implement early warning systems by setting indicators against various parameters such as the social-emotional learning of students or 21st-century skills, their behavior, attendance, and academics. Data-driven decisions are taken by the teachers with such details to ensure that every student is on track. In case someone goes off track, teachers pay special attention to keeping them aligned with the target goals.

Allowing the students to lead learning

No matter what strategies are implemented in educational institutes, teachers should understand that the best learning environment gives a sense of empowerment to the students. Efficient teachers act as moderators who inspire the students and guide them to discover themselves while learning new skills. They let the students be self-learners so that they love learning throughout their lives, not just under compulsion to complete the syllabus. This ensures that students are best prepared for their life after school or college.

Implementing the above strategies can help students acquire 21st-century skills besides the regular knowledge from textbooks. Initially, some may find it tough to adjust to this new learning method, but gradually, it will make them feel empowered. They will begin to think critically and creatively and be better suited to grow in the competitive world by efficiently facing challenges.

Conclusion

Life skills are a very important and integral part of the educational system worldwide. Higher education has the potential to deliver skills and research for productivity and innovation. It is important to remember that education with life skills is not another subject; it humanises education. It helps to organise thinking and effort to achieve a goal. Once an action plan has been developed, especially in the curriculum, it can be developed spirally, in depth and width. A lot of thought must be given to how to bring life skills education into the mainstream curriculum. Our educational policies and subsequent curriculum frameworks have always emphasised the need for life-skill education. It is also true that in order to be effective, there must be clearly defined and definite focus, direction, and commitment for fostering life skills. These can be acquired every moment and every day of our lives. A life skills-based teaching and learning process will help strengthen and promote the quality of the educational system. Life skills techniques in the teaching and learning process as well as in socially oriented activities will create a good relationship between teachers and students. At present, most educational institutions are focusing on life skills for the overall development of students, from primary to higher education. Sensitization on the relevance and importance of life skills among students will inculcate good qualities in them, bringing up positive modifications in behaviour, knowledge, attitudes, skills, and values. Through this research paper, an attempt is made to study life skills awareness among postgraduate students. Hence, more research needs to be conducted in the life skills area so that we can design effective strategies for building life skills in learners to transform them into globally competent, tolerant, and responsible citizens of our country.

Life skills are abilities that enable a person to navigate a range of life contexts with a sense of personal confidence, a social conscience, and professional competence. They are developed through the use of processes that are inclusive and sensitive to individual, local, and regional diversity.

Today, there is substantial evidence that life skills play a positive and important role in the development of young adults into responsible and empowered citizens. The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of resilience, social compassion, empathy, and perseverance,” says Arjun Bahadur, Lead-Life Skills Collaborative (LSC), which focuses on championing life skills for India’s young people through extensive on-the-ground outreach programmes.

The NEP 2020 policy would reshape the education system. It focuses on providing skill-based or vocational education to the students so they can learn the basic skills required

in the future. Some of the skills that the policy emphasises being there within the students are called 21st century skills and include creativity, collaborative skills, basic life skills, and social skills. Fulfilling these needs will help students, parents, and teachers change their perceptions of the inferiority associated with the path of VET and dream of higher education and high-status occupations.

Works Cited

- Botvin, Gilbert, et al. "Preventing Tobacco and Alcohol Use Among Elementary School Students Through Life Skills Training." *Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2003, pp. 1-17. Taylor & Francis Online, https://doi.org/10.1300/j029v12n04_01.
- Clark, Don. *Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains: The Cognitive Domain*. 1995. Nwlink.com, retrieved 14 Dec. 2015, <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html>.
- Kawalekar, D. J. "The Value of Life Skills in Higher Education." *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 2017, pp. 43-46.
- Nair, Madhavan. *Family Life & Life Skills Education for Adolescents*. 2005. Abstract, University of Southampton.
- Pillai, Radhika. *The Importance of Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents*. 2012. Mind the Young Minds, retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/mindtheyoungminds/souvenir-cum-scientific-update>.
- Puspakumara, J. *Effectiveness of Life-Skills Training Program in Preventing Common Issues Among Adolescents: A Community Based Quasi Experimental Study (ALST)*. 2011. Presentation, Dept. of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine & Allied Sciences, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka.
- Ramesht, Majid, and Farshad Chavoshian. *Study of Life Skills Training in Prevention of Drug Abuse in Students*. 2006. Lecture, The 3rd Seminar of Students Mental Health, Iran University of Science and Technology.
- Roodbari, Zeinab, et al. "The Study of the Effect of Life Skill Training On Social Development, Emotional And Social Compatibility Among First- Grade Female High School In Neka City." *Indian Journal of Fundamental and Applied Life Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2013, pp. 382-390. *Cibtech*, <http://www.cibtech.org/jls.htm>.

-
- Smith, Elizabeth, et al. "Results of a 3-Year Study of Two Methods of Delivery of Life Skills Training." *Health Education & Behavior*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2006, pp. 325-339. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198105285020>.
- Tuttle, Jane, et al. "Positive Adolescent Life Skills Training for High-Risk Teens: Results of a Group Intervention Study." *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2006, pp. 184-191. *Elsevier*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedhc.2005.10.011>.
- Vranda, M. N., and M. Shankara Rao. "Life Skills Education for Young Adolescents and Indian Experience." *Journal of the Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2011.
- Yadav, Pragati, and Naseem Iqbal. "Impact of Life Skill Training on Self-esteem, Adjustment and Empathy among Adolescents." *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*, vol. 35, Special Issue, 2009, pp. 61-70. *MedIND*, <http://medind.nic.in/jak/t09/s1/jakt09s1p61.pdf>.
- Yankey, Thomas, and Updesh Kumar Nand Biswas. *[Study on Life Skills]*. 2012.
- World Health Organization (WHO). *Life Skill Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools*. Programme on Mental Health, WHO, 1994.
- "Document." *Central University of Kerala*, <https://www.cukerala.ac.in/cukpdfs/IQAC/3.4.5/3.4.5.EDU.065.pdf>.
- "NEP 2020: Building 21st Century Skills in Students." *Teachmint Blog*, <https://blog.teachmint.com/nep-2020-building-21st-century-skills-in-students/>.
- "Significance of Life Skills." *Drishti IAS*, <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/significance-of-life-skills>.