

Life Skills Education Development: In Indian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The psychosocial abilities also known as "life skills" which enable people to maximize their potential, manage their emotional health and social relationships, and make well-informed decisions. People who receive life skills education behave well and are better equipped to handle the rigors and difficulties of daily life. Young adolescents need to be taught life skills as adolescence is a time of transition between childhood and maturity and involves significant physical, cognitive, and psychological changes that must be addressed. The Indian education system has long included life skills training, but in the 21st-century, it has been given more attention by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), and most recently, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The goal of the current study is to investigate 21st-century life skills programs in India. These programs seek to provide teenagers the critical thinking, emotional fortitude, decision-making, and social skills, they need to successfully negotiate social, academic, and personal obstacles.

Keywords: *Life Skills, Life Skills Education, National Curriculum Framework (NCF), National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), National Education Policy (NEP) 2020*

In essence, life skills are those competencies that support young people's mental health and competency as to navigate life's challenges. According to the World Health Organization (1999), life skills are "the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life." Life skills are described as "a behavior changes or behavior development approach which is designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude, and skills" by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2007).

Rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes are hallmarks of early adolescence, a critical developmental time. Young people actively seek to define their identity and sense of self throughout this developmental stage. During this period, individuals encounter complex social, intellectual, and personal challenges, while simultaneously acquiring new knowledge and developing essential skills. The structured and systematic implementation of Life Skills Education becomes essential for this transitional stage. "Life skills involve essential competences like critical thinking, communication, and teamwork. Developing these in youngsters ensures they can make wise judgements, handle their emotions, and

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adapt to life's changing circumstances. By grooming youth into resilient and sincere individuals, life skills education promotes not just personal success, but the overall development of a peaceful and welcoming society.

Life skills education is becoming popular in the contemporary global environment because it helps teenagers convert their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs into positive actions. These abilities form the cornerstone of psychosocial competence and self-worth. With these skills, people may investigate several options, balance advantages and disadvantages, and make logical choices to deal with life's obstacles. Ten key methods are listed in the UNICEF, UNESCO, and WHO guidelines: problem-solving, critical and creative thinking, effective communication, decision-making, interpersonal skills, self-awareness, empathy, and the capacity to manage stress and emotions. In the end, these competencies develop the emotional, mental, and resilient skills required to overcome everyday challenges and make a significant contribution to society. UNESCO has divided the components under three broad headings are given in Table 1:

Table 1 Key Life Skills

Self-awareness	Interpersonal Skills	Thinking Skills
1. Stress management	5. Empathy	11. Goal setting
2. Emotional regulation	6. Listening skills	12. Decision making
3. Positive thinking	7. Interpersonal effectiveness	13. Problem solving
4. Self-esteem	8. Handling disputes	14. Critical and creative thinking
	9. Managing relationships	15. Executive function skills
	10. Confident communication	16. Resilience (bouncing back from adversity)

Thus, Life Skills, in a general way, can be labelled as a blend of knowledge, behavior, attitudes and values.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Life skills constitute the psychosocial competencies that enable individuals to reach their full potential, maintain emotional well-being, and navigate social relationships through prudent decision-making. As Nair and Ranjan (2020) observe, life skills education represents a holistic approach that promotes the practice and reinforcement of psychosocial abilities. These skills should be appropriate for the learner's age, culturally sensitive, and aligned with the individual's developmental milestones throughout life. Moreover, the principles of Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda emphasize the significant importance of teaching these life skills. Vivekananda, in particular, argued that true education extends beyond the mere accumulation of information and encompasses the development of character and the realization of the perfection already inherent in humanity.

Individuals who receive life skills education exhibit appropriate conduct and are better prepared to manage daily life challenges (Vranda & Rao, 2011). By promoting behavior modification, life skills education assists students in addressing life problems and developing psychosocial competence (Razia, 2016). The Life Skills approach represents an interactive educational methodology characterized by learner-centered, youth-friendly, gender-sensitive, interactive, and participatory learning (Rooth, 2000). As noted by Saravanakumar (2020), social skills programs can strengthen students' self-control and

self-management capabilities, thereby improving academic performance, learning capacity, and adjustment to the school environment.

According to Vranda and Rao (2011), life skills may be grouped into the following domains: learning/academic skills (such as study skills, literacy, and learning from experiences); relating skills (including communication, initiating, sustaining, and concluding relationships, assertiveness, and conflict management); work and recreation skills (encompassing time management, financial management, and career planning); and the development of self and others' abilities (covering creative problem solving, positive self-perception, decision-making, stress management, transition management, regulation of negative emotions, self-awareness, and maintenance of physical well-being). These competencies are recognized as playing a crucial role in aiding young people to overcome obstacles and to become productive members of society (Prajapati, Sharma, & Sharma, 2017; WHO, 1993).

Objectives

The objectives of the present research work are as follows:

- i) To analyze the need of Life Skills Education.
- ii) To explore various initiatives for Life Skills programs in India.

METHODOLOGY

The nature of present study is qualitative and has been carried out using a variety of sources, including journals, papers, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, NEP 2020, the NCF preliminary draft, etc. The study employed a descriptive analytical approach.

Life Skill Programs Initiatives in India

Globally, life skills have emerged as a significant element in numerous intervention programs. Life skills initiatives have been implemented across diverse focal areas, including the reduction of risky behaviors, sports settings, and sexual and reproductive health. The following is a detailed, chronological discussion of India's Life Skills Program Initiatives. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 emphasizes constructive learning experiences, the development of an inquiry-based approach, workplace-relevant information, and broader life skills. In 2005, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) prepared Life Skills guides for teachers, covering classes 6, 7, and 8, and integrated Life Skills Education into the curricula through Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) for grades 6 to 10. These guides provide educators with general instructions aligned to each of the World Health Organization's (WHO) ten essential life skills. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) includes life skills training for upper primary girls on its agenda.

Program for Adolescent Education (2005)

Adolescents constitute the nation's most vital demographic force, driving social transformation. They represent a resource that must be developed and educated to produce future leaders and productive members of society. This group is particularly vulnerable due to a frequent lack of awareness regarding the risks of substance addiction, sexually transmitted infections, and the maturation process. They often lack the social networks necessary to seek reliable information and assistance in addressing such issues. The vulnerability of girls and young women is further intensified by various social factors, including early marriage, early pregnancy, a high maternal mortality rate, domestic abuse, and restricted access to educational opportunities.

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Youth who possess knowledge and competencies are more inclined to make prudent choices concerning their relationships, careers, habits, and physical and mental well-being. The objective of life skills education is to enable young people to cultivate moral principles. It would ease the transition into adulthood for today's stressed youth. Adolescents derive several benefits when they acquire Knowledge, Attitudes, Values, Enhanced Life Skills (KAVELS). Those endowed with these life skills are better equipped to make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, foster healthy relationships, demonstrate empathy, and manage their lives in a constructive and healthful manner.

Back in 2005, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) teamed up with the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) to launch the Adolescence Education Program, or AEP. The whole idea behind AEP is to equip every young person between 10 and 19 with the know-how and skills they need to stay safe from things like HIV, STDs, drug use, violence, mental health issues, and anything that could mess with their productivity. This program trains teachers and some of the students themselves, who then go on to teach their peers. It's pretty much a nationwide initiative covering all secondary and senior secondary schools. Right now, the plan is for trained teachers to deliver it in 9th and 11th grades, spending at least 16 hours on it each school year. The way AEP teaches is all about getting people involved, focusing on practical life skills, and making it a two-way street. The goals of AEP were:

1. to equip students with useful life skills for handling adolescent challenges through extracurricular activities;
2. to provide them with correct information about puberty, drug use, and various sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS;
3. to foster responsible actions and positive outlooks on growing up; and to assist them in navigating gender biases and stereotypes.

Supplementary Initiatives by the Indian Government

Through India's three national school systems—CBSE, NVS, and KVS—the NCERT has implemented a co-curricular approach to Life Skills Education, which can be integrated into the curriculum with or without grades. In 2008, the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD) launched post-graduate courses in life skills and developed a training guide for teaching teenagers and young people. RGNIYD also conducted multiple training seminars to spread awareness of life skills programs nationwide. The National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF), introduced in 2013, emphasized skill training, professional knowledge, core competencies, and attitudes across all educational programs. In 2016, India established a new policy for skill development and entrepreneurship along with a dedicated Ministry for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. Institutions such as the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), and Sector Skill Councils were created in a public-private partnership model. The Skilling India project was launched in mission mode to promote widespread skill acquisition. Life skills components have been integrated into both academic and vocational training curricula. This approach ensures that learners acquire not only technical and professional skills but also essential life competencies. Overall, India's framework combines educational policy, institutional support, and practical training to mainstream life skills development nationwide.

Life Skills Education: Facilitators' Guide (2014)

In 2014, the Psychiatry Department of NIMHANS Bangalore developed a facilitator's guide to teach life skills to Indian adolescents. It addressed critical issues including nutrition, communicable diseases, substance abuse, behavioral addictions, early marriage, sexual abuse, gender concerns, aggression, and major life choices. The guide emphasized the facilitator's role, participatory and peer-group learning techniques, mental health awareness, and counseling principles. This structured framework provided a comprehensive approach for promoting holistic adolescent development and essential life competencies.

Initiatives In Higher Education

Since 2019, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has incorporated Life Skills into the curriculum for all undergraduate programs in India. The initiative aims to provide students with essential competencies, including communication, interpersonal skills, time management, teamwork, flexibility, problem-solving, decision-making, leadership, and universal values. According to UGC, integrating these skills enhances students' employability, self-esteem, and overall preparedness for personal and professional challenges. The Life Skills (Life Skills 2.0) curriculum developed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) is in line with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It emphasizes holistic and learner-centred education beyond traditional academic knowledge. The curriculum focuses on developing communication, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It enhances professional competencies like teamwork, leadership and employability skills. Emotional intelligence, stress management and resilience are also its major components. The program covers digital literacy, cyber ethics and responsible use of technology. Universal human values and constitutional principles are also incorporated to promote moral and responsible citizenship. Experiential learning methods like role-playing and case studies are helpful in developing practical skills. The curriculum is multidisciplinary and adaptable to graduate programs. Overall, it prepares students to become competent, moral and socially responsible individuals in line with NEP 2020.

National Curriculum Framework (2021)

The Ministry of Education (MoE) and NCERT developed the preliminary draft of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2021) in line with NEP 2020 recommendations. NCF 2021 recommends that grade IX students' study "Individuals in Society," covering political, economic, sociocultural, and environmental domains. The curriculum promotes ethical and moral reasoning and integrates knowledge from multiple disciplines, making it interdisciplinary in nature. It also facilitates the development of critical thinking, interpersonal skills, and social-emotional competencies, enabling students to apply learning in real-world contexts beyond the classroom.

National and international policy level initiatives who works for life skill developments and the agencies participate in them are given inn Table 2.

Table 2: Life Skill Developing Agencies Participating in Developing Life Skill in India

Organization	Type of Intervention	Target Group	Key Activities / Approach
WHO (World Health Organization)	Framework for 10 Core Life Skills	Schools (Classes 6–10 via CBSE)	Defined 10 core life skills (decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, communication, interpersonal skills, self-awareness, empathy,

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Organization	Type of Intervention	Target Group	Key Activities / Approach
			coping with emotions, coping with stress)
UNICEF India	Policy advocacy + implementation framework	Schools, adolescents	Developed quality standards; supported curriculum integration; teacher training models; psychosocial support
CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education)	Life Skills via Continuous & Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE)	Classes 6–10	Life skills manuals for teachers; assessment through CCE; integration into school curriculum
Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)	Government life skills training	Upper primary girls	Life skills training modules focused on empowerment and adolescent development
NIOS + UNFPA + MHRD	Teacher training initiative	Teachers	Teacher training videos for integrating life skills into curriculum
Organization	Focus Area	Target Group	Activities Conducted
Dream a Dream	Social & emotional learning	Adolescents, teachers	Experiential workshops; play-based learning; teacher development (4 workshop series over 6 months); observational assessment tools
The Akanksha Foundation	Integrated SEL	Students in 15 schools (Mumbai, Pune)	Integrated life skills in curriculum; leadership programs; Service-Learning Program (SLP); teacher & school leader support
Going To School (GTS)	Entrepreneurship & life skills	Class 9 students	Story-based skill books; Saturday 2-hour sessions; community action projects; teacher training
Khel Planet	Life skills through play	Low-income private school children	Game-based workshops targeting emotional, cognitive, leadership & collaboration skills
In Open	Life skills + computer literacy	Secondary school students	Integrated soft skills with computer literacy training
Medha	Employability skills	Secondary & college students	Soft skills, workplace readiness, communication, teamwork training
Lend A Hand India	Vocational + life skills	Secondary school students	Vocational education + workplace soft skills
IGNIS Careers	English + life skills	Youth	Communication and workplace readiness through English learning
Educate Girls	Empowerment & leadership	Adolescent girls	Leadership development, community engagement
Shaishav / Ibtada / Sanlaap	Child rights + empowerment	Vulnerable children & adolescents	Self-awareness, leadership, empowerment programs
Creya	21st-century skills	School students	Critical thinking, problem solving workshops
THOTS Labs	Inquiry-based learning	School students	Higher-order thinking skills training
The Teacher Foundation (TTF)	SEL standards development	Schools & teachers	Research on SEL standards; framework development; teacher assessment tools

CONCLUSION

Life skills refer to the psychosocial competencies required to manage diverse situations and form the foundation for personal growth and well-being. They are universal and essential in a globalized world, where interconnectedness coexists with increasing inequalities, exposing young people to challenges such as social pollution, environmental degradation, and political instability. Life Skills Education fosters positive behavior and adaptability, enabling individuals to overcome obstacles effectively. The depth of mastery in these skills strengthens the consistency of constructive behaviors. In India, life skills have long been part of the educational system, and NEP 2020 emphasizes their integration into the curriculum to align education with traditional values and ethos. The policy highlights the importance of developing higher-order cognitive abilities, socio-emotional competencies, and character formation, collectively constituting life skills. Life Skills Education thus serves as a fundamental mechanism for achieving NEP 2020 objectives and preparing learners to navigate the demands and challenges of the twenty-first century.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Thakur, M. (2025). Life Skills Education Development: In Indian Perspective. *International Journal of Social Impact*, 10(4), 235-242. DIP: 18.02.024/20251004, DOI: 10.25215/2455/1004024