

# Life Skills: The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

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## Abstract

“Skills have become the global currency of the 21st century, but this currency can depreciate if it isn’t used” said Andreas Schleicher, Deputy Director for Education at the OECD Forum (25 May 2012). Our educational system gives more importance to learning of 3 R’s- reading, writing and arithmetic. It is concentrated more on the cognitive dimension rather than on reflective and psychological dimensions. It is achievement oriented than child oriented. But today changes and challenges of fast-growing society demands more contextual approach in education to meet actual use in real life situations. In 21<sup>st</sup> century India there is raising problem of unemployment, inequality, violence and environmental destruction, etc., demands a new set of skills, and creative problem-solving potential. Life skills are group of psychological competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively and develop coping and self-management skills to lead a healthy and productive life. Life skill learning should be made integral part of the curriculum to promote the well-being of the youth.

**Keywords:** Life Skills, Education, Youth, 21<sup>st</sup> Century

## INTRODUCTION:

Youths are considered as the most valuable asset of the society. Youth is the most productive period of one’s life. The youth of today face many more choices and demands than ever before. Dealing with academic competition and peer pressure, handling daily life conflicts, preparing for future roles, making crucial carrier choices on the one hand provide them with greater independence but on the other hand making them undergo greater conflict and frustration, affecting their psychosocial well-being. In 21<sup>st</sup> century, academic stress, violence including bullying, sexual permissiveness, easy drug availability and abuse, crowding, poor infrastructure, social divide are some of major issues which a youth has to struggle with in this rapidly changing social scene of India. An empowered youth has the competence to cope with the challenges of life using the available resources even amidst such adversities. So it is essential to help the youth acquire enduring self-esteem, inquiring habits of mind, reliable human relationships, a sense of belonging in a valued group, and a feeling of usefulness.

Technological revolution, emergence of knowledge economy, global pandemic are some of the factors that has affected the education system in the recent times. NEP, 2020, emphasizes on skill development rather than the content The HEIs are expected to prepare the students for the constantly dynamic job market which demands the young people to be prepared for the unprecedented changes. Hence the HEIs should impart the domain specific skills as well as the life skills required for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Education is a unique investment in the present and the future. Our country is currently on the threshold of a significant ‘demographic dividend’, that it is the home for the largest adolescent population in the

world (243 million, census 2010). Demographers and economists have predicted higher growth prospects for India over the next thirty years, as India is and will remain for some time one of the youngest countries in the world. This demographic process entails a massive and growing labour force which will deliver profound benefits in terms of growth and prosperity.

### **LIFE SKILLS - THEIR NEED & IMPORTANCE**

Life skills are group of psychological competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively and develop coping and self-management skills to lead a healthy and productive life. These are the abilities; individuals can learn that will help them to live a fruitful life. According to a study conducted to assess the levels of life skills in early and late adolescents of High school and Pre University College of Bangalore city found that 13% had high level of Life skills, 73% had average level and 14% had low level of life skills. (Arpana Sr., D'Souza Lancy, 2012). The Ten core Life Skills suggested by UNICEF are 1. Self-awareness, 2. Empathy, 3. Effective communication, 4. Interpersonal Relationship, 5. Creative thinking, 6. Critical thinking, 7. Decision making, 8. Problem Solving, 9. Coping with emotion, 10. Coping with stress

Life skills are a category of soft skills that are needed to successfully navigate the challenges of daily life, both personal and professional. They include the ability to set and achieve goals, make decisions, solve problems, and effectively manage one's time. Once mastered, life skills help a person in every aspect of his/her life.

For the youth to enter the community of responsible adults prepared for a diversity of professional and social roles as well, they must possess critical thinking and problem-solving skills along with effective coping resources and personal and social competencies. The most direct interventions for the promotion of psychosocial competence in the young people can be done by teaching of life skills in a supportive learning environment (WHO, 1994). It will not only help promote the well-being of the youth, but also contribute to national health and our future as a nation.

Recognizing the need for skill development, the Government of India has adopted skill development as a national priority and introduced life skills in the education realm to create a skilled work force that is not only employable but also empowered. But there is a long way to go

### **LIFE SKILL APPROACH TO EDUCATION**

Life skills approach is a comprehensive, multi-strategy approach, aiming at effectively bringing about desired positive behaviors in individuals through the transfer of appropriate knowledge, skills, values and attitude in the learner. The goal of this approach is to promote healthy, sociable behavior and to prevent or reduce risk behaviors, as well as make an impact on knowledge and attitude. The International Bureau of Education focused on four pillars of learning - (a) learning to know, (b) learning to do, (c) learning to be and (d) learning to live together-and the following are some cognitive personal and interpersonal life skills that are generally considered particularly important.

#### **LEARNING TO KNOW - Cognitive abilities**

- Decision making/problem solving skills, Information gathering skills, Evaluating future consequences of present actions for self and others, Determining alternative solutions to problems, Analysis skills regarding the influence of values and attitudes of self and others on motivation
- Critical thinking skills- Analyzing peer and media influences, Analyzing attitudes, values, social nor-

ms and beliefs and factors affecting these, Identifying relevant information and information sources

#### **LEARNING TO BE** - Personal abilities-

- Skills for increasing internal locus of control-Self esteem/confidence building skills, Self awareness skills including awareness of rights, influences, values, attitudes, strengths and weaknesses, Goal setting skills, Self evaluation/self assessment/self-monitoring skills, Skills for managing feelings- Anger management, Dealing with grief and anxiety, Coping skills for dealing with loss, abuse, trauma,
- Skills for managing stress- Time management, Positive thinking, Relaxation technique

#### **LEARNING TO LIVE TOGETHER** - interpersonal abilities

- Interpersonal communication skills - Verbal/Non-verbal communication, Active listening, Expressing feelings; give feedback (without blaming) and receiving feedback
- Negotiation/refusal skills- Negotiation and conflict management, Assertiveness skills
- Empathy- Ability to listen and understand another's needs
- Cooperation and team work- Expressing respect for others contribution, assessing one's own abilities and contributions to the group, Advocacy skills- Influencing skills and persuasion, Net- working and motivation skills.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF LIFE SKILL TRAINING FOR YOUTH**

Life skills play a vital role in professional success as they help one to excel in the workplace and their importance cannot be denied in this age of information and knowledge. In today's competitive world, academic knowledge is not the only ingredient to excel in life. For an individual to be a part of the working community or the world academic circle, it is essential to have an attractive personality; a personality that doesn't need words to make its presence known. A well-rounded personality is one that has a confident countenance, an assertive but likable way of speaking and a nature that attracts people naturally.

#### **ROLE OF ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS IN INCULCATING LIFE SKILLS AMONG YOUTH:**

**Multidisciplinary Approach:** National Education Policy 2020 has made it a mandate on multidisciplinary education rather than the specialization in a core area. Integrating this approach helps in developing comprehensive knowledge and prepare the students for the rapidly changing global markets

**Project Based Learning:** Students should be involved in real life projects which encourages critical thinking, team work and creativity among the students to thrive in 21<sup>st</sup> century

**Collaborative activities:** Involving students in collaborative activities enhances their skills in collaborative learning and problem solving

**Encourage content generation:** Academic institutions should encourage the students to contribute the content rather than being the mere consumers. Academic environment should be created that fosters the creativity among the students

**Development of communication abilities:** Students should be given written and oral assignments for improving the communication skills and also constructive feedback should be provided for their improvement

**Reflective teaching practices:** Teachers should regularly reflect their teaching practices and approaches in fostering the skills like communication skills, creativity, collaborative learning among the learners

**Capacity building for teachers:** Teachers should be trained to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners and prepare the students for the ever dynamic job market. They should also be trained for effective transaction of curriculum in digital and blended modes

**Involvement of parents and community:** Parents and local community should be educated as well as involved in fostering the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills among the students even outside the classroom

## CONCLUSION

A major challenge that India faces today is to ensure employability opportunities for youth, inspire in them the flexibility to learn new and innovative skills and instill in them a strong work ethics. Various researches has been proved that adoption of Life skills learning in school and colleges improves adjustment of the adolescents with teachers, school, increases prosocial behavior, coping, and self-esteem. Life skill learning should be an integral part of our curriculum to promote psychosocial competence and reduce problem behaviors in youth. The prevailing educational approach needs to be changed from policy to gross root level.

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