



Life skill education: A path to lifelong learning and development

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Abstract

Life skill education serves as a vital tool for lifelong learning and personal development. It encompasses essential psychological abilities such as critical thinking, decision-making, and effective communication, which empower individuals to navigate the complexities of life. Grounded in frameworks provided by WHO and UNICEF, life skills foster psychological competence, self-efficacy, and holistic growth. Complementary soft skills like digital literacy and leadership are crucial for professional success. Despite progress, challenges such as gender disparities in literacy persist in India, underscoring the importance of targeted educational policies like the National Education Policy 2020 and initiatives like the Jan Shikshan Sansthan Scheme. This article explores life skill education's transformative role in equipping individuals to address personal and societal challenges, contributing to national progress and equitable development.

Keywords: Life skills, lifelong learning, psychological competence, National Education Policy 2020, gender disparity, critical thinking, digital literacy, holistic development, Jan Shikshan Sansthan, societal transformation

Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a cornerstone of national progress, with its power to transform societies, boost economic growth and enhance individual well-being. Despite this universal understanding, illiteracy remains a pressing issue in many developing countries, disproportionately affecting women and limiting their opportunities.

Lifelong learning is about continuously acquiring knowledge and skills throughout life. Skills—defined as the ability to perform tasks effectively—are at the heart of this idea. Life skills, in particular, are psychological tools that help individuals turn their knowledge, values and attitudes into positive and healthy behaviour.

A skill requires consistent practice and regular application. Skilled individuals can complete tasks more efficiently, saving time, energy, and resources while delivering better results.

The World Health Organization (WHO) describes life skills as the "abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life." Similarly, UNICEF highlights life skills as a developmental approach encompassing three essential elements: knowledge, attitudes, and skills. These abilities help individuals navigate life's complexities, develop psychological competence, and grow holistically.

The WHO identifies ten core life skills essential for personal and social growth:

- 1. Creative Thinking:** Finding unique and personal ways of solving problems or expressing ideas.
- 2. Critical Thinking:** Objectively analysing information and experiences to make informed decisions.
- 3. Decision-Making:** Evaluating options by weighing their pros and cons to make rational choices.

- 4. Effective communication:** Expressing ideas and emotions clearly through verbal and non-verbal methods.
- 5. Empathy:** Understanding others' feelings, circumstances, and perspectives.
- 6. Interpersonal relationships:** Building and maintaining meaningful connections with others.
- 7. Managing Emotions:** Recognizing and regulating emotions in yourself and others.
- 8. Problem-Solving:** Identifying challenges and finding practical, effective solutions.
- 9. Self-Awareness:** Understanding your own strengths, weaknesses, and emotions to achieve your goals.
- 10. Coping with Stress:** Identifying stressors and learning strategies to manage and minimize their impact.

These skills are interconnected and reinforce each other, fostering self-esteem, resilience, and personal effectiveness. Complementing these are soft skills like time management, digital literacy, workplace ethics, leadership, and emotional intelligence, which are essential for professional success.

Why Life Skills Education Matters

Research has shown that life skills education can:

- Foster positive attitudes and behaviours.
- Enhance communication and social skills.
- Increase self-esteem and confidence.
- Improve academic performance and problem-solving abilities.
- Strengthen relationships and help navigate daily challenges.

By equipping individuals with these essential tools, life skills education creates well-rounded, confident, and adaptable individuals who can balance personal and professional responsibilities effectively.

To achieve a well-balanced life, life skills such as self-care, setting priorities, maintaining a positive mindset, and being prepared for the unexpected play a crucial role.

The Japanese philosophy of Ikigai, meaning "reason for being," offers a holistic approach to setting life goals. It encourages a balance between personal interests, talents, societal contributions, and financial incentives. By aligning these elements, Ikigai helps individuals make fulfilling and impactful career and life choices.

India's literacy rate, as per the 2021 Census, stands at 77.7%, with female literacy lagging at 70.3%. In Madhya Pradesh, the disparity is even starker: male literacy is 78.73%, while female literacy is only 59.24%. Such gaps hinder equitable progress and highlight the need for targeted efforts to promote education and life skills among women.

Policies Supporting Lifelong Learning

India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes lifelong and adult education. Its focus areas include:

1. Foundational literacy and numeracy.
2. Critical life skills.
3. Vocational training.
4. Basic education.
5. Continuing education.

Programs like the Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) scheme aim to implement these goals, providing opportunities for skill development and lifelong learning.

Equipping individuals with critical life skills like financial literacy, digital literacy, and health awareness can help them overcome barriers like illiteracy, poverty, and lack of access to resources. These skills empower individuals to navigate modern challenges, enhance personal growth, and contribute meaningfully to national development.

Conclusion

Life skills education is a cornerstone of lifelong learning, bridging literacy gaps and fostering societal well-being. By integrating life skills into educational frameworks, we can equip individuals to face personal and professional challenges with confidence and resilience. Policies like NEP 2020 and initiatives like Jan Shikshan Sansthan reflect India's commitment to empowering its citizens and promoting equitable, sustainable development.

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