

Exploring Perceptions of Elementary School Teachers on the Importance of School-Based Life Skills Education: A Case Study

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Abstract

There is an unusual increase in the cases of child abuse, early marriages, and suicide, physical and mental violence causing a large number of school dropouts in elementary classes. This calls for the requirement to investigate or evaluate the perceptions of teachers about life skills education in public sector elementary schools. The study was conducted using qualitative interviews from twelve teachers of two public schools where life skill education is being taught. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed that teachers are aware and have a positive attitude towards life skills education. This study will contribute to raising awareness.

Keywords: *Adolescence, Life skills education, Public sector schools, Teachers' perceptions.*

JEL Classification: *I20, I21, I25*

INTRODUCTION

The definition of Life Skills determined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as capabilities for the adaptive and positive attitude that empower individuals to deal efficiently with the demands and challenges of everyday life (Monk, 2001; Palmer, 2014). They essentially indicate the psychosocial skills that are set around valued behavior and comprise reflective skills like critical thinking and solving their issues. They add personal skills too, like interpersonal skills and self-awareness like to engage in communicating effectively, upholding a healthy relationship with others. Practicing life skills can carry abilities like self-esteem, civility, and acceptance, action capabilities of the modern secondary school students and can produce enough abilities amongst them to have the liberty to decide what to do in an unusual position. Health and living, education can stable life skills education or the other way round (Ingham, 2010). This study will help to identify the factors that why teachers do not provide life skill education to the children in schools. In a regularly changing atmosphere, having life skill education is a crucial part of being able to encounter the challenges of everyday life (Ghasemian, & Kumar, 2015; Sukhodolsky et al., 2004).

To manage the growing pace and change style of living, students must need advanced life skills such as the talent of tackling stress and frustration. Therefore, policymakers should add Life skill education in the curriculum and teachers should effectively instill it (Reza, 2012). The youth is deficient in proper life skills to handle the pressures of this intermediate phase and make informed selections. It was learning through the related projects on Life Skills Based Education that there are no sources of information like radio, television, internet, or newspapers accessible to the Madrassah students

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(Huda, et al., 2017). Moreover, the people of this age group do not have any adult family member around who can help them, especially girls because their parents are equally uninformed about their roles, rights, and responsibilities (Hadjipateras et al., 2006).

Because of the unavailability of valid sources of information and reliable relationships, young people encounter problematic conditions (Coppock & McGovern, 2014; Ladd et al., 2002). Well-timed education by concentrating on knowledge, improving attitudes, and skill-building can authorize young people to use their energies in a responsible manner (Akpama, 2013). Due to the relative originality of the idea, comprehending and developing, the thought of life skills has been a topic of rigorous research in South Asia during recent times. However, it has not been an easy task due to a common hesitancy towards accepting the issue of sexuality of young people and inadequate or no youth-friendly facilities, structures, or systems, which reinforce the upgrade of life skills education.

Schools are a place where a large number of young people gather, where they can not only be taught life skills, but also can be followed and reinforced by creating a suitable environment (Magnani et al., 2005). The existing education system of Pakistan has a minimum focus on the improvement of essential life skills that are required to endorse critical thinking and healthy behaviors. Moreover, in our society, the reluctance to talk about topics as sexual and reproductive health makes the teaching of SRH related issues even harder (Bhattacharjee & Costigan, 2005).

Research Questions

1. What is your perception of life skills education?
2. What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the importance of school-based life skill education?

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Life Skills Education?

WHO (1999) pointed ten essential life skills which include: 1) empathy 2) self-awareness 3) creative thinking 4) critical thinking 5) problem solving 6) decision making 7) communicating effectively 8) Interpersonal relationship 9) handling stress 10) managing the emotional state (p. 01). The addition of Life Skill Education in the secondary teacher education curriculum is a current practice worldwide (Behrani, 2016).

The Need of Life Skills Education in Schools

Schools are a suitable place to introduce life skills education because schools play a fair part in youngster's social life (Prajapati, Sharma & Sharma, 2016). For the implementation of life skill education in Pakistan, we need teachers with great experience and knowledge about life skills, high integrity with parents and community members, opportunities and equipment for short and long-term evaluation (Dhawan, 2014). LSE is so much pertinent to the needs of young people when the schools make it a part of their curriculum; it helps with major problems like indiscipline, school dropouts, and adolescent pregnancies (UNAIDS, 2003). Aside from the effect on the health of children, there are other benefits of a school as an institution. Such as, evaluation of life skills programs recommends that the approaches, which are used, can help to revamp the teacher-student relationship and signals are indicating that life skills teachings are linked with few reports that are related to classroom behavior problems (Kurtdele-Fidan, & Aydogdu, 2018). There are researches present which indicate that improved academic performances are a result of teaching life skills; less bullying, great self-confidence in children and healthier relationship between children and parents are other benefits (Weissberg, Caplan & Sivo, 1989). Thus, Life Skill Education is the best way to equip the learner with capacities

that allow his/her positive and versatile behavior to handle the demands and challenges of everyday life effectively.

We must be fully aware of how significant these skills are in children's life. It is obliged to put effort into adding life skills into our daily teaching practices (Behrani, 2016). Our goal should always be to work on making the lives of children better, to activate our students' sense of developing life skills, and to support our students be prepared for the continuously fluctuating world that waits for them (Prajapati et al., 2016).

As stated by Sahu and Gupta (2013), adolescents and children are the creatures who think and feel with a mental complexity level that is just becoming common. WHO (1994) declares that in the present era kids live in a kind of environment that is very complex. Moreover, there are various platforms of communication within their reach (Jones, Lavalley & Tod, 2011). Electronic media have a powerful influence on adolescents and children, which is appearing to be the main reason for overshadowing the influence of family specifically, parents in certain conditions (Huda et al., 2017). Communication with friends, peer pressure and advertisements of media, etc. have a powerful impact on adolescents and growing children (Alhassan & Doodoo, 2020). The influence of parents in shaping social and moral values and the conventional school curriculum is becoming progressively unable of preparing children capable of the skills, which they needed to face practical life (Shek et al., 2020). The nature of taking a risk is considered a symbol of adolescence and if they are not being provided with skills to guard themselves, the possibility of divergent or imperfect growth will be real.

Educational Benefits

- i. Life skills education presents student-centered and interactive methods of teaching which can influence positively on:
 - The relations among pupils and teachers.
 - Enjoyment of young people while learning.
 - Job satisfaction for the teacher.
 - Absenteeism and dropout rate from school (Shek et al., 2020).
- ii. Life skills education influences some manifestations positively on the academic performance of children. As soon as the pupils or students start to feel that they are being involved in matters of relevance to their personal lives, they contribute more and study more (Alhassan & Doodoo, 2020; Parsons, Hunter, & Warne, 1988).
- iii. It is crucial to review the curriculum of teacher education and start including transformational and critical learning theory in teacher education for reflecting on the complication of the teaching and learning process (Bowers, 1999; Nolet, 2009; Corcoran, 1999; Kiefer & Kemple, 1999).

Health Benefits

- i. Life skills education demonstrates the blend of social and psychological (i.e. psychosocial) features that take part in a healthy behavior (Srikala & Kishore, 2010).
- ii. The execution level of life skills education in schools shows that it is the need of every child.
- iii. The advancement of social and personal skills is the main characteristic of health promotion involvements that focus on empowering a person to endorse his/her health along with the health of other people and of the neighborhood or community (Van Der Heide et al., 2013).

Cultural Benefits

- i. Life skills education benefits young people who are growing up in a modern era and positively caters to their needs.

- ii. Life skills education help students to be a responsible citizen and do better towards the society and culture (Vaidya, 2014).

Life Skills are psychosocial abilities, which develop a flexible and positive attitude in a person to deal adequately with all the ups and downs in everyday life (Poole et al., 2013). The evolution of Life Skills is an ongoing process, which initiates at a very young age and proceed throughout life. Currently, Life Skills-Based Education (LSBE) has played a vital role in child development and promotion of healthy behaviors all around the world. In 1986, the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion approved life skills as an imperative cause of making improved health choices (Kaur & Singh, 2015). According to UNICEF (2003) “A behavior change or behavior development approach designed to address the balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude, and skills” (p. 01). Tabulawa (2013) further defines Life skills education as “Life skills education is a structured program of needs and outcomes-based participatory learning that aims to increase positive and adaptive behavior by assisting individuals to develop and practice psycho-social skills that minimize risk factors and maximize protective factors. Life skills, education programs are theory- and evidenced-based, learner-focused, delivered by competent facilitators, and appropriately evaluated to ensure continuous improvement of documented results.”

Research evidence identifies that turns in risk behavior are improbable if education is not catering to the important competencies like knowledge, attitude, and skills (Parmar & Katoch, 2015). Subasree and Nair (2014) stated that students need life skills to deal with difficulties related to their routine life. These issues might be plentiful for them. Few issues are physical changes in the body, scoring less in tests, career orientation, peer pressure, issues of interpersonal relationships, pressure from parents, no protection from violence, lack of recognition, respect, and trust, the influence of media, poor access to health and education services, liabilities like poverty, single parenting, drug abuse, child labor, emotional uncertainty, mental health issues (Huda et al., 2017; Sahu & Gupta, 2013).

Teachers play an imperative role in student’s life because students spend their so much time in school so teachers should provide directions and support to their students to handle these issues and solve them efficiently (Dhawan, 2014). Students should be taught about how to take things positively and have a positive attitude towards the difficulties (Silva, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

The research was based on life skills education, provided by schools. This case study used a qualitative research approach in which twelve teachers from Two public sector schools participated.

Research Design

The research objectives and research questions were exploratory, so in this study, the researcher used the qualitative research method to observe feelings, thoughts, and behaviors and to show the bigger picture to the participants. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews which comprised open-ended questions. Participants were interviewed individually.

Population and Sample

The population of this research paper was all elementary school teachers from public sector schools in Karachi. The sample was based on the twelve elementary school teachers of Government schools. The researcher chose the convenient sampling technique and conducted the interviews with all twelve elementary school teachers.

These two schools were purposely chosen as they catered to the students of nearby slum areas. Geographically, both schools were near to one another. Therefore, they both catered to the same type of student intake. The sole reason to select those schools was one of those schools is adopted by an NGO which is working for the school reforms and they are providing life skills education on a high level with an organized curriculum. The other school is not providing life skills education with a designed curriculum nonetheless, the teachers try their best to teach these skills to the students by solely their end. This research was on the analysis of life skill education in Pakistani schools. The researcher applied an investigative technique and conducted interviews to attain in-depth data.

Data Analysis Technique

For this research, the researcher aimed to analyze data through thematic analysis. Braun and Clark (2006) stated that “thematic analysis is a method that used for identifying, reporting and analyzing the themes which are present in the collected data”. Thematic analysis recognized the evolving themes and appropriate meanings which were based on the understanding of people’s experiences in particular. Erickson (1986) stated, “The basic task of data analysis is to generate assertions that vary in scope and level of inference, largely through induction, and to establish an evidentiary warrant for the assertions one wishes to make”.

Research Instrument

This research was based on the qualitative method and the instrumentation of the research was a semi-structured interview schedule. The respondents answered the questions, asked by the researcher.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding

The themes, which were extracted from the collected data, the first one, was the understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher wanted to have an idea of whether the teachers are aware of the phenomenon of Life Skills because this term is not much used in our country’s education system.

Essential skills

The responses from teachers were persuaded to interpersonal life skills. All teachers refer to cognitive life skills e.g. problem-solving skills. Respondent 1 was certain that problem-solving skills play a great part in life skills and it also consists of being capable of “solve problems and be manageable”. Personal life skills e.g. inspiration to do stuff are also added. About interpersonal life skills, respondent 3 briefly mentions communication and confrontation skills such as “how to communicate well teachers.” Respondent 2 highlighted listening skills as “how well do you listen to other people’s problems without making them feel that they are burdening you by sharing their stuff with you. Respondent 3 also referred to the ability to “get involved in the classrooms.”

All teachers spoke in the favor of life skills education and considered it as the crucial and necessary kind of education in children’s life. Respondent 1 indicated life skills as the most desirable skills for students so they can participate well in everyday life. She stated:

“Students should be taught life skills education so it can be useful for them to thrive in their daily life.”

According to respondent 6 students feel that if they share their issues with their teacher or parents, they will be judged, and their parents or teacher will deal with the matter strictly while ignoring

the fact that the children are already suffering because of that (Shek et al., 2020). In this manner, children start fearing their teachers and stop getting close to them. She said:

"In our society, children feel fear from their teachers and parents instead of getting closer and sharing things with them."

Both respondent 3 and respondent 5 talked about how they use fine art projects for students to exercise cognitive life skills. Students follow their ideas and make decisions about what they want to create in their art project. Respondent 5 shared that she permits students to make diverse decisions that depend on their growth level. For the students of lower primary classes, she "gives them two kinds of colors so they can choose" and when it comes to the older students, she gives them the liberty to choose their material, design, and technique that they wish to use. In the end, both respondent 3 and respondent 5 motivate their students to assess their artwork. All teachers motivate their students by working with them on how to be successful in achieving their goals. Throughout the procedure of the project, students also challenge their time management skills. According to respondent 3:

"Deciding for one's own life is a very important skill which I teach through my art class to the children."

Limited knowledge

It was shocking for me that the teachers of this school were unaware of the idea of life skills education. Teachers had a piece of very limited knowledge about the phenomenon. Upon explaining they showed a great appreciation for it. Respondent 8 revealed that she has heard of this term but never had a chance to know more about it. She stated:

"I have heard about it but don't know any details."

Absence of In-Service Teacher Training

Unawareness of teachers about life skills education points out the lack of training and workshops. If teachers are to perform their functions effectively and efficiently, it becomes imperative for them to require training in new skills and modern methodology. Respondent 10 and 12 shared:

"There is no training were arranged by the government for teaching us about the life skills education and how to teach it, that is why we are left behind."

Importance

Themes that exhibited teacher's perceptions about life skills education in schools were mainly based on their experience. The aim was to get an idea about what teachers think about the importance of life skills education in children's life. All teachers were in favor of providing life skills education and showed so much encouragement and a positive attitude towards it.

Confidence building

Teachers said that they try to make their students confident by praising them for the efforts they put, even for the tiny ones. They think that it is imperative to praise and give positive and constructive feedback because children get to know their worth and accomplishments through it. However, if a child falls behind at something or bears no talent at a certain skill, admire the effort yet, do not mention the fallouts. For example, respondent 5 expressed her views by saying that she encourages her child by reassuring her that it is alright not to be capable of doing all the things perfectly and tells her that some things take frequent practice and effort. She stated:

"I encourage my students even when they fail and tell them that all their efforts are valuable."

Creative Thinking and Problem-Solving

Creative thinking is the skill to see a problem differently. This may include looking at a new way to do something, producing fresh ideas, and using resources in distinctive ways. Being a creative thinker directs to readiness to experiment and to take risks. Respondent 2 shared an activity that she uses in her class to promote creative thinking as:

“I ask students to sit in a circle then I launch the topic which I plan to teach. I quickly ask questions moving around the circle, every group member suggests the very first response that comes to their mind.”

Problem-solving skills are essential in all extents of life, and problem-solving activities in the classroom happen to be a constructive way to prepare students so they can be ready to resolve the real difficulties in their social relations, in the classroom, or at home. The skill to analyze a problem critically, arrange and calculate all its components and then think about an effective solution is the most precious skill a person can gain in life.

A Greater Sense of Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is an important skill that should be taught to every student. Teachers shared that they distinguish their lesson plans to assist the academic requirements of all the students. Why is there a question mark when we do a similar thing with teaching self-awareness and social-emotional skills? Respondent 3 shared:

“Like most of the children, all of my students have their trigger points, emotions, or events they carry with them or came across them in my class that will shove them closer and closer with an outburst of frustration. Few of the triggers I barely ever encounter, and few are evident day after day. Each one of them upset my students, as soon as a child turns out to be increasingly frustrated, the frustration falls over as rage toward other people.”

Living a Healthy Life

Relevant and high-quality health and physical education are one of the greatest approaches and this trend should last. Good health and physical education not only do upsurge the probabilities that young people of our society will live productive and healthier lives, but it is also balanced in the classroom too. Excellent health and physical education courses can be transformative for students of the new generation and in numerous cases, it is already making a remarkable difference. These programs suggest students a brilliant chance to grow their minds and bodies to get skills that will push them towards success in all the academic and physical features of life and education. Significant and good HPE programs offer the discipline and structure which is the need for young people to make positive choices and be competent in school and their lives as well. For the sake of teaching HPE a highly qualified and experienced trainer is necessary. Respondent 3 spoke about the level of implementation of health and physical education in her school. She stated:

“In our school, weekly taekwondo and karate classes are organized with a highly trained and qualified instructor.”

A high-quality HPE course should provide provocative yet attainable goals and comprise every student in all of the activity sessions. Students of elementary classes should work out for building basic skills, such as, athletic skills which include, hopping, running, and skipping. Health and physical education is an essential part of the education for all children from kindergarten to high school. Standardized health and physical education programs are the main need to maximize the health-related fitness, physical competence, the delightfulness of physical activity, and self-responsibility for all learners so that they can become energetic and physically active for all of their lives.

Teachers should be qualified for teaching this kind of education because it is a big responsibility. So many issues are directly related to children and LSE. Children get pressurized regarding their careers from parents that frustrate them (Boleman, Cummings, & Briers, 2004). This has come to the knowledge of researchers during the data collection that when children have problems

regarding their interpersonal relationships, they do not discuss it with anyone, which is the root cause of the problems. Child labor is one of the biggest curses for Pakistan. The major cause of spreading it is poverty and lack of education. Children do not go to school and start earning for running their household. In our society, mental health issues are considered a myth, and the ratio of people is very low who are ready to acknowledge it as a huge deal. The youngsters of the present era are the greatest victims of mental health issues.

Generally, in public sector schools, LSE has not been completely addressed since there were some main features of education i.e. family life education, extra-curricular activities, and communication skills which were not a part of the curriculum. Henceforth, based on the findings, this research study suggested that the subject of life skills should get the same attention as the other subjects so the education can be at the spearhead for defeating the social troubles.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that teachers considered the teaching of LSE as an important subject to be taught in elementary classes. The government has not added a sufficient amount of life skills education to the curriculum even after knowing what is going on with our children, they are getting raped and killed. They are depressed for so many reasons, they are getting abused mentally and physically but they don't know what to do. The government should provide an effective curriculum in which life skills education has a fair share. Teachers should also be there in elementary schools who are qualified for teaching life skills education.

Life skills education worldwide has gained immense attention for the curriculum and course developments because it can provide support to the national course outline for making it child-friendly, equity-driven, and fulfills children's everyday needs (Care et al., 2017).

1. It is highly recommended that skill knowledge should be provided in schools alongside the standard course outline to prepare children for practical life in the real world. It should not burden the children with excess knowledge rather adjust within the curriculum and assess on the same grounds.
2. The government should develop strong guidelines on life skill education that can support the addition of skills education and its evaluation within the school and education systems.
3. The government should play its vital role in establishing and enriching school-based HIV education along with sexual and reproductive life skill knowledge in generalized population so that it can prevent HIV and stigma among young and vulnerable populations in concentrated populations.

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