

## Effect of Teaching Life Skills to the Students on Improvement in Overall Schools' Environment

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**Syed Imran Haider**

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad.

**Prof. Dr. Fateh Muhammad Burfat**

Chairman, Department of Criminology, University of Karachi, Karachi.

### Abstract:

Life skills are basic and necessary capacities which enable an individual to participate successfully in social and personal life. Teaching of these skills has been recognized as a successful strategy to address a variety of issues related to children. In Pakistan, unfortunately Life Skills are not an exclusive part of our mainstream curricula of primary and secondary schools. However, different schools in Karachi have taught a specialized life skills education curriculum under an initiative of a civil society organization. This paper is an assessment of if, teaching of Life Skills to the Students effect the Overall Schools' Environment or not. To assess the effect of life skills teaching on improvement in school environment, teachers, and students of the selected schools in Karachi were selected as study subjects. A total of 10 Focused Group Discussions with students and 05 with teachers were conducted. The results showed that the school environment improved positively and a significant decrease in cases of bullying was observed in addition to improved cleanliness and discipline in the school.

### **1. Introduction**

The study is an assessment of, if the teaching of Life Skills to the students in secondary schools effect the Overall Schools' Environment or not. The study is carried out covering 10 secondary schools in Karachi after teaching of life skills curriculum through trained teachers under an initiative of a civil society organization.

However, there is no common definition of 'life skills' and although the World Health Organization and others have given definitions, the concept is elastic and includes a range of

skills and knowledge. Important in its conception are the personal, interpersonal and cognitive psychosocial skills that enable people to interact appropriately, manage their own emotional states and make decisions and choices for an active, safe and productive life. These skills are considered to be universally applicable and generic but certain psychosocial life skills have been identified as especially relevant for dealing with specific risks, particularly around HIV prevention, sexual and reproductive health and, increasingly, issues of citizenship and disaster risk reduction.

Life skills education has been introduced in different ways in formal schools: as a new subject or integrated to various degrees within the teaching practice and content of other subjects. In some cases it is offered as an extra or co-curricular provision. The psychosocial aims of life skills education require a conceptualization of the curriculum that includes not only knowledge and skills but also behaviour, attitudes and values. This has been a driver to use more participatory and interactive teaching and learning methodologies in the delivery of life skills education. These are difficult changes in traditional education systems. Life skills education seeks outcomes of changed attitudes and behaviour, and has highlighted the need for new forms of monitoring and assessment able to capture attitudinal and behavioural change.

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. In particular, life skills are a group of 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 and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner. There is evidence of the impact of social norms (both supportive and constraining) on the design, implementation and outcomes of life skills education at all levels. Conservative social norms can seriously limit children's access to reliable knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, yet few LSE interventions have undertaken detailed analyses of social norms to understand their impact, or have explicitly recognized and found appropriate ways to address them.

UNICEF has elaborated strategies and programme materials that are associated with child friendly school as well as the integration of a human rights-based approach (HRBA) to education for all. These approaches are complementary and, to some extent, overlapping, with the main aims and tenets of LSE. UNICEF's CFS framework (which is presented in the life skills section of its main website<sup>70</sup>) sets out child-centered approaches to the organization of teaching and learning in order to promote quality education for all children in schools.

Life skills-based education is recognized as a methodology to address a variety of issues of child and youth development and thematic responses as expressed in UNGASS on HIV/AIDS (2001), UNGASS on Children (2002), World Youth Report (2003), World Program for Human Rights Education (2004), UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005), UN Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children (2006), 51st Commission on the Status of Women (2007), and the World Development Report (2007). Expected learning outcomes include a combination of knowledge, values, attitudes and skills with a particular emphasis on those skills that related to critical thinking and problem solving, self-management and communication and inter-personal skills.

Life Skills-Based Education (LSBE) has a long history of supporting child development and health promotion in many parts. In 1986, the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion recognized life skills in terms of making better health choices. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) linked life skills to education by stating that education should be directed towards the development of the child's fullest potential. The 1990 Jomtien Declaration on Education for All took this vision further and included life skills among essential learning tools for survival, capacity development and quality of life. The 2000 Dakar World Education Conference took a position that all young people and adults have the human right to benefit from "an education that includes learning to know, to do, to live together and to be", and included life skills in two out of the six EFA Goals.

### 1.1 Objectives

Following were the specific objectives of the study:

1. To assess the effect of Life Skills learning on the incidences of bullying among students

2. To explore the impact of life skills on overall cleanliness and environment of schools
3. To explore the effect of self awareness through life skills curriculum on discipline and behaviour of students

## 1.2 Literature Review

Today, more than half of the world population is under 25 years of age and one in four is under age 18 (UNFPA 2014). Eighty-five per cent of young people between 15 and 24 years of age are living in the developing world (UN 2006). At present, the majority (60%) of youth live in Asia, but in the coming decades it is particularly the African continent that will see an unprecedented growth in the number of children under 18, with their share in the total population set to rise to 40% by 2050 (UNICEF 2014).

As per United Nations Inter Agency Meeting (1999), there are many different reasons why these life skills are taught. In Zimbabwe and Thailand the impetus for initiating life skills education was the prevention of HIV/AIDS. In Mexico, it was the prevention of adolescent pregnancy. In the United Kingdom, an important life skills initiative was set up to contribute to child abuse prevention, and in the USA there are numerous life skills programmes for the prevention of substance abuse and violence. In South 2 Africa and Colombia an important stimulus for life skills education has been the desire to create a curriculum for education for life, called “Life Orientation” education in South Africa and “Integral Education” in Colombia. There are many initiatives of this nature in which, in addition to primary prevention objectives, life skills education has been developed to promote the positive socialization of children.

As per UNICEF, across South Asia, life skills programming has grown rapidly, contributing to both a diversity of interventions and understanding within countries about what is life skill-based education. One of the many reasons for this is that most stakeholders have never experienced skills-based learning themselves. In general, there is a reluctance to acknowledge adolescent sexuality and the societal roots of vulnerability, limited delivery capacity, difficulties linking the development of knowledge, attitudes and life skills to behaviour, and a lack of child friendly services.

Lisane Brown (2001) studied on the "Impact of Life Skills on Adolescent Behavior Transition Study Results". Findings of this study are life skills education has impact on some behaviour. Studies have shown globally that implementation of life skills education programmes get also effected by contextual barriers. As Observations in many settings show that the school context is thus characterized by many practical and organizational barriers. In addition, the school's social climate is often at odds with what the programme aims to strengthen. Often, notably unequal, gendered treatment of students has been observed (Browes 2014).

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## **2. Methodology**

To assess the effect of the learning life skills on over all schools environment, the assessment was made using different methods and techniques. The paper is based on the data collected from the target groups including, Teachers, Schools Heads and students from 10 selected schools in Karachi. For this purpose 10 FGDs (05 boys + 05 girls) of students were conducted (One FGD in each school) in which 88 students participated and 05 FGDs covering 41 teachers,

were also conducted to verify and analyze the findings. Then the collected qualitative data was analyzed accordingly to develop the results.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

The data collected through FGDs was arranged and trends were identified to synthesize the key findings. It is tried to present the major trends related to effects of learning life skills through the curriculum. Following are the key findings which came out of the qualitative data collected through FGDs:

#### **Mission of School Supported**

The findings of the study showed that almost all of the teachers and a majority of students reported that the life skills trainings and its consequent teaching to students has significantly supported the schools mission of provision of quality education. The students have started taking more interest in their education. By understanding the importance of self-awareness and communication skills, they feel more responsible and accountable to overall environment and development of the school. Following are some of the relevant comments reported by the students and teachers:

“I have come to know the importance of education and role of self-awareness in developing a healthy environment after going through the curriculum. Now I realize that my education will be best facilitated if the overall school environment will be friendly- A 14 year old boy”

“Through understanding human rights, I believe in collective thinking. I feel the right of education is same for all. We should all support each other and our teachers to make our schools more successful- A 13 year old girl”

“After experience of training on life skills, I have started feeling that the overall responsibility is not only of school heads. We should plan our roles and activities in a way that we could better support the school mission of quality education and increased enrolment- A teacher with 15 years’ experience”

### **Ability in Students to Reflect their Accomplishments**

Another highlight related to the effect of teaching of life skills based curriculum was regarding improvement in the self-esteem of the students. It was repeatedly reported that after studying the life skills curriculum, students became more confident of their own selves. The improved communication skills enhanced students' confidence to interact with their fellows, teachers and parents. Students reported that now they can openly discuss their issues with their teachers and do not feel ashamed of it. The respondents mentioned that due to enhanced self-esteem now they can give credit to themselves over achievements in curricular and co-curricular activities. Following are some of the relevant statements given by the students:

"I was afraid of talking with others especially in large gatherings. After life skills education experience and engagement in co-curricular activities as well as learning about positive thinking, I started feeling good about myself. Now I can openly share my issues with my teacher and openly give credit to myself after getting good marks in tests/ exams. The most pleasing thing is that now I am a debater in my class and students ask me to learn from me- A 14 years old boy"

"I have always been a good student and secured good marks in all my exams in the past but I never presented in a good way to others. In fact I used to feel shy about sharing my achievements with others. From my life skills based training, I have realized that it is important to take credit of our good doings and by sharing it with others we can develop further confidence to achieve further- A girl of 15 years age"

### **Improvement in Discipline**

Data of the FGDs showed that the impact of life skills education remained very positive on the situation of discipline in the school. The punctuality on behalf of both teachers and students improved after this. It was also reported by most of the respondents that now students feel more responsible regarding issues of discipline and it takes less time to assemble students in assembly. It was also reported that now the students support each other and highlight the issues of discipline of other students among them and support others to follow the rules. The

schools heads and teachers shared that previously they were in a difficult situation because it was a permanent challenge for them to discipline students of 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> class especially. On the other hand education department emphasis on no punishment in schools is rising day by day and teachers were unable to control students due to lack of capacity to discipline without out using violence.

Teachers were happy to share that because of Life Skills learning they have developed capacity to discipline students by open and friendly communication and by letting realize their responsibility in a friendly environment. The students also shared the same story. Most of the students shared that their teachers have become more friendly and respecting towards students. Now teachers do not directly start blaming and abusing students on their mistakes rather guide them with proper arguments in a respectable way. In response, the students feel more accountable and try to maintain discipline in the school on their own. Following are a couple of relevant statements of the respondents:

“Now our teachers give us respect and explain things with logic and in response we also try to follow all the rules in the school so no issue of discipline could be highlighted. In my opinion, it is just because of life skills based education- A 16 years old boy”

“After the extensive training of life skills and its importance, I came to realize that our judgmental attitude and harsh behavior impacts negatively on the discipline of students. Rather we should deal with them in a respectable way and make them feel responsible. This has impacted very positively on the punctuality and discipline in our school- A female teacher of a public secondary school”

### **Non-violence and Friendly Behavior**

Furthermore, it came out of the collected data that after life skills education the non-violent atmosphere is developed and promoted among schools. The students mentioned that after studying about different types of violence they have come to realize that violence is not only a physical one. In fact verbal and emotional violence also can have very adverse effects on individuals. In addition to this the knowledge of communication skills, dealing with peer



pressure and self-awareness has developed a tendency to negotiate on their issues with peers. Now they do not directly become violent and start screaming at others. Teachers also mentioned that information around human rights, self-esteem, gender, puberty and emotional changes has developed the capacity of students to understand their own emotions and the emotions of others. This has impacted very positive on the personality of the students and as per the observation of the teachers and schools records the incidences of bullying and violence are reduced significantly. Following are a couple of relevant statements given by the students:

“I was used to tease other students and bully them to show my masculinity and power. This made me famous in the school. But now, I have come to realize that this can cause very harmful effects on my own personality as well as the personality of others. The most important thing is, now I understood my mood swings are related to puberty and it is a natural and normal process. I have changed myself and now I try to remain friendly with other students- A 14 years old boy”

“I just want to say that every teacher should be trained on life skills based education concepts and approach because due to this you come to realize the importance of many things on which otherwise we do not think much. The most important is non-judgmental attitude and non-violent behavior which are the key characteristics of a good teacher- A science teacher”

### **Cleanliness of Body and Environment**

This remained the second highest mentioned and emphasized impact of the life skills education on the students. It was mentioned that the awareness of body cleanliness and importance of clean environment increase very significantly. After teaching of the curriculum and students engagement in school committee meetings as well as participation in co-curricular activities around topics of life skills curriculum, the situation of cleanliness improved at a greater level. It was reported that the content covered through health and hygiene, infectious diseases and relationships has impacted on the minds of students. They mentioned that now they take bath regularly and give special attention to the cleanliness of their pubic areas etc. The girl students mentioned that they have come to realize the importance of body cleanliness especially during menstruation days. Before this knowledge they were not aware of the concept of menstrual

hygiene. Teachers also mentioned positive change in the students and highlighted that now the overall cleanliness in class rooms has also improved. As a teacher mentioned:

“I am very happy due to the reason that now many students take bath regularly and I have got rid of extreme smell of sweating. I am sorry but in summers especially sometimes it becomes very difficult for teachers to concentrate on the lesson because of sweating smell especially in the class of young girls of 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> grades- A female teacher.”

“I have learned that by keeping our bodies and surrounding environment clean, we can protect ourselves from many diseases and health issues- A 13 years’ old girl”

### **Safety and Security**

As per subjects of the study another highly ranked element remained safety and security related feelings which increased amongst students and teachers. The schools heads reported that due to life skills activities the students have started feeling more responsible for overall school’s environment. As a school head mentioned;

“Now my teachers are more friendly and they have developed an empathetic attitude among students as well so the mutual support and friendliness has changed the overall school environment”.

### **Conclusion**

The study findings have shown that provision of life skills education can very positively impact on overall environment of the schools. This situation can definitely benefit the learning environment and the quality of education can be improved further. The positive effects on the personalities of teachers and students develop a positive image of schools so this may be made the permanent part of schools education.

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