

From Learning Space to the Real World: Understanding the Significance of Life Skill Education in Higher Education

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Abstract

To promote holistic student development, it is essential to incorporate life skill education within higher education is crucial for fostering holistic student development in an increasingly complex world. Life skills education includes skills such as communication, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, and resilience, which become crucial when students focus primarily on their academic and personal challenges. This Paper highlighted the significance of life skills education at the higher education level to improve graduate employability, encourage experiential learning, and address societal well-being, this study highlights. Based on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, it can be argued that a curriculum that embeds life skills in higher education, facilitates students' personal and professional growth. The paper indicates that teaching life skills at a higher education level improves students' academic achievement and equips them with the demands of the contemporary workforce. However, there are still some challenges that exist to successfully incorporate these abilities into existing curricula, requiring innovative approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment. By identifying key life skills that are essential for future success and advocating for their systematic incorporation into higher education, this study aims to highlight the urgent need for educational reforms that produce well-rounded individuals equipped to contribute meaningfully to society. Ultimately, enhancing life skill education within higher education curricula will empower students to navigate the complexities of modern life with competence and confidence, fostering personal growth and societal engagement.

Keywords: Life Skill Education, Higher education, Curriculum, Skill Enhancement, 21st Century skills

1.1 Introduction

Higher education marks a significant transition among young individual serving as a crucial phase for their personal and academic growth. Recognizing this, nations worldwide have taken crucial steps to ensure that every student has an equal right to education that supports their physical, mental, social, moral, and spiritual well-being. During this transformative phase, learners become increasingly aware of their strengths and talents, equipping themselves with

the complexities of the future life and demands of the modern workforce. To facilitate this valuable transformation, the integration of a comprehensive approach to life skill education becomes essential in higher education.

Life skill education contributes to the holistic development of students by fostering cognitive abilities, interpersonal skills, and emotional intelligence in this 21st century. This comprehensive growth is essential for students to navigate personal and professional challenges effectively (Gupta, 2023; Narayanan, 2023; Sharma & Alvi, 2023). While simultaneously, fostering the development of appropriate 21st century skills like communication skills, emotional coping, self-awareness, problem-solving, decision-making, creative and critical thinking, empathy, and stress management. The main objective of life skills education is to provide people with the necessary knowledge about risk-taking behaviors. This knowledge serves to shield a student against various forms of exploitation and manipulation. (UNICEF, 2015; WHO, 1993).

In the Indian higher education context, the integration of life skills occurs at various curriculum levels. Students must be equipped with life skills by active participation in learning activities, ensuring their applicability in real-world scenarios and everyday life. Life skill programs are designed to enhance fundamental abilities such as interpersonal communication skills, leadership, and problem-solving, as well as address health-related issues, mental health concerns, and social issues, including gender roles. A variety of social and emotional skills are necessary for a successful transition to university life; a lack of them might result in subpar academic achievement or even a decline in interest in higher education. In this regard, NEP (2020) provides a critical foundation in this context. The policy places a strong emphasis on teaching life skills to students for their success in the twenty-first century. The policy's goals include:

- **Preparing students for the future:** NEP 2020 aims to equip students with the skills they require for personal and professional achievement.
- **Reducing social stigma:** NEP 2020 aims to reduce the stigma associated with vocational careers.
- **Promoting lifelong learning:** NEP 2020 aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which promotes lifelong learning.

The integration of NEP 2020 and the suggested approach to life skills education includes: Embedding life skills in the curriculum, Training teachers effectively, implementing

innovative teaching practices, and Assessing student proficiency. As Indian higher education evolves, the prioritization of life skills will play a crucial role in shaping not only successful professionals but also engaged and informed citizens committed to the betterment of their communities.

At its core, curriculum serves as the heart of education ensuring the quality and excellence of higher education institutions. Consequently, the addition of life skills in higher education curricula is increasingly seen as essential for fostering student success both academically and professionally. By embedding life skills into the curriculum through structured courses and practical applications, institutions can significantly enhance students' readiness for the workforce (Devrani et al., 2024). For instance, the integration of soft skills training into STEM curricula has demonstrated the potential to improve students' global competitiveness.

The idea of incorporating life skills in today's intricate world is essential because academic knowledge alone is insufficient for success. As a result, this paper examines the role and importance of life skills in Indian higher education, emphasizing its significant impact on experiential learning, graduate employability, advancing technology, and general societal well-being in this 21st century era. In this discourse of the demanding need to develop experienced individuals who can contribute significantly to their communities and professions, this research will address the gaps in present educational practices and advocate for a life skills curriculum. In the end, holistic education development encompassing educational experience equips students to confidently and competently handle the challenges of contemporary life.

1.2 Review of Related Literature

By encouraging self-awareness, pleasant emotions, and personal effectiveness, life skills education benefits students' well-being. These abilities support students to manage resilience, stress, and mental well-being. The efficiency of an institution-wide required course based on Seligman's Wellbeing Theory concepts was examined to address the gap. The efficiency of the curriculum material and staff coaching approach in helping students acquire life skills was assessed by a test, which also looked at how these perceptions affected students' subjective well-being. According to the findings of this research, Asian students are receptive to this innovative teaching method, which might plant the seeds for future gains by favorably influencing their abilities, attitudes, behaviors, and values (Gan, Beevi, Low, Lee, & Hall, 2022). Studies suggest that life skills explicitly and structurally are inculcated into higher education curricula. This includes both theoretical and practical approaches to teaching these skills (Cronin et al., 2021;

Scheuring & Thompson, 2024; Sharma & Alvi, 2023). In his research, Sharma & Alvi, (2023) specifies that students recognize the implication of life skills for their personal and professional development. However, there is a requirement for more studies to understand students' perceptions and the effectiveness of life skills education. There is often a gap between the skills taught in higher education and those required by employers. According to Allen and De Weert (2007), this discrepancy may have an impact on the productivity and income of recent graduates. The literature claims the critical role of life skills in higher education for preparing students for the workforce and life challenges. Effective integration of these skills into curricula, through innovative and experiential learning methods, can significantly enhance students' personal and professional development.

1.3 Objectives

The importance of life skills education and the advantages of incorporating it into our curriculum are the main agenda of this paper. These include helping students develop their social skills, acquire new skills, and improve their emotional and cognitive abilities. These are very essential components for a dynamic citizen who can successfully cope with the challenges of the future.

1. To understand the importance of life skill education in higher education.
2. To highlight the key life skills that should be included in higher education.
3. To explore the effectiveness of propagation and implementation of life skills in higher education curriculum and its influence on holistic development, career readiness, experiential learning, and overall societal well-being.
4. To discuss the potential challenges in integrating life skill education into higher education curriculum.

1.4 Discussion

1.4.1 Importance of Life skill education in Higher education

In the context of a rapidly evolving world, the implication of life skill education in higher education cannot be exaggerated. While academic knowledge lays the foundation for professional success, life skills equip students with the practical abilities necessary for directing both personal and professional challenges. As the job market evolves and societal norms shift, the development of well-rounded, adaptable, and tough individuals is needed. Thus, life skill education plays a crucial role in fostering holistic development, career readiness, experiential learning, and social responsibility among students. At its core, life skill education facilitates

holistic development by incorporating a range of competencies such as emotional intelligence, effective communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. These skills are integral to preparing students to confront the complexity they encounter in higher education, which often involves intricate problem-solving scenarios and collaborative projects. Unlike traditional academic instruction, life skill education encourages self-reflection and the cultivation of personal strengths, thereby supporting not only intellectual growth but also emotional and social maturity. Integrating life skills into higher education can enhance overall academic performance too. As higher education students learn to manage stress, set goals, and develop effective study habits, they become more adept at handling their academic responsibilities. These skills acquired during life skills education can translate into better time management and organizational abilities, often resulting in better academic outcomes.

In today's competitive workforce, career readiness is a primary concern for higher education students. Employers increasingly prioritize not only technical skills but also place value on soft skills. Skills like leadership, adaptability, and interpersonal communication enhance a student's employability and effectiveness within team-oriented and collaborative work environments. Life skill education equips students with these critical competencies, thereby aligning their training with the realities of the modern workplace. Communication skills are further enhanced through life skill education at higher education level which focuses on the importance of clear and effective communication. Proficient communication is fundamental in both professional and personal contexts. By focusing on these skills, Life skills education prepares students to articulate their thoughts, engage in meaningful dialogue, and manage conflicts at the higher education level, an invaluable asset that transcends both academic and collaboration and future careers. Moreover, the ability to resolve conflict and work effectively as part of a team is vital in group projects and workplace interactions, fostering an inclusive environment aimed at shared success.

Beyond preparing students for the workforce, life skills education encourages introspection and self-awareness, which leads to personal development. Students obtain self-knowledge that will help them navigate both personal and social issues by learning to recognize their strengths and flaws. Students gain confidence and improve their decision-making skills via this process, which equips them to handle a variety of life circumstances. Furthermore, identifying one's emotional health and knowing how to communicate it to others are important components of personal growth that help to create self-assured and self-aware individuals. Another component

of teaching life skills at the higher school level is adaptability. Being able to adapt is essential in a world where society and technology are changing at a rapid pace. Students who get life skills instruction become more adaptable and are better equipped to handle new situations and uncertainties. In addition to preparing students for their professional future, this type of adaptability fosters qualities that give them the fortitude and poise to address personal challenges head-on. Furthermore, life skills education promotes social responsibility and civic engagement at higher education levels. It instills the significance of ethical behavior, community involvement, and social consciousness, encouraging them to contribute positively to society. By developing a broad perspective on their responsibilities, development of higher education students as a responsible citizen who is more likely to engage in community service and social advocacy.

1.4.2 Key life skills for Higher education

The NEP 2020 also stresses that “given the 21st-century requirements, quality higher education must aim to develop good, thoughtful, well-rounded, and creative individuals” and... “must enable an individual to study one or more specialized areas of interest at a deep level, and also develop character, ethical and Constitutional values, intellectual curiosity, scientific temper, creativity, the spirit of service, and twenty-first-century capabilities across a range of disciplines including sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, languages, as well as professional, technical, and vocational subjects.” It also encompasses that “a quality higher education must enable personal accomplishment and enlightenment, constructive public engagement, and productive contribution to the society” and must “prepare students for more meaningful and satisfying lives and work roles and enable economic independence.” This holistic approach to education aligns with the demands of a dynamic world, ensuring that graduates are equipped to lead satisfying lives while making impactful contributions to society. Here are some key life skills and their description (Table 1) which are highlighted in various policies, and documents developed by the University Grant Commission (UGC) in terms of higher education.

Table 1- key life skills at the Higher education level

1. No.	Skills	Description
1.	Critical Thinking and Problem Solving	Analyzing problems, evaluating evidence, making informed decisions
2.	Communication	Articulating ideas clearly, collaborating with others
3.	Teamwork and Interpersonal	Working effectively in teams, building relationships
4.	Time Management and organization	Managing time efficiently, staying organized
5.	Resilience and Adaptability	Adapting to new situations, bouncing back from setbacks
6.	Emotional Intelligence	Understanding and managing emotions, empathizing with others
7.	Leadership	Taking initiative, motivating others, driving projects
8.	Social Intelligence	Understanding social complexities, social cues, and building networks
9.	Self-Awareness and Self-Regulation	Being aware of strengths and weaknesses, regulating behavior
10.	Psychological and Mental wellbeing	Maintaining mental health, practicing self-care, and managing stress
11.	Self-Assessment	Reflecting on personal performance, identifying areas for improvement
12.	Creativity	Thinking artistically, coming up with novel solutions, and taking an unconventional approach to issues
13.	Technical Skills	Proficiency in specific tools and technologies relevant to a field

Through the intentional integration of life skills into higher education, we can foster a generation capable of addressing current and future challenges with creativity, empathy, and resilience.

1.4.3 Holistic education and Life skills

A vast array of educational approaches and philosophical stances are included in holistic education. It aims to avoid leaving out any important facets of the human experience and places a strong emphasis on wholeness. According to Mahmoudi, Jafari, Nasrabadi, and Liaghatdar (2012), it seeks to promote students' balanced development of their intellectual, physical, spiritual, emotional, social, and artistic faculties. This method guarantees that learning experiences encompass not just academic information but also life skills that support students' entire development. Life skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, communication, resilience, and adaptability are increasingly being integrated into higher education curricula to prepare students for real-world challenges (Scheuring & Thompson, 2024; Sharma & Alvi, 2023; Väisänen & Hirsto, 2020). These skills are essential for both personal development and

professional success. Engaging students in collaborative learning and reflective practices enhances their creative self-concept and professional competencies. This engagement is vital for fostering a holistic educational environment that promotes lifelong learning and personal growth(Álvarez-Huerta, Muela, & Larrea, 2021).

1.4.4.1 Experiential Learning and Life Skills in Higher Education

The successful distribution of life skills in higher education courses is greatly aided by experiential learning (EL), which gives students hands-on, real-world experiences that advance their professional and personal growth. This approach bridges the gap between classroom learning and real-world application by enabling students to apply theoretical knowledge in authentic settings. The critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities that are necessary for their future are fostered in pupils by this approach (Danh, 2021; Henderson, Homan, & Bayne, 2024; Mayombe, 2024). It encourages the growth of vital life skills including leadership, teamwork, communication, and emotional intelligence. For example, it has been demonstrated that including Life Skills modules in the curriculum improves students' social and personal growth and equips them for the demands of the contemporary workforce (Nagarajah, Mejer, & See 2019; Rameli et al., 2018). By encouraging active and collaborative learning, this method aids in the development of working life skills, which are essential for success in the workplace (Väistönen & Hirsto, 2020). Although EL has advantages, integrating it into the curriculum calls for rigorous preparation and coordination. It can be difficult to evaluate EL outcomes, particularly soft skills, and may call for creative assessment techniques such as reflective assignments and peer reviews (Fagerholm & Vihavainen, 2013; Kummin, Ramachandran, Jusohhussain, & Muslim, 2024). While EL offers numerous benefits, its successful addition to educational curricula requires careful planning, development, suggestion, and implementation of innovative techniques to evaluate both technical knowledge and soft skills effectively.

1.4.4.2 Life Skills dissemination on driving graduate Employability in Higher Education

Knowledge and skills that improve university graduates' probabilities of finding a job are becoming more and more crucial for institutions of higher learning. The impact of experiential learning on first-year students' self-assessed life skills has been empirically demonstrated by the favorable effects of team-based business simulations on life skill development and course-specific subject matter competence. Building a life skill ability scale through consultative

interviews with graduate recruiters can help find components like resilience and adaptability that aren't included in current scales (Scheuring & Thompson, 2024).

Work-integrated learning (WIL) can be assessed to understand its impact on graduate employability, with a focus on the facilitating role of skill of digital literacy and the diminishing role of life-career skills (Adegbite, 2024). Employer involvement in degree course design and instruction has been found positive effects on the ability of graduates to secure employment in 'graduate-level' jobs such as structured work experience, and other employability skills initiatives (Mason, Williams, & Cranmer, 2009). According to a study on undergraduate employability skill competency, factors like gender, work experience, geographic origin, and the caliber of skills development in the learning program all affect employability skill competency, underscoring the influence of these factors on the acquisition of life skills (Jackson, 2014). Despite academics' best efforts to improve graduates' employability, agenda-related constraints frequently result in inconsistent outcomes (Cranmer, 2006) which highlights difficulties in successfully fostering employability skills in the classroom.

1.4.4.3 Technological advancement

Technological advancements have significantly influenced the higher education curriculum, integrating essential life skills that are crucial for students' academic and professional success. Higher education institutions are increasingly focusing on developing students' technological skills, which are essential for their personal, social, and professional futures. This includes the integration of digital technologies in academic work, enhancing the organization of academic tasks, and fostering new kinds of teaching and learning (Rodrigues, Cerdeira, Machado-Taylor, & Alves, 2021). Technological tools and innovative teaching methods, such as education in virtual reality, are used to develop critical soft skills like problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity. These tools provide immersive learning experiences that go beyond traditional knowledge transfer (Cabrera-Duffaut, Pinto-Llorente, & Iglesias-Rodríguez, 2024). Blended learning is widely adopted in higher education. This approach not only activates students but also develops innovation and entrepreneurship skills, which are critical in the modern job market (Pisoni, 2019). There is a recognized need to align higher education curricula with market expectations. This includes providing students with 21st-century skills such as decision-making, organization, and time management. Studies indicate that students often feel underprepared in these areas, highlighting the need for curriculum developers to focus on these competencies (Mathews, Sen, Philip, & Mathew, 2024; Mishrif, Karolak, & Mirza, 2023). The

following table-2 highlights the technological integration in the development of life skills at the higher education level.

Table 2- Technological Integration in Higher Education

S. No.	Technological Integration	Life Skills Developed	Examples
1.	Digital Competence	Self-directed learning	Interactive e-books, VR
2.	Multimedia Systems	Problem-solving, creativity	Educational robots, VR
3.	Blended Learning	Innovation, entrepreneurship	Online and face-to-face instruction
4.	Service-Learning Programs	Civic engagement, practical skills	Community service with digital tech
5.	Employability Skills	Decision-making, time management	Curriculum alignment with market needs

1.4.4.4 Co-curricular Activities and Workshops

Co-curricular activities and workshops play a significant role in higher education by enhancing students' life skills and overall development. These activities complement academic learning and provide students with opportunities to develop essential skills for their personal and professional lives. Co-curricular activities help students develop a range of skills, including communication, teamwork, leadership, and critical thinking. For instance, participation in activities such as clubs, workshops, and alternative break programs can significantly enhance students' employability and readiness for the workforce (El-Haggar, Mezhoudi, & Alrawjih, 2019; Kaltenbaugh & Parsons, 2021; Niehaus & Inkelaas, 2015; Sim & Straughan, 2021). Workshops focused on life skills, such as those conducted at the University of Jordan, have been shown to increase students' awareness and proficiency in essential life skills, which are not typically covered in traditional academic courses (Alahmad et al., 2024). To identify and develop equity practices, a faculty development program offered peer faculty coaching and professional development training. This led to positive outcomes from a student engagement survey and student course success data (Dang, Nguyen, Brewster, Lui-Martinez, & Carrion-Palomares, 2023). Effective pedagogical techniques have been found by D'Angelo, Marcus, & Ngabonzima, (2022) in their research to promote the development of life skills, which are essential for empowering youth to thrive in interpersonal interactions, the workplace, and society at large.

1.4.5 Potential challenges in integrating life skill education into higher education

1. Higher education curricula are often already packed with academic content, leaving little room for additional life skills training. Integrating life skills requires a re-evaluation and potential reduction of existing content to make space for these essential skills.

2. The demand for higher education has increased globally, leading to a crisis in resourcing. This makes it difficult to allocate sufficient resources for the development and execution of life skills programs.
3. Students often undervalue the importance of soft skills compared to technical knowledge. This perception can hinder the effective integration of life skills into the curriculum, as students may not engage with these programs as seriously as they do with their core subjects.
4. Create a curriculum that smoothly incorporates life skills into academic content, ensuring that these abilities are viewed as essential to the learning process rather than treated as supplementary.
5. Invest in training programs for faculty to equip them with the necessary skills to teach and assess life skills effectively.
6. Promote students' understanding of the value of life skills for both their career and personal growth. This can be accomplished through workshops, orientation programs, and the integration of life skills into the core curriculum.
7. Develop and implement innovative assessment methods that can effectively measure the expansion of life skills, such as peer reviews, project-based assessments, and self-assessment tools.

1.5 Conclusion

As WHO (1993) elaborated Life skill education which focuses on learning is defined as the "abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life". To enable students to learn and practice skills, life skills education should be child-centered and activity-oriented so the younger generation is ready to be empowered and prepare themselves to take responsibility for their actions. This is especially true in India, where the future and significance of higher education are closely linked to skill development. Therefore, it is concluded in this paper, that the development of life skills education within the higher education system is essential for cultivating well-rounded individuals who are academically proficient as well as equipped to navigate the complexities of personal and professional life. NEP, 2020 also outlined a holistic approach to learning that emphasizes emotional intelligence, communication, and problem-solving will significantly enhance students' employability and resilience in an ever-changing workforce. Life skills from this perspective will promote mental well-being and competence among the younger generation as they face the realities of life. Moreover, the inculcation of life skills in the higher education

curriculum and courses will ensure the development of essential competencies and provide opportunities for further employment in this competitive job market. Life skills education must include the practice of life skills concerning major health and social needs. Enhancing skill development among youth in colleges and universities has become increasingly important in today's world due to encouragement to foster the academic-industry partnership to further enhance student practical skills. The sooner higher education institutions embrace this reality and make appropriate adjustments, the better it will be for the nation's growth. Skills development should not be viewed as an optional addition to university programs; rather, it needs to be interlaced flawlessly into the education and training of the young generation, equipping them to be employable and capable of managing business operations effectively. In the current job market, candidates are often expected to possess strong life and soft skills, yet many are unaware of these expectations until they confront interviews. Unfortunately, higher education often falls short of addressing the skill sets that youth need to navigate the professional world and make a significant impact. By prioritizing life skills education, policymakers can reform higher education not only from the perspective of employability but also align it with the comprehensive approach of societal resilience and civic engagement in this 21st century world.

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