

Chapter 15

Life Skills for Adolescents



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Abstract The chapter focuses on the importance of life skills and life skills education for adolescents that can help facilitate positive development in adolescents. Research in the field of life skills and the measurement of life skills are highlighted. Various initiatives regarding life skills programmes in India and globally are described. Further, the issues and challenges to life skills education programmes are analyzed with future suggestions.

Keywords Life skills · Adolescents · Life skills education · Life skills training · Youth · Thinking skills · Emotional skills · Social skills

Introduction

The twenty-first century adolescents are venturing into a world with new opportunities, challenges, and innovations. Individual aspirations, social relationships, and the work culture are changing with the advent of new technologies and advancements in the world. The future generation needs to be equipped with the know-hows to function effectively in this future world. This will require not only the skills related to academic learning but also the emotional and behavioural skills to relate to people, deal with problems and adapt to emerging situations. The focus needs to be on the overall development of the young generation including their mental health and well-being. Thus socio-emotional skills to address the adjustment and well-being of adolescents along with twenty-first century skills like creative thinking, decision-making, communication skill etc. would help them to have positive health, gain employment, and be empowered (IIPS, Mumbai, 2010; India youth development index & report, 2017). It will make them effective and productive citizens of the country. The society and the nation will also benefit and advance from one of the important human resource—the young generation, termed as the ‘demographic dividends’ of a country, especially in India where adolescents and the youth form a major

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chunk of the total population. However, a significant number of youth in India face challenges related to physical as well as mental health (Chavan et al., 2018; Gururaj et al., 2016) owing to disadvantaged conditions. As a result, it limits the opportunity to harness the benefits that can arise from this rich demographic resource. Hence, the young population needs to be empowered by imparting them necessary life skills so that they can thrive and contribute significantly to the society and the nation.

The focus of education system majorly has always been on the academic achievement of students. It is lacking in its ability to equip the youth with necessary life skills (Youth in India, 2017). Although there has been an emphasis from time to time through various national educational policies and frameworks on imparting skills other than academic-related skills, systematic and comprehensive approach to this is lacking. Education needs to develop the child as a whole and prepare her/him for a productive and fulfilling life. It also needs to make them future ready in terms of personal skills, socio-emotional skills, and work/employment skills. Life skills play a crucial role in this regard, which needs to be made the centre stage of school education as it has an impact not only on academic progress and achievement but also on personal social effectiveness and excellence.

Conceptualizing Life Skills

Life skills refer to skills and competencies related to our interpersonal and psychosocial aspects that help adolescents to adapt, adjust, cope, and live life effectively. Life skills are a range of psycho-social and cognitive abilities that equip children and youth to engage in informed decisions and choices, manage their emotional well-being, and communicate effectively (Singh & Menon, 2015). World Health Organization (WHO, 1994) defines life skills as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enables individuals to deal effectively with demands and challenges of everyday life”. Adaptive indicates being flexible and adjusting to various life situations one comes across. Positive behaviour refers to having a positive outlook and looking for alternatives and possibilities even in the most difficult situations. Thus, it includes personal social competencies that can help achieve personal well-being, ensure good mental health, and function effectively in social settings.

Life skills are also considered as non-cognitive skills, socio-emotional learning, character traits, or personality traits, as defined by West et al. (2016), “skills not captured by assessments of cognitive ability and knowledge”. Thus, life skills can be described as consisting of *Thinking skills* and *Social skills*. Thinking skills refer to cognitive abilities at an individual level. Social skills include emotional skills and interpersonal skills to identify emotions and to deal effectively with other people. It helps in communicating effectively and managing conflicts. Life skills sometimes are viewed in terms of workplace success. However, the importance of life skills is not limited to workplace only, but it goes beyond and indicates skills to function effectively in other spheres of life also as a whole. So life skills can be used to indicate life success. They can help adolescents deal with life’s diverse challenges.

UNICEF defines life skills as “a behaviour change or behaviour development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills”. This has implications for adolescent mental health as changes in knowledge, beliefs and skills will reduce the likelihood of them engaging in risk and other maladaptive behaviours, deal with peer pressure and conflicts. This will facilitate their physical, mental, and socio-emotional well-being.

Ten Core Life Skills

The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasized on the need and importance of life skills education in 1998. It has suggested ten core life skills—self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, interpersonal relationship skills, effective communication skills, coping with stress and coping with emotions—to every school worldwide to incorporate into the mainstream academic curriculum. All these skills help adolescents develop awareness about themselves, be able to analyze and solve problems, think critically and creatively about challenges, build healthy relationships, and manage emotions and stressful situations. It helps them to be healthy, productive, assertive, and resilient through adolescent stage and in further life stages.

Self-awareness: It can be described as a key foundational life skill, which underlies the significance of knowing oneself. It includes developing an awareness about oneself in terms of one’s thoughts, emotions, and actions as well as knowing one’s interests, preferences, dis-likings, abilities and skills, and so on. Understanding oneself will help the adolescent explain their behaviour, choose correct path, and enable to take proper decisions in life. It will lead to interact effectively with their peer and others, and develop empathy.

Empathy: Empathy refers to the ability to develop ‘other awareness’, that is, one is able to think about things or situation from the perspective of the other person. This helps in improving communication and relates well with other people. It can help in good interpersonal relationships with peers and family as it conveys a sense of caring and understanding towards the other person. Empathy can help the adolescent to accept the differences and be sensitive to age, class, ethnic, and culture related diversity.

Critical thinking: It includes the ability to think and analyze a problem or situation from all angles, considering the pros, cons, and implications. The ability to think critically will help adolescents in recognizing the risk factors in a particular situation, avoid peer pressure, and media influence. It will help them to take a correct decision.

Creative thinking: Thinking creatively refers to a novel and useful way of thinking, which consists of fluency (number of new ideas), flexibility (seeing things from different perspectives), originality (newness of the idea), and elaboration (expanding ideas). Given the rapid developmental changes during adolescence stage and the

complexities of the twenty-first century global world, adolescents will need both critical thinking and creative thinking to achieve success and well-being.

Problem-solving: It refers to the ability to solve problems effectively in the given situation and context by taking a comprehensive view of the problem in all aspects. Adolescents need to see things objectively and use their critical and creative thinking to be able to solve problems effectively.

Decision-making: Adolescents need to learn to make effective decisions as they are faced with many crossroads in their life starting from subject selection at school to deciding on who to be friend with, choosing their career and life style. Decision-making skill helps them to be confident and deal with situations in a constructive manner without getting stressed.

Interpersonal relationship skills: Adolescents are at a growing stage where they need to learn to form effective relationships with their family members, peers, and others at school and in the society, e.g., as part of different clubs, associations, or workplace. This will help them to have good social relations and social support, which can contribute to better mental health.

Effective communication: The generation gap and other issues in growing adolescence stage may lead to more conflicts and anxieties, which can be constructively dealt with by effective communication. Rather than being passive or aggressive, adolescents learn to be assertive in their communication.

Coping with emotions: The transitional stage of adolescence generates a variety of emotions in the adolescents, which they need to learn to recognize, identify, and manage. Further, this skill helps them to know about emotions in others and learn to handle these properly. Coping with emotions helps adolescents to learn to respond to emotions and understand how emotions are affecting their mental health and relationships.

Coping with stress: This skill helps adolescents to recognize stress in them, know the sources of their stress, and use appropriate strategies for coping.

Importance of Life Skills

Adolescence is considered as a turbulent stage because of the progressive biological changes and consequent impact on other aspects of development. “The frontal lobes, home to key components of the neural circuitry underlying ‘executive functions’ such as planning, working memory, and impulse control, are among the last areas of the brain to mature; they may not be fully developed until halfway through the third decade of life” (Sowell et al., 1999). This has implications when viewed in the context of the characteristics of adolescents that include behaviours marked by novelty-seeking, risk-taking, and increased peer-based interaction and affiliation. As a result, adolescents may engage in substance use, mis-adventures, truancy, aggression and

violence, anti-social behaviour, and gang-culture. It also affects their interaction with parents negatively.

Further, the education system and the societal expectations, in general, are such that the emphasis by schools and family is mostly on the development of academic skills and career-related decisions. However, the mental health aspect, which is equally important, gets neglected or emphasized less. This results in anxiety, stress, and other emotional behavioural problems. Life skills training can play an important role in better adjustment, coping, increased self-esteem, empathy and pro-social behaviour (Bharath & Kishore, 2010; Yadav & Iqbal, 2009), and in promoting adolescents' daily functioning and mental well-being (van Loon et al., 2019). This consequently can have positive impact on school performance also. Teaching of life skills in schools leads to improvement in academic learning outcomes among adolescents (Subasree, 2015). Thus, research studies show that life skills programmes can help not only in academic outcomes but also developing psychosocial skills and competencies, and reducing risky behaviour (Bardhan & Nair, 2016).

Life skills will equip the adolescents to deal with the various challenges and concerns related to not only cognitive and physical development but also emotional, social, and sexual development. Adolescents need for autonomy, independence, creativity and desire to do things can be capitalized on to gear them towards constructive and productive things. Life skills is the key here that will enable the growing adolescents to realize their desires and dreams and steer their life in an effective way. Hence, life skills education needs to be emphasized in the school system (Prajapati et al., 2016). At early school stage, the emphasis is on acquiring basic reading, writing, and numeracy skills. In other words, the focus is on the three R's—reading, writing, and arithmetic. As the child grows and enters into adolescence, they need to learn various life skills to function effectively, adjust, and adapt to school life, peer group and life situations. In addition, the requirements of the twenty-first century make it imperative for all adolescents to have digital skills and literacy. Further, the adolescents need to learn vocational skills to be effective and productive at work.

UNICEF talks about four types of skills needed for success in school, life and work: *Foundational skills* (literacy and numeracy), *Digital skills* (using technology), *Transferable skills* (life skills/soft skills/socio-emotional skills), and *Job-specific skills* (technical and vocational skills). Transferable or life skills help adolescents to deal with emerging challenges, manage conflicts, learn interpersonal skills, and develop empathy. The demand of being a global citizen requires adolescents to learn skills that will help them to create a better future not only for themselves but also for their family and community in the long run. However, as per UNICEF, “By 2030, it is estimated that another 825 million children will not acquire the basic secondary-level skills—like transferable, digital and job-specific skills—needed to support lifelong learning and employment”. This is a global challenge, and more pronounced in case of marginalized sections of the society.

The Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (1990) has highlighted life skills as essential learning tools necessary for survival, capacity development, and quality of life. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992) has also advocated for linking life skills to education as it will help in development of the child's fullest

potential, which is the main aim of education. Hence, it is very important to make life skills an integral part of adolescent's life by an exclusive focus on this and active implementation of life skills education in the school as part of curriculum. This will enable the adolescents to be employment ready as well as future ready to deal with the varied and emerging challenges/issues of future.

Life Skills Education: Policies and Initiatives

Life skills are generic skills, which can help adolescents in their optimum development and adjustment. At the same time, these skills can be aimed at specific issues and problems such as targeting adolescents with substance use or faced with abuse, violence, or HIV/AIDS etc. Life skills can act as primary prevention in various areas such as violence, child abuse, adolescent pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, suicide, substance use, accidents, injuries, conflict etc. (WHO, 1999). There has been varied initial focus in starting of life skills programmes in different countries. In USA, life skills programmes focused on prevention of violence and substance use whereas life skills initiatives in UK targeted child abuse prevention. In Mexico, it aimed at prevention of adolescent pregnancy; and in Thailand and Zimbabwe, it aimed at prevention of HIV/AIDS. South Africa has created a curriculum for education for life called Life Orientation Education and Columbia has termed it as Integral education which focuses on life skills training to students.

In India, Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the apex body governing school education in India integrated life skills education as part of curriculum in 2010 (Behrani, 2016). It developed life skills manuals for teachers based on the ten core life skills of the WHO.

National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) has emphasized on connecting knowledge to life outside the school and going beyond the textbooks, thus highlighting learning of skills other than academic by the growing children. It indicates the importance of constructive learning experiences, active engagement of children, interaction with people and environment around as crucial for building life skills to deal with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Another important initiative, Adolescence Education Programme (AEP) (MHRD & NACO, 2005) of the Govt of India, launched by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (renamed to Ministry of Education in July 2020) in collaboration with National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) focuses on strengthening the life skills of the young to deal with risky behaviours, preventing AIDS and substance use, and encouraging healthy attitude and behaviour.

However, concern for and focus on the adolescent issues and development had started much earlier in India when the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), an apex body in school education in the country, developed the General Framework of Adolescence Education based on the National Seminar it organized on Adolescence Education in 1993, 12–13th April. The Framework addressed three main aspects such as the process of growing up during adolescence,

HIV/AIDS, and drug abuse. Thus, it brought the issues and concerns of adolescence into the mainstream of the school education system. It aimed at empowering adolescents by developing life skills in them to deal with risky situations, reducing their vulnerability, enabling them to make healthy choices, and helping in their positive behaviour development.

NCERT also emphasizes on education for peace and acknowledges the purpose of education as promoting a culture of peace (NCERT, 2006a, 2006b). It also highlights a health and physical education curriculum at all levels of schooling and talks about special attention to vulnerable social groups and girl children (NCERT,). This has implication for learning of life skills and will contribute to the physical as well as mental, social, and emotional development of children. All these reflect the objective of preparing students for life and making them capable to lead an effective and good life.

Importance of life skills education for adolescents has also been emphasized in various international declarations such as the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments (2000) and the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV and AIDS (2001). WHO, in 1993, has prepared a document (later revised in 1997) outlining a framework for life skills programme development, both conceptually and practically. It includes life skills for developing psychosocial competence and also talks about development and implementation of life skills programmes. It targets teaching life skills to children and adolescents in schools, but it can be applied to those out of school also.

Life skills education (LSE) aims at providing awareness and training to adolescents in developing appropriate knowledge, attitudes, and skills to adapt to life situations and engage in healthy behaviour and functioning. Research studies have advocated the importance of life skills education for youth (Dinesh & Belinda, 2014; Singh, & Sharma, 2016). It plays a crucial role in youth health promotion, education, and overall development (Sangma, & Prakash, 2017; Vranda & Rao, 2011). Studies have also pointed out the need for training in life skills (Buvaneswari & Juliet, 2017).

Various initiatives have been taken in India regarding Life Skills Education (LSE) programmes. The Youth focused Life Skills Education and Counseling Services (YLSECS) program has been prepared by Department of Youth Empowerment and Sports, Government of Karnataka supported by Department of Epidemiology, Centre for Public Health, National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), in India for the promotion of mental health and well-being of youth in the State (Pradeep et al., 2019). The objective of this training program was to provide the knowledge of life skills to the participants and to train them to organize such trainings in their respective settings through facilitatory approach. Overall, 28 life skills training workshops were conducted. Each training workshop was planned for 5 days and two domains of life skills by WHO were covered each day, devoting 3–4 h per domain. Each workshop enrolled about 25–30 participants who were trained by master facilitators who were specialists in the field of psychology and social sciences and were skilled in conducting the training following a facilitatory approach.

YLSECS training program, thus, aimed at empowering the participants with requisite knowledge and skills for imparting life skills to college going youth. Findings

indicated that such training significantly improved participants' awareness about life skills and increased their level of confidence and capacity to teach life skills to students. Furthermore, the study highlighted the need for supportive supervision for participants to conduct life skills training themselves in their respective colleges.

A cascade model of life skills education has been developed by the Department of Psychiatry, NIMHANS Bangalore in India in collaboration with World Health Organization-South East Asia Region Office (WHO-SEARO), which focused on various developmental issues such as nutrition, hygiene, interpersonal relationships, substance use, academics, gender issues, career, and sexuality (Bharath et al., 2005). These modules were separately developed following a developmental approach separately for classes 8th, 9th, and 10th standards using a teacher as facilitator.

There are many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also across India who are involved in providing life skills training. They cater to children from marginalized sections and disadvantaged backgrounds, focus on empowering girls specifically, attempt to build life skills through sports, art forms, and other multiple methods.

Life Skills for Adolescents Outside the School Curriculum

Many children and adolescents are out of school or drop out of school due to various reasons. Life skills are of crucial significance for such children and adolescents who are faced with life's stark realities and challenges. Such children include street children, working children, orphans, abused children, sexually exploited children, and victims of violence, war and trauma. Life skills will help them to develop psychosocial competencies to deal with the demands and challenges of their everyday life.

The local level organizations, self-help groups, NGOs, local governance and in-community functionaries, and leaders can play an important role in developing life skills in such children and adolescents. They can be provided orientation to be sensitive to the needs of these adolescents and trained to impart life skills to them through a participatory approach.

Whether it is in-school or out-of-school life skills training programmes, the role and involvement of community are crucial in success of the programmes. Community linkage provides support and helps the adolescents to transfer the life skills into actual practice, thus leading to sustainability of the life skills learned.

There needs to be a collaboration between various stakeholders at school, home, and community with a common objective to facilitate the growing up process of adolescents, develop psychosocial competencies in them to be resilient and face any life situations. This assumes more significance in that the adolescents in India are from diverse contexts and backgrounds. Hence, it is important to help them realize their strengths and empower them through life skills training. This highlights a right-based approach to the empowerment of adolescents.

Assessment of Life Skills

There is a need for measurement tools to assess the impact of life skills programmes. One such tool is Life Skills Scale (LSS) by Vranda (2009a, 2009b; 2007), consisting of 115 items on a 5-point Likert format, which is based on the ten life skills of WHO. The scale has been used effectively with adolescents in diverse contexts such as school, institutionalized, and street children (Vranda, 2009a, 2009b).

Another scale, The Life Skills Assessment Scale developed by Subasree and Nair (2014) is popularly used by various researchers (Dhingra & Chauhan, 2017) to assess life skills. This scale also is based on the ten life skills of WHO, having a total of 100 items.

The Dream Life Skills Assessment Scale (DLSAS) was developed specifically to measure life skills of disadvantaged children (Kennedy et al., 2014), which includes assessment by teacher/facilitator of five critical life skills in children such as interacting with others, overcoming difficulties and solving problems, taking initiative, managing conflict, and understanding and following instructions.

Various other tools are also used by the organizations working in the field. However, in general, there is a need to develop more standardized tools with a focus on measuring life skills as a whole which can be utilized across the age groups, and address the assessment of outcomes across the temporal spectrum, that is, immediate outcomes to long-term outcomes (Talreja et al., 2018).

The Indian Association of Life Skills Education (IALSE) in India plays an important role with regard to compilation and dissemination of knowledge and research in the field of life skills through organizing conferences and its journal called International Journal of Life Skills Education. On the international scenario, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) focuses on the importance of integrating the academic learning with psycho-social aspects with an aim of achieving a balanced and effective personality. Towards this end, it has developed various grade-wise programmes to enhance social and emotional skills in students. Research and initiatives by CASEL have made social and emotional learning (SEL) at the centre stage of education in USA and have been used globally also. The SEL framework focuses on five components such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, which can be taught across developmental stages from childhood to adulthood and also in diverse cultural contexts (www.casel.org).

Other tools on life skills have focused on specific skills addressing particular contexts. For instance, Korean Life Skills Scale for Sport (Lim et al., 2019) measures life skills in school physical education or sports fields. It assesses five factors such as teamwork, goal setting, time management, social skills, and leadership relevant for functioning in sports context and excelling in it.

One crucial aspect in assessment of life skills relates to measuring the outcomes of the training or intervention programmes. This requires a clear consensus on defining and identifying what life outcomes one is aiming at. The WHO Quality of life tool (WHOQOL) provides a measure of life outcomes mostly in terms of mental health

space, but it is not representative of different facets of life (WHO, 1998), which is the objective in any life skills training programme.

Challenges to Life Skills Education

Life skills education (LSE) has an important contribution to the overall development of adolescents. It aims at facilitating the practice and reinforcement of skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way. It, thus, helps contribute to the promotion of personal and social development, the protection of human rights, and the prevention high-risk behaviour and social problems. However, there are many challenges in the implementation of LSE that needs to be considered (Grover, 2019). The stakeholders here are the teachers/facilitators who provide life skills training, the adolescent themselves with their diverse background, the quality of the LSE programmes in terms of their content and methods, and the education system itself, how much weightage and priority it gives to LSE in schools.

- The education system usually focuses on the child as a product of the system (Singh & Menon, 2015), not on the process of development of child into a competent, effective, and healthy individual with a resilient and positive attitude to deal with any challenges of life. It is examination and grade-centric and ignores the natural free spirit and creativity of children. To date, the Indian educational system produces individuals in general who are not able to think for themselves or even acquire the ability to work independently, to take ownership and responsibility and to solve problems and take decisions (Subitha, 2013). The twenty-first century is moving towards a world where the adolescents need to be truly a global citizen for which they need to acquire the relevant thinking skills, vocational skills as well as the social and emotional skills. However, the school system prioritizes the cognitive skills and focuses more on imparting the scholastic knowledge. Even though co-curricular activities are there in school, development of emotional and social skills are mostly neglected. Further, life skills education is also confused with value education (Ramakrishnan, 2010) and with vocational education (Subitha, 2013). It has implications for understanding of the meaning, scope, and purpose of life skills for adolescents by the teachers and the school system. This will help the stakeholders realize the importance of LSE and give its due place by integrating it into the curriculum.
- Effective implementation of any programme requires adequate resources. Life skills education also needs good facilitators or teachers trained in imparting life skills training (Abobo & Orodho, 2014). Infrastructural facilities also need to be adequate. Thus, teacher education programmes need to focus on developing the awareness, skills, and competencies of teachers who will facilitate the life skills training for the students. The quality of LSE also needs to be maintained by structuring it and maintaining a uniform standard protocol for its implementation.

- The content of LSE programme and the method for delivery also are important factors. The modalities of LSE can include group discussions, role-plays, debates, games, brain storming, stories and case studies, and other interactive activities. Participatory strategy needs to be used in teaching life skills, focusing more on using an affective approach to life skills training. In the process, the teacher/facilitator needs to take into account the sociocultural context of the adolescent.
- Adolescent is not a unitary term with uniform experience and background. They have varied contexts and personal, social, and cultural needs, which influence their development and mould their attitude. Any life skills training programme needs to take into account the experiences of the adolescent and build upon it. Further, the decreasing traditional support systems, changing family structures and family relationships have created different kinds of issues and challenges for the adolescents. These can have different impacts related to their socio-economic status and background. The type of schools, the nature of peer group, the living environment etc. might also impact the receiving and understanding the importance of LSE by the adolescents themselves and their family and the community.
- Evaluating the outcome of life skills training programs is crucial as it will provide feedback about the effectiveness of the programme, delivery mechanism of the training, and practical difficulties in the contextual background of the participants.
- Assessing the effectiveness of life skills education/training programmes requires measurement of life skills through standardized tools. However, the challenge to measurement is the way life skills are viewed, as separate skills or as a whole. There is a need to develop more standardized tools and further research to study the efficacy and application of such tools in multiple contexts, with varied constructs and outcomes.
- A fundamental challenge to life skills education programmes relates to defining and a uniform conceptualization of life skills. Research studies in India indicate that life skills education is evaluated mostly through the lens of employment readiness rather than life readiness (Talreja et al., 2018). This highlights employability only in relation to adversity in the life of adolescents whereas focus needs to be more on preparing the adolescents for the future and developing psychosocial competencies in them to lead a good life. This requires taking a developmental approach to life skills and viewing these skills as lifelong. Hence, it requires emphasizing the role of life skills from early childhood years to school years and to young adults and then older years.
- Life skills education and training programmes can benefit from a strength-based approach. Discussions on adolescent brain development and maturity often use a deficit-based approach, but research in brain science has enormous opportunity to illuminate the great strengths and potentialities of the adolescent brain (Johnson et al., 2009). This can inform the policies and the programmes related to life skills education to better promote adolescent health and well-being.

Conclusion

The conventional emphasis on examination and academic success has given way to the realization in the twenty-first century globalized world about the importance of other pertinent skills in achieving success in life. The complexities of life and technological advancement require learning of various life skills to become successful in life. Life skills as the name suggests are skills for leading an effective and successful life. They provide important building blocks for adolescents to carve out their life. Hence, it becomes imperative that life skills are integrated into the curriculum (Schurer, 2017), this way it will be an effective strategy to strengthen adolescents' life skills.

The chapter discussed the concept of life skills and life skills education. It highlighted various initiatives in life skills education. The chapter also described the concerns and challenges related to life skills programmes, which need to be addressed so that the full benefits of such programmes can be realized by the adolescents. Life skills are very important and necessary life tools that the young population need to equip themselves with to survive and thrive in the global world. This is more pertinent for the adolescents struggling in the deprived and marginalized sections of the society. Life skills training will help them to adapt to difficult situations in their life and be resilient.

It is really counterproductive that, on the one hand, India has world's largest youth population (UN Report, Nov. 18, 2014), set to continue till 2030 (UNFPA); on the other hand, various reports indicate that majority of this youth population are facing poverty, malnutrition, and hunger (Ministry of Women and Child Development, Govt of India, 2013–2014; UNICEF, 2009). The resultant developmental delay affects various aspects of adolescent health and leads to poorer cognitive abilities, poor information processing, emotion regulation difficulties, neuropsychological difficulties, and behavioural problems such as self-harm and social withdrawal, among others (Kennedy et al., 2014).

The adversity and challenges faced by the young deprive the nation of the potential of this demographic dividend. In this scenario, it is the life skills that can address this challenge and enable the adolescents and youth to thrive in life, develop resilience, acquire psychosocial competence, be productive, and contribute meaningfully. The underlying emphasis here is to focus on the rights of these adolescents to live a dignified and productive life. Towards this end, life skills can act as the right tool to empower them to achieve their basic rights and dignity.

Time to Reflect

Life in earlier times was simple, more so for our young population. Play was integrated with their learning. But gradually with increasing complexities and competitions, learning got devoided of play and then we started talking about joyful learning,

playway method to refocus on the natural way of learning. The gap between play and learning needs to be bridged and education system needs to revisit the main aim of education, that is the holistic development of the child focusing on all aspects such as physical, mental, social, emotional,, moral and spiritual. Life skills education programmes can be the key to realizing this goal of education, equipping our young with the necessary skills to excel and thrive in their own life and also contribute to the society.

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