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Life skill based education for sustainable future of adolescent girls

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Abstract

Adolescence is a period of transition between childhood and adulthood that occupies a crucial position in the life of human beings. This period is an important physiological phase of life characterized by an exceptionally rapid rate of growth and development. Good nutritional status, positive health and healthy eating habits are important stepping stones among adolescent girls for health promotion and disease prevention. Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. These skills are usually associated with managing and living better quality of life by accomplishing adolescent's ambitions. Life skills enable individuals to translate knowledge, attitudes and values into actual abilities. Life skills as an approach is designed to enhance efforts to positively develop or change behaviour related to healthy functioning in society.

Keywords: Adolescent girls, life skills, positive health, sustainable future and healthy eating habits

1. Introduction

Adolescence is an intense anabolic period when requirement for all nutrients is enhanced. During this pubertal stage, rapid physical and physiological changes take place with significant influence on physiological and sexual behaviour. These are the years when an individual is vulnerable to negative peer pressure, risk taking, experimentation and misinformed decision making relating to their behaviour and sexuality, which not only affects the self-development of the individual but also the family and the society. Good nutritional status, positive health and healthy eating habits are important stepping stones among adolescent girls for health promotion and disease prevention.

Life skills as an approach is designed to enhance efforts to positively develop or change behaviour related to healthy functioning in society. These skills are usually associated with managing and living better quality of life by accomplishing adolescent's ambitions. The purpose of this review is to explore life skills dimensions and to emphasize the importance of life skills for sustainable future of adolescent girls.

2. Life Skills Concept

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Life skills are innumerable and its nature and definition differ across cultures and settings. Figure 1 depicts core principles of life skills. However, analysis of life skills field suggest that there is a core set of skills that are the heart of skills based initiatives for the promotion of the health and well-being of adolescents. Various core principles of life skills laid down by WHO (1997) ^[16] are as follows:

2.1 Self-Awareness

Self-Awareness includes recognition of ourselves, identification of our strength, weaknesses, desires and dislikes. Developing self-awareness can help us to recognize when we are stressed or feel under pressure. It is also often a prerequisite for effective communication and interpersonal relations, as well as for developing empathy for others.

2.2 Empathy

Empathy is the ability to imagine what life is like for another person, even in situation that we may not be familiar with. Empathy can help us to understand and accept others who may be

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very different from ourselves, which can improve social interactions, for example, in situations of ethnic or cultural diversity. Empathy can also help to encourage nurturing behavior towards people in need of care and assistance.



Fig 1: Core Principles of Life Skills

2.3 Effective Communication

Effective Communication is an ability to express ourselves both verbally and non-verbally in an appropriate way in relation to our cultures and situations. This means being able to express desires, opinions, and fears and seek assistance and advice in times of need.

2.4 Creative Thinking

Creative thinking contributes to both decision making and problem solving by enabling us to explore the available alternatives and various consequences of our actions or non-action. It helps us to look beyond our direct experience, and even if no problem is identified, or no decision is to be made, creative thinking can help us to respond adaptively and with flexibility to the situations of our daily lives. Creative thinking inculcates novelty and flexibility to the situation of our daily lifestyle.

2.5 Problem Solving

Problem solving enables us to deal constructively with problems in our lives. Significant problems that are left unresolved can cause mental stress and give rise to accompanying physical strain. This is having made decisions about each of the options, choosing the one which is the best suited, following it through the process again till a positive outcome of the problem is achieved.

2.6 Interpersonal Relationship

Interpersonal relationship skills are a skills that helps us to understand our relations with others and relate in a positive or reciprocal manner with them. It helps us to maintain relationship with friends and family members which are an important source of social support and also be able to end

relationships constructively. Interpersonal relationship enhances the mental and social well-being.

2.7 Dealing with Emotion

Dealing with emotion is an ability, which involves recognizing emotions in others, and ourselves, being aware of how emotions influence behaviors and being able to respond to emotions appropriately. Intense emotions, like anger or sorrow can have negative effects on our health if we do not react appropriately.

2.8 Decision Making

Decision making helps us to deal constructively with decisions about our lives. It is the process of making assessment of an issue by considering all possible/available options and the effects different decision might have on us.

2.9 Coping with Stress

Coping with stress means recognizing the sources of stress in our lives, recognizing how this affects our health, and acting in ways that helps us to cope up with stress, by changing our environment or lifestyle.

2.10 Coping with Emotions

Coping with emotion means involving recognizing emotions within us and others, being aware of how emotions influence behavior and respond against emotions appropriately. Intense emotions, like anger or sorrow can affect our health, if we do not react positively against that response.

3. Life Skills: A Life Course Approach

Critical thinking is also regarded as intellectually engaged, skilful, and responsible thinking that facilitates good judgment because it requires the application of assumptions, knowledge, competence, and the ability to challenge one's own thinking. Critical thinking requires the use of self-correction and monitoring to judge the rationality of thinking as well as reflexivity. Critical thinking is the ability to think clearly and rationally. It includes the ability to engage in reflective and independent thinking.

Decision Making is the act of choosing between two or more right and wrong deeds. Decision making helps us to take appropriate decisions about ones lives. It teaches people to actively make decisions thinking about its after effects of future.

Interpersonal skills are the life skills we use every day to communicate and interact with other people, both individually and in groups. Interpersonal communication is the process by which people exchange information, feelings, and meaning through verbal and non-verbal messages: it is face-to-face communication.

Self-management skills refers to skills to increase the internal locus of control, so that the individual believes that they can make a difference in the world and affect change. Self-esteem, self-awareness, self-evaluation skills and the ability to set goals are also part of the more general category of self-management skills. Figure 4 indicates sustainable development through life skill approaches.

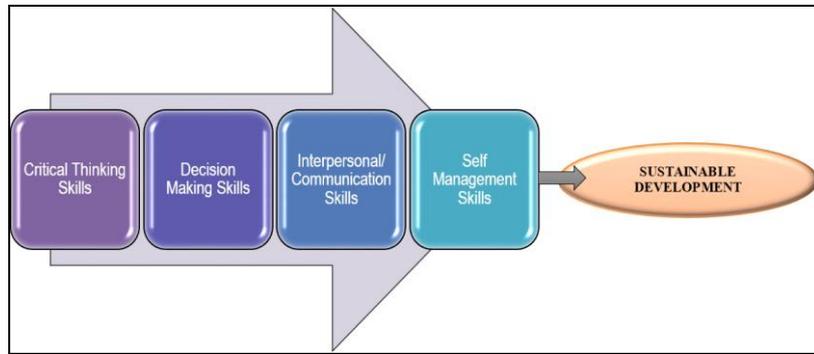


Fig 2: Sustainable development through life skill approaches.

Quality education is an effective means to fight poverty and foster peaceful societies. Quality education empowers individuals, gives them voice, unlocks their potential, opens pathways to self-actualization and broadens the perspectives to open minds to a pluralist world. Quality has become a dynamic concept that has been constantly adapted to the world societies are undergoing profound social and economic transformation. Encouragement for future- oriented thinking and anticipation is gaining importance.

Quality education seeks to reduce barriers of lifestyle based on gender and socioeconomic status among the children attending school. Thus, the cycle of exclusion can be broken and the children can start on the path to a life where it is possible to fulfill all human rights. Learners bring with them a history of life experiences, both positive and negative experiences in order to enhance their and other’s learning. Figure 3 depicts a quality framework of levels of learning system for quality education.

In new millennium, the process of curriculum revision must keep pace with the rapid changes brought about by globalization for enhancing quality education. Physical modification (adequate sanitation, hygiene facilities etc.) and psychological changes (eliminating bullying, corporal punishments et.) enhances the enrollment level of the adolescent girls. Each level can promote quality education and thwart it. Good policy can cover a wide range of educational activities from upper administration to individual classroom. Administrational support for quality education throughout the educational system is essentially required i.e. effective teaching practices, welcoming policies, purchasing appropriate textbooks and supplies as well providing professional development for the whole staff for ensuring ongoing quality and efficient use of resources.

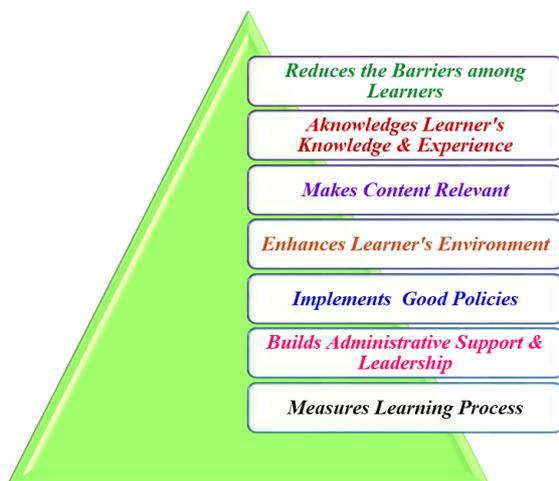


Fig 3: A quality framework of levels of learning system for quality education

4. Role of Life Skills in Health Promotion

Life skills as an approach is designed to enhance efforts to positively develop or change behaviour related to healthy functioning in society. Life skills approach encompasses and balances all three of components, namely knowledge (information), attitudes (values) and skills (behavioural changes). Practical experience shows that behaviour is substantially more difficult to change and requires more intensive approaches than knowledge and attitude change. The goal of the life skills approach is to promote healthy, sociable behaviour and to prevent or reduce risk behaviors, as well as make an impact on knowledge and attitudinal components.

For health promotion, teaching skills in each of these areas provides a foundation in generic life skills for psychosocial competence. The teaching of life skills appears in a wide variety of educational programmes with demonstrable effectiveness, including programmes for the prevention of substance abuse (Botvin *et al.*, 1980; Pentz, 1983) [1, 6] and adolescent pregnancy (Zabin *et al.*, 1986; Schinke, 1984) [17, 9], the promotion of intelligence (Gonzalez, 1990), and the prevention of bullying (Olweus, 1990) [5]. Educational programmes teaching these skills have also been developed for the prevention of AIDS (WHO/GPA, 1994) [15]; for peace education (Prutzman *et al.*, 1988) [8], and for the promotion of self-confidence and self-esteem (TACADE, 1990) [10]. Teaching life skills in this wide range of promotion and prevention programmes demonstrates the common value of life skills for health promotion, beyond their value within any specific programme.

Teaching life skills as generic skills in relation to everyday life could form the foundation of life skills education for the promotion of mental well-being, and healthy interaction and behaviour. More problem specific skills, such as assertively dealing with peer pressures to use drugs, to have unprotected sex, or to become involved in vandalism, could be built on this foundation. There are research indications that teaching skills in this way, as part of broad-based life skills programmes, is an effective approach for primary prevention education (Errecart *et al.*, 1991; Perry and Kelder, 1992; Caplan *et al.*, 1992) [3, 7, 2]. The model below (Figure 4) shows the place of life skills as a link between motivating factors of knowledge, attitudes and values, and positive health behaviour; and in this way contributing to the primary prevention of health problems.

Life skills enable individuals to translate knowledge, attitudes and values into actual abilities - ie. "what to do and how to do it". Life skills are abilities that enable individuals to behave in healthy ways, given the desire to do so and given the scope and opportunity to do so. They are not a panacea; "how to do" abilities are not the only factors that affect behaviour. If the model above was placed within a larger, more comprehensive framework, there would be many factors that relate to the motivation and ability to behave in positive ways to prevent

health problems. These factors include such things as social support, cultural and environment factors.

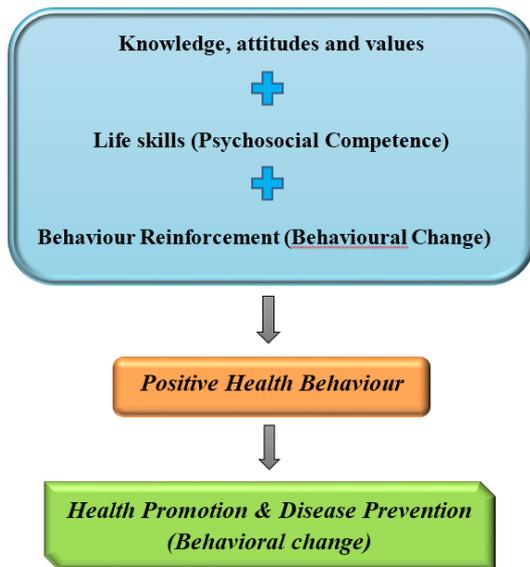


Fig 4: Interrelationship between knowledge, attitude & behaviour

5. Quality Education and Life Skill Approach for Sustainable Future

“Education is an indispensable element for achieving sustainable development”.

All sustainable development programmes, including education for sustainable development (ESD) and life skill approaches, must consider the local environmental, economic, and societal conditions. United Nations. 2004

Education for sustainable development is based on ideals and principals that underlie sustainability, such as intergenerational equity, gender equity, social tolerance, poverty alleviation, environmental preservation and restoration, natural resource conservation, and just and peaceable societies. There are four thrusts of ESD, which are as follows:

1. Improve access to quality basic education.
2. Reorient existing education to address sustainable development.
3. Develop public understanding and awareness.
4. Provide training programmes for all sectors of private and civil society. These four became major components for the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2005a) [12].

Quality education calls for using a life-skills approach in education and ESD calls for including skills in reorienting education to address sustainability. Learning a variety of skills will prepare individuals for a more successful life at home, in their communities, and in the workforce. People use a variety of skills in the full range of human activities: interacting with family and community members and when acting as an individual, a member of a group, and an employee or entrepreneur. Rather than simply letting individuals learn skills by observing people live and interact around them, educational systems intentionally teach a breadth of skills. In a life-skills approach to education, young students become aware of, develop, use, and practice a wide variety of skills within the safety of the learning environment.

In this 21st century, adolescents need skills that will help them adapt to changes over a lifetime. They need skills in each of the four pillars of Education for All – learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and with others, and learning to be (UNESCO, 2005b) [13]. Young minds need

cognitive, reflective, self-management, and social skills. Life skills allow individuals to bridge what they currently know and do and what they can know and do in the future (UNESCO, 2005c) [14].

Life-long learning skills and opportunities, which allow adults to develop new skills and keep life-long employment, are part of quality education and ESD visions. Lifelong learning skills also help adults to adapt socially and to participate in community-decision making as the places they live change. Teaching and learning life skills are part of both quality education, which is essential for sustainable development.

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