

The Relevance of Life Skills Training in Tertiary Level: A Conceptual Exploration of Employability and Personal Growth

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Abstract

The dynamic nature of the modern workplace and the increasing complexity of societal roles demand more than technical proficiency or academic brilliance. As students step into the tertiary level of education, they are expected to not only acquire domain-specific knowledge but also to develop a wide array of competencies that amplifies their employability and which in process fosters holistic personal growth. World Health Organization (WHO) defines life skills as abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour. This article explores the relevance of life skills training at the tertiary level, examining its direct implications on employability and its wide impact on student's personal development.

Keywords: Life skills, adaptive, training, employability

Introduction

Life skills encompass a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal abilities including communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, emotional regulation, empathy, and resilience. Dissimilar to hard skills, life skills are not tied to a specific profession but are invariably applicable across disciplines and roles. The universality and adaptability of life skills make the study indispensable in tertiary education. For example, a medical degree holder may excel in his/her diagnostics, but without empathy and communication skills, patient care remains incomplete. Similarly, an engineering student may be technically sound, yet struggle in team projects or client interactions without collaborative and conflict-resolution skills.

Moreover, with the rise in the stress associated with academic and career transitions, life skills serve as a buffer, which promotes self-awareness and emotional well-being. The competencies which are acquired from life skills become the essential tools for managing change, adapting to diverse environments, and sustaining motivation in both personal and professional spheres of life.

The Importance of Life Skills

Employers across the world customarily highlight the importance of soft skills in recruitment of employees. According to a LinkedIn Global Talent Trends report, over 92% of talent professionals and hiring managers say that soft skills are equally or more important than hard skills. Tertiary institutions that integrate life skills training into their curriculum thereby directly intensify the employability of their graduates. Critical thinking and problem-solving, for instance, are highly valued across sectors – from business and law to engineering and IT. Life skills training encourage students to tackle real-world scenarios, make informed decisions, and reflect on outcomes. Similarly, communication and interpersonal skills are vital during interviews, workplace integration, and leadership roles.

Evidently, employers seek candidates who are adaptable, resilient, and capable of managing pressure-traits that life skills education specifically targets. These attributes also contribute to career longevity and career progression, making students/graduates more competent and future-ready in the dynamic employment environment. Beyond professional preparation, life skills education nurtures the foundational elements of personal development.

Self-awareness, a core life skill, allow students to recognize their strengths, values, motivations and limitations. This insight is vital in setting realistic academic and career goals and in making ethical decisions. Emotional intelligence, another core life skill, enables students to manage emotions, understand other, empathize, and build healthy relationships. These skills are not only essential for workplace but in everyday life. Life skills training fosters autonomy, confidence, and the ability to handle failure, all of which are critical during the transformative years of higher education.

For example, time management and stress management workshops have been shown to improve student's performance, reduce anxiety, and increase retention rates. For instance,

training in assertiveness and conflict resolution can empower students to navigate campus life, internships, and social engagements more effectively. To maximize the benefits of life skills training, it is essential for tertiary institutions to move beyond optional workshops and embed these competencies into the academic curriculum. This integration can be achieved through interactive teaching methods such as role-play, simulations, group discussions, project-based learning, and reflective journaling.

Equity in Life Skills Development

While the importance of life skills training is increasingly recognized, it is crucial to acknowledge that students do not engage with these programs from a level playing field. Gender and socioeconomic backgrounds can significantly shape an individual's access to, and understanding of, life skills. For instance, students from underprivileged backgrounds may have had limited exposure to structured environments that nurture communication, leadership, or emotional regulation. They may also face additional stressors, such as financial instability or family responsibilities, which can hinder their ability to fully engage in such training.

Gender norms also play a vital role. In certain cultural contexts, assertiveness or public speaking may be discouraged among female students, while emotional expression might be stigmatized among male students. These societal expectations can inhibit the development of core life skills such as confidence, empathy, and decision-making. Therefore, life skills training must be inclusive, sensitive, and adaptable to the diverse lived experiences of students. Facilitators should adopt gender-aware pedagogical methods and create safe spaces that empower all learners to participate meaningfully, regardless of their background.

Life Skills Learning

Universities like the University of Delhi and the National University of Singapore have pioneered such efforts, offering mandatory credit courses on life skills and personal development. The pedagogical shift from lecture-based to experiential learning ensures that students not only understand concepts but also practice and internalize them. Institutions can also partner with industries, and NGOs, to enrich life skills content and provide students with real-world exposure through volunteering, mentoring and internships.

National education policies, such as India's NEP 2020, have already recognized the need for holistic and multidisciplinary learning, including life skills training. Policy frameworks should mandate life skills modules as part of undergraduate and postgraduate programs, allocating resources for faculty training and student support. Continuous assessments and feedback mechanisms should be implemented to evaluate the effectiveness of life skills training and make necessary modifications.

Life skills education at the tertiary level is no longer a supplementary component-it has become a core part to prepare students for the realities of life beyond the classroom. As the global job market becomes more dynamic, competitive, and digitally driven, employers are increasingly looking for candidates/freshers who can demonstrate more than academic excellence. Skills such as critical thinking, adaptability, resilience, teamwork, and emotional intelligence are highly sought-after and often serve as the distinguishing factor between equally qualified candidates. Institutions must take deliberate steps to integrate life skills into academic frameworks-not as isolated interventions, but as part of a holistic developmental model. This requires policy support, curriculum reform, faculty training and a cultural shift in the way education is perceived, not merely as the transmission of knowledge, but as the cultivation of whole individuals.

Conclusion

Importantly, life skills are not just about professional success, they are about building character, nurturing self-awareness, and fostering the ability to lead a fulfilling life. A candidate equipped with emotional regulation, empathy, ethical decision-making, and effective communication is better positioned to contribute positively to both personal and societal spheres. These skills enable graduates to cope with the uncertainties of modern life, to be motivated in the face of setbacks, and navigate social environments which are complex with maturity and a sense of purpose.

In totality, the relevance of life skills education in tertiary education cannot be overstated. It plays a pivotal role in shaping well-rounded graduates who are career-ready, emotionally intelligent, and socially responsible. Life skills must be placed at the core of the educational journey, as educators and policymakers strive to build future-ready institutions.

Empowering students not just to strive in the world, but to thrive and lead with confidence, competence, and compassion.

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