



Assessment of life skill development of children with learning disability

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Abstract

Life skills have been defined as the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the challenges of life. Life skills are considered the fuel that empowers life, which provides the energy to survive and thrive, enabling a person to lead a productive life. Hence in this constantly changing social, economical and political environment, developing life skills is an essential part of being able to meet the challenges of everyday life. The present paper deals with the Assessment of Life Skill Development of Children with Learning Disability.

Keywords: life skill development, learning disability

Introduction

UNICEF defines life skills as, “a behavior change or behavior development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: Knowledge, attitude and skills”. Thus, life skills are essentially those abilities that help promote mental well-being and competence in young people as they face the realities of life (UNICEF, 2002).

The WHO has identified ten skills as basic life skills and has further grouped under three heads as; Social Skills, Thinking Skills and Emotional Skills. “Thinking” skills can be perceived as a skill not only in making rational decisions but also in being able to make others agree to one's point of view effectively. Skills related to dealing with others are termed as “social skills”. While thinking skills relate to reflection at a personal level, social skills include interpersonal skills and do not necessarily depend on logical thinking. It is the combination of these two types of skills that are needed for achieving assertive behavior and negotiating (WHO, 2007).

Based on the nature of life skills it can be broadly divided into 3 namely, Social Skills, Emotional Skills and Thinking Skills.

a) Social Skills

The social skills can be identified as skills related to an individual's ability to communicate with others, ability to understand and be aware of his/her thoughts and deeds, ability to be empathetic and ability to maintain relationships with others. So this skill is essential for the creation of a pleasant living environment at home and society. According to WHO the four basic social skills are self-awareness, empathy, effective communication and interpersonal relationship.

▪ **Self-Awareness:** Self-awareness also known by synonyms such as self-image, self-concept and self-esteem, is the awareness about self. It includes recognition of one's character, strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes. Realization about one's strengths helps the adolescent to understand his/her self-worth and

builds his/her confidence to face life boldly. And being aware of one's weaknesses or negative personality traits will help in bringing about positive changes in the affected fields.

- **Empathy:** Empathy is a person's ability to understand and accept different kinds of people around him/her who are different from self in many aspects. It is a rare mental ability to understand and accept without emotional disturbances, the predicament of others in distress, as if self were in the same situation. It also entails providing emotional support for that person. It helps an adolescent to understand and accept others who are different from him/her and to offer support and care.
- **Effective Communication:** Effective Communication is an efficient tool for the establishment and maintenance of good social and working relationships with people. It is a way of reaching out to others by transmitting ideas, facts, thoughts, feelings and values. It's the ability to express him/her in ways that are appropriate to his/her cultures and situations. It enables an adolescent to express his opinions, desires and fears clearly by using both verbal communication and non-verbal expressions.
- **Interpersonal Relationship:** Inter Personal Relationship also called as people skill is known as survival skills which is imperative for establishing and maintaining social relationships. Interpersonal skill is the ability to initiate and maintain positive relationship with others and to de-link unconstructive relationship, with minimum disturbances to all concerned. Relating with others is an important life skill and one of the most important forms of human intelligence which provides warmth, caring, support and collaboration that fills life with excitement and potential for joy and personal fulfillment. It teaches an adolescent to relate to other people in a positive manner. It also helps him/her to develop the ability to end relationships constructively (Subasree & Nair, 2014).

b) Thinking Skills

Thinking skills can be defined as skills, which helps people to develop the ability to handle problems by solving them in a critical and/or creative ways. Thinking skills also include the creativity of person which helps to generate quick and alternate idea which is innovative. Decision making will help individual to be decisive and effective at work and home. Critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making and problem solving are grouped under thinking skills (WHO, 2007).

- **Creative Thinking:** Creativity is typically used to refer to the act of producing new ideas, approaches or actions. Creativity is the ability to generate innovative ideas and manifest them from thought into reality. The process involves original thinking and then executing the plan into action. Creativity is the ability to create something that is both novel (original and unexpected) and appropriate (useful or meets tasks constraints). It helps an adolescent to respond in a flexible manner to various challenges of life. It enables him/her to explore available possible alternatives and to assess their consequences. This skill helps in both problem solving and decision-making.
- **Critical Thinking:** Critical thinking is defined as logical thinking and reasoning involving skills such as comparison and classification; Critical Thinking is that mode of thinking about any subject, content or problem in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully making use of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them. This skill enables an adolescent to analyze information and experiences objectively. It also helps to recognize factors like family values, peer and media pressures that influence attitudes and behavior.
- **Decision-Making:** Decision Making is the ability to choose the best from amongst the various alternatives or options in many life situations. It's the skill to analysis and weigh the pros and cons of alternatives and accepting responsibility for the consequences of the decision with confidence. It enables an adolescent to make constructive decisions about one's life like choice of a career or marriage partner etc.
- **Problem Solving:** Problem Solving skills enable one to deal constructively with problems that arise in day to day life. This skill is helpful to settle an issue, solve a problem or to resolve a conflict. It enables the person to get out of the uncomfortable situations and accomplish one's need without resorting to anger, coercion, defiance, aggressive behavior or force. Scientifically, problem solving is a process to bring an opportunity for a positive act. It helps an adolescent to solve his/her problems by using creative and critical thinking (Subasree & Nair, 2014).

c) Emotional Skills

Emotional skill is the capacity of an individual to understand the emotions of self and others. It is the ability to act according to the situation with assertiveness and emotional balance. Emotional skills involves coping with emotions and coping with stress.

- **Coping with Emotions:** Coping with emotions is a life skill that helps the individual to understand feelings of self

and others. This skill helps to realize that it is normal to have strong feelings and that feelings are neither positive nor negative. Accepting feelings is the first step towards learning to have more control over them. This life skill enables the individual to learn healthy, positive and safe ways to express his/her feelings. It enables an adolescent to recognize emotions in self and others, to realize its effects on behavior and to respond to emotions appropriately. Uncontrolled emotions like excessive sorrow and anger are referred to in this dimension.

- **Coping with Stress:** Coping with stress enable the individual to recognize the sources of stress, understanding its effects and relax without making the situation worse. This skill provides the strength to face positive or negative stressful situations, deal with accompanying emotions and to find solutions that are most beneficial. This skill helps an adolescent to recognize sources of stress and its effects (Subasree & Nair, 2014).

Life skills can help one to accept and understand others who are different, which can improve social interactions, to recognize stress and pressure and to maintain emotional balance in all situations.

According to WHO (2015) Life skill development promotes basic education, gender equality, democracy, good citizenship, childcare and protection, quality and efficiency of education system, promotion of lifelong learning, quality of life and promotion of peace. Life skills are thus distinctly different from physical or motor skills, practical or health skills, as well as from vocational or livelihood skills, such as crafts, money management and entrepreneurial skills.

Life skills are essential for holistic development of a child. Adolescence is the most difficult phase of life and it's also the period during which most of the life skills are developed. The development of life skills in children with learning disability is all the more important, to save the child from degenerating and to build up the potential of the child to the maximum. To be able to lead a successful and happy life in this stressful scenario, life skills have a significant role as these skills are multidimensional in nature and encompass a broad class of individual attitudes, behaviors and habits that are necessary for promoting mental well- being and competence in young people as they face the realities of life.

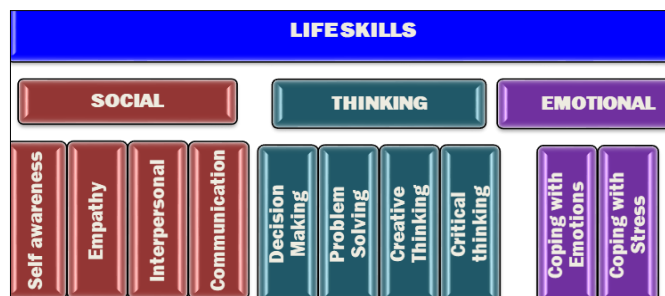


Fig 1: Life Skills

Dimensions of life skill development

Menon, Singh & Rashmi (2015) [7] in “An overview of life skills in India- evidence and current practices in the education system”, established that, students who develop social and emotional skills and academic mind sets are better equipped to

succeed in school and are able to transfer theoretical concepts to real-life situations early on.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2003) defines life skills as, "a behavior change or behavior development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: Knowledge, attitude and skills".

Khera & Khosia (2012) in their "Study of core life skills of adolescents in relation to their self-concept developed through YUVA School Life Skill Programme" concluded that, adolescents having good self-concepts have improved both their core affective life skills and core cognitive life skills significantly through YUVA Special Learning Programme.

Dimensions of learning disabilities

Learning disability is also referred to as "*hidden disabilities*" and are either identified too late or never in a lifetime resulting in a tremendous waste of man power and resources. Thus the very name hidden disabilities signify the need for intervention in the development of affected children. Children affected with learning disabilities are of average and above average intelligence. In the affected people there appears to be a puzzling gap between their potential and achievements. That is the reason for it being called as "hidden disabilities". Learning disability is not curable but remains a lifelong challenge. Ideally with appropriate support and intervention from the parents and mentors the life skills of these children can be developed and enhanced so that they are enabled to achieve success in school, at work, in relationships and community.

Up to 10 percent of the population is affected by specific learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and autism, translating to 2 or 3 pupils in every classroom (Science Daily, 2013).

Bryan (1978) ^[1] reported that the Learning difficulty students were, more likely than normal students to send and receive negative verbal messages and to interpret non-verbal behaviours inaccurately. Similarly, Bryan, Sherman, & Fisher (1980) ^[2] indicated that learning disabled boys are less likely to maintain eye contact or smile during an interview. Cohen & Mindek (1983) ^[3] study agreed that hyperactive syndrome encompasses a heterogeneous group of behavior disorders having different symptom clusters and aetiologies. Cruickshank, Montgomery & Spillane (1961) and Strauss & Lehtinen (1947) ^[4] found that many children with serious learning difficulties found it hard to focus their attention on a selected sound, word, number or line of point.

In the Colorado, "Family reading study" made by Frics (1991) it was found that boys born to a dyslexic parent ran a 35-40% risk of developing dyslexia themselves (tending to higher figure if the dyslexic parent was male), whereas, girls ran a 17-18% risk irrespective of the parents gender. Where neither parent was dyslexic, the risks for boys and girls were 5-10% and 2% respectively. Hessler & Kitchen (1980) ^[6] suggested that learning disabilities are related to overall language facility.

Methodology

The district of Ernakulum has been chosen as the area of study. In this study, descriptive research design was employed all the parents of the children with learning disability, who are

studying in National Institute of Open School (NIOS) and special schools in Ernakulum District of Kerala is considered as the universe of the study. The researcher adopted the descriptive sampling method and followed simple random sampling technique

The contours of parental style and skill development has been analyzed using perception framework with the help of primary data collected from the parents of children with learning disability. With this end in view, this chapter has been dichotomized into different sections. The first deals with the profile of the parents while the second is an evaluation of parental style and skill development of the disabled children.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Details of the Respondent (Total-100)

Variables	Frequency & Per cent
Gender	
Male	57 (57%)
Female	43 (43%)
Religion	
Hindu	57 (57%)
Christian	35 (35%)
Muslim	8 (8%)
Type of Family	
Joint	19 (19%)
Nuclear	81 (81%)
No of Siblings	
One	25(25%)
More than one	75 (75%)

It shows that the majorities (57%) of the respondents surveyed were males, and 43% of are females. Though there is only a minor difference in gender levels, the profile shows a male bias. Majority of the sample respondents are Hindus (57%) with Christians forming the second largest religious group in the sample with 35%. Muslims constitute only 8%. The family type of the respondents. It is clear that as expected, in an urban setup, the majority (81 %) live independently as nuclear families. It depicts the number of children in the family. Majority of the sample respondents (75%) have two children in their family and 25% are one child family. The households with 3 or more children constitute only 16%.

Table 2: Life Skill Score of Students

Name of Life Skill	Average Score
Self awareness	72.80
Empathy	73.80
Communication	67.69
Interpersonal Skill	70.48
Overall Social Skill	71.19
Decision Making	65.14
Problem Solving	68.49
Critical Thinking	77.69
Creative Thinking	66.43
Overall Thinking Skill	69.43
Coping with Stress	67.89
Coping with Emotion	59.86
Overall Emotional Skill	63.87
Life Skill	69.04

Source: Survey data

Perception of parents regarding the life skill of children

The perception of parents for the 10 major life skill indicators have been categorised into a five-point scale and this is further

evaluated with the aid of Factor Analysis (FA) to identify the major life skill factors. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient in Table no 3 indicates high reliability with 0.822. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure is used to test the sample adequacy. The KMO score closer to 1 is generally considered to be good for estimating FA. The test value as per the results is 0.850 (Table 3.9) which is above the generally accepted minimum score. Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity is significant and the results indicate that the variables used for Factor Analysis are correlated. Variability of each factor is shown via communalities.

Table 3

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	
.822	10	

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.850	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	252.370
	Df	45
	Sig.	.000

Table 4: Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
Self-awareness	1.000	.453
Empathy	1.000	.491
Communication	1.000	.465
Interpersonal Skill	1.000	.580
Decision Making	1.000	.555
Problem Solving	1.000	.554
Critical Thinking	1.000	.648
Creative Thinking	1.000	.479
Coping with Stress	1.000	.455
Coping with Emotion	1.000	.289

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Here, two factors with an eigen value of more than 1 are generated as per the Total Variance Explained in Table which has accounted for 49.68 percent of the total variance. Out of this 39.179 and 10.507 percentages of variances are explained by the first and second factors. The rotated solution explains 26.913 and 22.773 percentages of the total variance

Determinants of Life Skills

Here a three-pronged framework is adopted to identify the determinants of life skills. Accordingly, the three life skill indicators and the overall Life Skill of the children is compared with the household income, mother’s education, frequency of parent-teacher interaction, age at detection of learning disability *inter alia* the three parenting styles to identify whether the life skills of the children are impacted by the changes in these attributes.

Education of mother and life skills

Here, the role of mother’s educational profile on the life skills of students with learning disabilities is evaluated. The null hypothesis in this aspect is:

Ho: Mother’s education has a positive effect on the development of life skills in children with learning disabilities

This is tested for the four life skill indicators using the Mann-

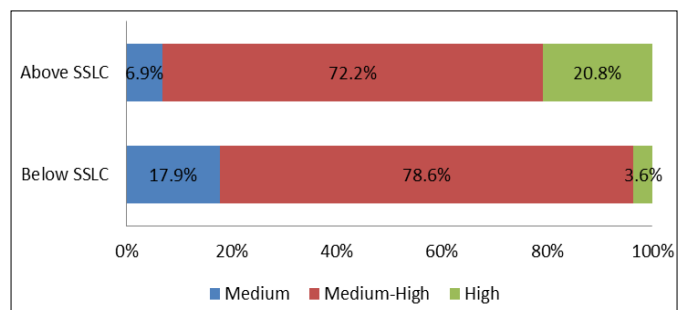
Whitney U Test and is depicted in Figure 3.16. Education profile is classified into upto SSLC and above SSLC for this purpose. The Social Skill is determined by the educational profile of the mother and hence the null hypothesis is rejected as the skill is same across different educational profiles. The Thinking Skill, Emotional Skill and Life Skill are not significantly different in terms of mother’s education and hence these do not show any significant relation and hence the null hypotheses are rejected.

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing Summary: Life Skill and Mother’s Education

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of Social Skill is the same across categories of Mother Education.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.013	Reject the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of Thinking Skill is the same across categories of Mother Education.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.162	Retain the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of Emotional Skill is the same across categories of Mother Education.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.223	Retain the null hypothesis.
4	The distribution of Life Skill is the same across categories of Mother Education.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.226	Retain the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

It shows the results of the Social Skill and education of mother. The education status is a determining factor in the social skill of the students. The children in the high social skill category come to 20.8 percent if the education of their mother is above SSLC and only 3.6 percent for mothers with an education of below SSLC. It also infers that the proportion of children with medium social skills are more among the below SSLC category (17.9 percent) compared to the above SSLC category (6.9 percent).



Source: Survey data

Fig 2: Social Skill and Mother’s Education

Frequency of interaction and life skills

The role of interactions between the parent and the student has already been discussed. The impact of these interactions on the life skills of the students is evaluated and it has been identified that the interactions between the teachers and parents do not have a direct influence on social skills and

emotional skills, however it shows that the Thinking Skill and Life Skills are significant and hence the null hypotheses in these respects are rejected. It implies that the Social and Emotional skills of the children do not differ in terms of the frequency of interactions between the parent and the teacher. The null hypothesis inference is given in Table 6.

Ho: The positive involvement of parents with teachers and resource persons has an effect on the development of life skills

Table no 6 and illustrate the results for Frequency of Interaction with thinking skills and life skills. The children of the parents who used to visit the schools and interact with teachers monthly or as per the request have better or high thinking skill compared to those who used to visit once in three months or annually. In fact, the percentage of students in the high life skill category increases with high frequency of visits made by the parents (i.e. monthly or as per request). For the life skill as well, 23 percent of the children of the parents who visited and interacted with teachers as per the request or requirements have shown high life skills. The children of parents who visited annually have the tendency to fall in the medium life skill category.

Table 6: Hypothesis Testing Summary: Life Skill and Frequency of Interaction

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of Social Skill is the same across categories of Frequency of Interaction.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.438	Retain the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of Thinking Skill is the same across categories of Frequency of Interaction.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.029	Reject the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of Emotional Skill is the same across categories of Frequency of Interaction.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.395	Retain the null hypothesis.
4	The distribution of Life Skill is the same across categories of Frequency of Interaction.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.023	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Age at Detection and Life Skill

Detection age of learning disability is classified as below 5 years and above 5 years and the impact of early detection on improving life skills of the students is tested with the null hypothesis

Ho: Early detection and acceptance of learning disability by the parents has a positive impact on the development of life skills

For overall life skill and social skill, the null hypotheses are rejected based on the Mann-Whitney U Test. Hence, it is concluded that the early detection has an influence on the development of life-skill and social-skill. For the other two skills viz. thinking-skill and emotional-skill, the results are not significantly related. Figure 4 depicts the inferences.

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing Summary: Life Skill and Early Detection

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of Social Skill is the same across categories of Detection Age.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.007	Reject the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of Thinking Skill is the same across categories of Detection Age.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.060	Retain the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of Emotional Skill is the same across categories of Detection Age.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.304	Retain the null hypothesis.
4	The distribution of Life Skill is the same across categories of Detection Age.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.032	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Major Findings

▪ **Life skills and socio-economic status of the family**

Socio-economic status of the family is dependent on many factors such as income, education and occupation. In this study the income of the family alone is considered as it is more or less directly related to educational qualification and occupation in the population considered. It was found that the income of the family has a significant influence on the life skills of children with learning disability.

▪ **Life skills and mother’s education**

A mother has a significant role in the life of her child. A mother plays a significant role in the physical, mental and emotional development of the child and most often detects any deficiencies in these areas. Educated mothers may be able to detect deficiencies in the overall development of the child and be able to initiate corrective steps for improvement.

▪ **Role of family environment**

For children with learning disability, the family environment created by parents and siblings, can help in overcoming some of the lacunae in the educational system. Parents should shape the family environment by providing children with challenges, new experiences, role models and expectations. A parent child interaction of specific support and autonomy can promote a child’s self-esteem.

Based on the above factors the following recommendations are suggested for life skill development of learning disabled children

1. Request meeting with your child’s teacher frequently be open and transparent with them.
2. Life skill training is to be made as part of academic training as it is useful not only for the children with learning disability but also for normal children. This can be possible by appointing life skill trainers in all the schools.
3. Training for teachers to guide them in giving adequate attention to the life skill development of learning disabled children.

4. Trainings and awareness programmes for parents to guide and provide adequate attention to the life skill development of learning disabled children.
5. Focus on the child's strength.
6. Set reasonable expectations.
7. Provide guidance needed for independence.
8. Maintain consistence discipline.
9. Share your enthusiasm for learning with your child.
10. Reinforce your child's ability to cope.
11. Help your child make one real friend.
12. Above all listen to your child's feelings.

Conclusion

The awareness about life skills and advantages of having good life skills, are essential for bringing up a child as a successful and happy individual. The learning-disabled child who cannot be expected to excel in academics has to be trained in life skills with utmost care, commitment and unfailing hope. For a child with learning disability constantly need encouragement, help and support from the parent's side. It is essential that parents break out of the dictum that 'A child should be seen and not heard' and lend a patient ear to the child and be responsive.

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