Challenges in the Implementation of Life Skills Education

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ABSTRACT

Education is to equip adolescents with abilities that allow them to succeed and contribute to the society they live in. These abilities are broadly called as life skills. Imparting life skill training through life skill education helps youth to overcome difficulties in life. But the challenges to provide effective life skills education are plenty which are to be addressed in a planned manner. In the present study, the inputs by teachers and administrators highlighted that non-graded status of life skills curriculum; inadequate pre-service and in-service training to teachers; non-favourable considerations for life skills education by parents and students; and inadequate teaching learning resources were some major challenges to successful implementation of life skills education in schools.

Keywords: Life Skills Education (LSE); Challenges in implementation of LSE; Adolescents; Teachers; and Administrators.

1.0. Introduction:

The ever-increasing social changes, complexities and the expansion of social relations make it necessary to prepare people to face difficult situations. To prevent psychological diseases and social dysfunctions, psychologists have engaged in life skills education in schools throughout the world.

Life skills education (LSE) is a term often used to describe learning experiences that aim to develop knowledge, attitudes and psychosocial competencies that will enable learners to take positive actions towards developing and maintaining healthy behaviours, environments and qualities of life (Botvin & Griffin, 2004). LSE has been reported to be effective in helping to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anti-social behaviour and drug abuse behaviour effectively, as well as aiding in HIV prevention. It has been widely incorporated into the school education curriculum of most of the countries (Moshki, Hassanzade, & Taymoori, 2014; and Yankah & Aggleton, 2008).

Life skills are a range of psycho-social and cognitive abilities that equip children to make informed decisions and choices, manage their emotional well-being and communicate effectively (Singh and Menon, 2015). World Health Organization (WHO) (1997) defined life skills as abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. It mentioned that there is a core set of ten life skills which are inter-related and reinforce each other. These can be paired to reveal five main life skills areas i.e. decision making and problem solving skills; creative thinking and critical thinking skills; interpersonal relationship and communication skills; self-awareness skills and empathy; and skill of coping with emotions and stressors.

LSE is considered as a key to bring constructive reforms in the education systems of the whole world. Many countries are now considering the development of life skills education in response to the need to reform traditional education systems which appear to be out of step with the realities of modern social and economic life.

In India, the educationists and policy planners recommended to include life skills education as a part of the curriculum at school level. National Curriculum Framework (2000); National Curriculum Framework (2005); and Adolescence Education Program (2005) emphasised that school education be intimately linked with the learning of different life-skills, so that students be made capable to fight with the challenges of drug addiction, violence, teenage pregnancy, AIDS and health related problems. During school years, constructive learning experiences, inquiry-based approach, work-related knowledge interventions be adopted and the opportunities should be provided to students to construct knowledge and acquire life skills. Further, NCF (2005) clearly outlined that the AEP should not be practiced separately, rather be included in school education.

Realising the significance of life skills education, Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), in 2010, introduced life skills education as an integral part of the curriculum through Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) for classes VI to X and developed life skills manuals for teachers and categorized the life skills identified by WHO in three major categories i.e.
Thinking skills: Critical thinking; creative thinking; decision making; problem solving; and self-awareness.

Social skills: Effective communication; interpersonal relationship skills; and empathy.

Emotional skills: Coping with emotions; and coping with stress.

The previous research studies by Kitivui (2013) and Kitimo (2014) identified the major challenges which hindered implementation of LSE were lack of enough teaching/learning materials, non-examinable status, heavy workloads caused by shortage of teachers and lack of trained teachers. Further, Nileena (2012); Singh and Sharma (2016); and Behrani (2016) summarised that time constraints; lack of proper life skills training to teachers; problems in evaluation of qualitative skills; social and emotional aspects of life skills; lack of students' interest due to academic burden; improper arrangements and time slots; and burden of extracurricular activities are the major challenges in implementation of life skills education in Indian schools.

2.0. Objectives of the study:

- To study the status of Life Skills Education in CBSE affiliated secondary schools of district Ajitgarh of Punjab.
- To study the problems faced by teachers and administrators in implementation of Life Skills Education in CBSE affiliated secondary schools of district Ajitgarh of Punjab.

3.0. Research Methodology:

The study was based on descriptive survey method of research and aimed to find out the problems faced by teachers and administrators in implementation of life skills education in CBSE schools of district Ajitgarh of Punjab. A sample of ten schools was selected randomly from the privately managed CBSE affiliated secondary schools situated in Ajitgarh district of Punjab state. The principals (10) and teachers (43), who were imparting life skills education to IX and X class students in the selected schools (10), were the part of the sample.

For collecting information from the principals/administrators and teachers, two semi-structured interview schedules were prepared regarding implementation of LSE in schools and problem in implementation of LSE in schools. The data was collected in the months of July-August, 2017.

4.0. Results and Findings:

To collect data from teachers and administrators, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The responses were clubbed under the various headings to develop summaries. The summaries are presented objective –wise as follows:

4.1. Objective-1: To study the status of Life Skills Education in CBSE affiliated secondary schools of district Ajitgarh of Punjab. The summaries of responses of administrators and teachers are presented as follows:

- Life skills education curriculum was running in all schools as per the guidelines of CBSE, as confirmed from the time table.
- A time period of 60-90 minutes per week after the recess was kept exclusively for the LSE.
- All teachers were aware about the importance of LSE.
- Only 4-6 teachers got training for LSE in each school.
- Teachers manual on LSE developed by the CBSE were followed as guidelines for implementation in all the ten schools.
- Parents were made aware about the LSE by the schools.
- Students activities were closely monitored by the teachers.
- Guidance and resources were provided to the students for LSE. But constraints of space for organizing LSE activities were reported in most of the schools.
- The preparation of supporting material for organizing LSE activities was a daunting task for administrators and teachers.
- Teachers reported that responses of some students were novel and some students improved their communication skills with LSE.
4.2. Objective-2: To study the problems faced by teachers and administrators in implementation of Life Skills Education in CBSE affiliated secondary schools of district Ajitgarh of Punjab. The summaries of responses of administrators and teachers are presented as follows:

- Non-graded status of LSE: LSE activities are not graded and students did not have any effect on their grades in the final exams, so those were participating passively in LSE activities.
- Academic burden on students: Students of grade IX and X were burdened with the academic subjects and other co-curricular activities of the curriculum for which they have to earn grades. Most of the students were not interested in the LSE activities as they concentrate more on examinable subjects.
- Non-participation of students: Students were attending LSE classes but not participate actively in the LSE activities. Students generally avoid assessment at the end as they had not participated actively.
- Non -acceptance by parents: Most of the parents give first preference to academic subjects of their wards and they were of the opinion that life skills can be learnt later on in life. Majority of them considered LSE as wastage of time.
- Extra burden on teachers: Teacher were over loaded with the academic and co-curricular activities. Organisation of LSE activities needs time and correlating the subject with LSE needs skilled insight. The work overload lead to low motivation among teachers regarding implementation of LSE.
- No pre-service training: During pre-service education, no training was provided to teachers regarding implementation of LSE in the school system.
- Short duration of in-service training: In-service training of 3-5 days on LSE was provided to teachers. Lack of intensive training to teachers on different aspects of life skills teaching and evaluation led to low level of preparedness of teachers for successful implementation of LSE in schools.
- No training to assimilate LSE with academic subjects: A short duration in-service LSE training was provided to 4-6 teachers in each school, which did not serve the purpose. Regular in-service training for life skills curriculum need to be provided to all teachers to train them to assimilate LSE with their academic subject.
- LSE as stand –alone subject: LSE program was running as stand – alone classroom activity in all of the schools and teachers were not oriented to assimilate LSE with academic curriculum. LSE was given a period of 60 to 90 minutes in a week, which was not sufficient to attain the objectives of LSE.
- Shortage of resources: LSE activities are highly resource intensive and need skilled teachers. But, the inadequacy of teaching and learning resources and supporting materials was a common challenge for the effective delivery of LSE in schools.
- Evaluation of LSE: Most existing systems for measuring life skills or competencies were highly complex, time consuming and needs skilled insight. But teachers were not trained for evaluating the LSE assignments.

5.0. Discussion of Results:

The inputs of the teachers and administrators provided the holistic information regarding implementation problems of life skills education in CBSE affiliated secondary schools of district Ajitgarh of Punjab state. Life skills education curriculum was implemented in all the sampled schools of district and 4-6 teachers were taking care of LSE activities as per the guidelines of the CBSE.

LSE was being taught as a stand-alone subject in the schools and no pre-service training provided to teachers. Chirwa (2009) and Maogoto (2011) emphasised that for better results, life skills education need to be integrated into curriculum through curricular and co-curricular activities instead of a stand-alone subject. Moreover, NCF (2005) clearly outlined that the Adolescence Education Program should not be practiced separately, rather be included in school education.

Teachers reported that in-service training was also not adequate and all school teachers were not equipped with the teaching learning and assessment practices of LSE. Being the non-graded subject, LSE was given the least priority by students and parents. Moreover, teachers and students were overloaded with academic and co-curricular activities which were to be examined in the final exams. Kitivui (2013); Kitimo (2014); and Abobo & Orodho (2014) also revealed that the major challenges which hindered implementation of LSE were lack of teaching/learning materials, non-examinable status, heavy workloads
of teachers, lack of trained teachers and non-availability of any specific criteria for the assessment and evaluation.

As results of the study revealed that provisions during in-service training for LSE were not adequate and teachers were not oriented to assimilate LSE with academic curriculum. Intensive training to coordinate LSE activities and to develop supplementary resources for teaching was required. In this context, Nileena (2012); Behrani (2016); and Singh & Sharma (2016) emphasised that in India, LSE should be age-aligned and inculcated in an inclusive set up in the schools by the trained and motivated teachers who can employ participatory and experiential teaching practices. By providing pre-service and in-service training, the capacity and motivation of teachers need to be developed to integrate life skills into their classroom practices. The supplementary resources like audio-visuals, board-games and digital devices need to be developed to make the teaching of life skills more interactive and interesting. Life skills education in schools have to be implemented in the context of broader education system reforms.

Further, Okech and Role (2015) suggested that pedagogy of LSE needs to be reconsidered and teachers have to approach the subject from a non-cognitive angle and develop learning outcomes that appeal more to the affective domain of the learner's personality. More interactive activities need to be included in LSE, so that, learning of life skills become lifelong.

Lack of training to teachers on different aspects of life skills teaching and evaluation, parents' non-acceptance, inadequate teaching learning resources and low level of preparedness of teachers and school were some identified challenges related to successful implementation of LSE in schools. It's required that life skills education should be made examinable, so that students, parents and teachers take it seriously like other examinable subjects of the school curriculum. During pre-service and in-service training, provisions are to be made to equip teachers with relevant and appropriate skills which could facilitate quality teaching, learning and evaluation of life skills.

6.0. References:


Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other

~ Abraham Lincoln