

Life Skills Education for K-12 School Students: A Perception of Teachers

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Abstract

The key purpose of this investigation was to explore the teachers' perception the life skills for K-12 learners and to explore the difference in the opinions of private and public school teachers about essential life skills for k-12 school students. This study was quantitative and descriptive in nature. Data were collected from 390 randomly selected teachers through a self-developed questionnaire that was pilot tested and 0.82 Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was determined which indicated the appropriateness of the questionnaire for further use. Data were analyzed via calculating mean scores and independent t test. The results of the study illustrated that all of the teachers possess very positive perception about every component of life skills for students but all of them emphasized significantly on coping and self-management skill which is related to personal and emotional aspects of their personality. A slight difference was perceived regarding the overall perception of male and female; private and public school teachers.

Keywords: Life skills, life skills education, teachers' perception, K-12 school students

Introduction

Life skills are comprised of cognitive, social, and personal attributes which lead students to handle their everyday challenges daringly and successfully. The term life skills education is rapidly growing as extremely important for every individual's life which enables them to solve their problems, bring change in their behavior and allow them to take initiatives and deal effectively with their life difficulties and personal matters (Life Skills-Based Education, 2014; Newman, et al., 2021). Wertalik and Kubina (2018) emphasized that individuals experience throughout their life various stages of transition e.g. starting their school, entering secondary school, after completing their education getting into employment, taking family responsibilities,

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participating in community activities and these all phases demand specific skills to successfully move through these transitional periods. Many researchers pinpoint the fact that developing essential life skills among students would help them to be as productive and optimistic citizens who would positively contribute to the development of a healthy society (Wooster & Hall, 2009; Baird, et al., 2021). These skills enable them to exhibit appropriate behavior to deal effectively with challenging situations.

Nowadays, the world is growing with diversified and challenging demands that have put learners in more complicated and challenging situations (UNICEF, 2012; Ronkainen, et al., 2021). These societies demand the key skills to furnish children at every stage so that they could be developed as self-governing individuals, productive and well-groomed citizens. This would enhance the overall quality of their lives and promote social cohesion (Duz & Aslan, 2020; Coskuner, et al., 2021). This is the demand of the time to realize the value of life skills education and effective delivery of life skills education is heavily dependent upon the capabilities and attitudes of teachers (Baela, 2009; Arasomwan & Mashiya, 2021). As the new education systems are expected which can foster positive and adaptive behaviors among students and enable them to handle their daily life challenges effectively and solve their problems independently. The teachers are considered as the key player in this whole process who could instill various life skills among students successfully. In the context of Pakistan, there is scarce work is done in this area. Although, few studies are available in literature all of them focus on life skills-based education that mostly relates life skills with health-related matters and preventive behavior for HIV/AIDs. Whereas, In a rapidly growing and challenging world the life skills education emphasized the overall wellbeing of children and require it to be part of the overall school curriculum especially for k-12 level students (UNICEF, 2017). The successful implementation of life skills education significantly depends upon the teachers' awareness, training, and professional competencies regarding these life skills. So, it would be very significant to explore the perception and awareness of teachers about the significance of life skills education particularly for K-12 students (from kindergarten to higher secondary level).

Objectives of the Research

Keeping in view the aim of the study some objectives were constructed such as:

1. To investigate the perception of teachers about the importance of essential life skills for K-12 school students.
2. To identify the difference in teachers' opinion of private and public schools about the essential life skills for k-12 school students.
3. To investigate the difference between female and male teachers regarding important life skills for K-12 school students.

Hypotheses of the Study

Following were the null hypotheses for the study:

H_{o1} There is no significant difference between the mean scores of public and private school teachers regarding important life skills education for K-12 students

H_{o2} There is no significant difference between the mean scores of female and male teachers about the importance of life skills education for students.

Significance of the Research

This study would be a great contribution for all stakeholders such as teachers, school administrators, parents, students, and community leaders by providing enrich data on the subject and create awareness among them about the significance of life skills education. This study would be a great source of useful information for the curriculum developers about how to relate instructional and assessment strategies with life skills education. Moreover, donor organizations, local government representatives, and policymakers would know about the importance of life skills education and train teachers for effective transmission of these skills among students of several age groups.

Review of Related Literature

Life Skills Education (LSE) has a long historical background that presents a comprehensive picture for the students' complete development and promotion of their good health. In the beginning, the Lifeskills was highlighted in the meeting of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion in 1986, where it was encouraged to adopt better choices for a healthy lifestyle. Later, the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) in 1989 related the term "life skill" specifically with education and emphasized that education is the only tool that can help in the development of particular life skills among young students that in turn supports for the advancement of their capacities and potential to lead their life with success (UNICEF, 2012).

The international commitments placed a significant focus on the promotion of life skills education such as the Education for All (EFA); the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); where education seems like an important mean for the complete and comprehensive development of students. It was pointed out in the Dakar World education Conferences that everyone has the right to be equipped with education and essential life skills that help them to learn, to know, to do, and to live together (Life Skills-Based Education, 2014; Duz & Aslan, 2020). Life skills can be prescribed as problem-solving behavior, managing self-affairs, developing good relationships with others, corporation, self-awareness, creative thinking, resisting pressures, coping with disappointments, assertiveness, respect others, tolerance, trust, and sharing and can cover five major areas of life as, self, family, community, job, and leisure (World Health Organization, 1999; Gupta, 2021).

The Teaching of Life Skills

Various forums and organizations that have been discussing the importance of life skills for young people. One of them is WHO, which is a very prominent organization and contributing to the teaching of such abilities that are often ignored in children's education (Orodho & Abobo, 2014; Arasomwan & Mashiya, 2021). However, there is growing recognition that due to many cultural changes a lot of young adolescences are not well equipped with the essential life skills which could help them to learn how to deal with the demands and stress of life (Mudzielwana & Mulovhedzi, 2016; Pillai, 2012). Generally, it could be because of cultural mechanisms such as families and customs in which life skills are not seen as crucial or influencing factors for adolescence comprehensive development. Throughout the world, a swift growing change is seen among young people's expectations, values, and living styles that are very different from their parents and forefathers due to the cultural transformation in many countries (Rasheed, 2010; Smith, et al., 2006; Gulati, 2019).

Life skills include psychological and social competencies that equip young people with critical, problem-solving, self-management, and socialization abilities (Nasheeda, et al., 2019). The efforts must be made to inculcate life skills through formal and informal education, in schools, at home, and in societies (Munsi & Guha, 2014; Scheeler, et al., 2009). The especially educational process must focus on the development of these life skills among young people so that they can lead their life successfully and handle challenging situations effectively (Marroquín, et al., 2017). The study of Tan (2018) expressed that teachers perceive life skills development as an important task among all educational endeavors because these skills are multipurpose and transferable which can enable every individual to cope with their life challenges. They considered life skills education as an unceasing process that could be learned and utilized continuously in everyone's life.

Research Methodology

The design of the study was based on a quantitative approach following the cross-sectional survey design. A stratified sampling technique was used to select 147 male teachers and 243 female teachers from public and private K-12 schools of Sargodha district by using Slovin's formula cited by Putra (2017). Table 1 illustrates the details of male and female teachers from public and private schools.

Table 1

Sample size

| | Private | Public | Total |
|-----------------|---------|--------|-------|
| Male teachers | 46 | 101 | 147 |
| Female teachers | 98 | 145 | 243 |
| Total | 144 | 246 | 390 |

Quantitative data were obtained by administering a self-developed questionnaire, based on extensive literature review, and was used to collect data about the perception of school teachers regarding which life skills are essential for their students. A pilot test was conducted to calculate the reliability of the questionnaire. For this purpose data were obtained from 30 teachers from the accessed population. Using the SPSS software Cronbach's alpha coefficient reliability was calculated as 0.82 which depicted the appropriateness of the questionnaire for further data collection.

Data were analyzed by calculating the mean scores of teachers' perceptions about the importance of life skills education for students of K-12 level schools. Moreover, the differences between the opinions of private and public, male and female school teachers were analyzed by applying independent samples *t*-test concerning the expected life skills for students. Scoring norms for the questionnaire is given below:

Scoring Norms

Total item numbers: 49

Table 2

Responses and Weight for Questionnaire Items

| Responses: | Strongly Agree | Agree | Not Decided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|------------|----------------|-------|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| Weights | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Table 3

The scoring range for the CRT variable

| No. of Items | Negative perception | Positive perception |
|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 8 | 8-24 | 25-40 |

If the obtained mean score falls between the ranges 8-24 it shows the negative perception about the creative thinking/ critical thinking Life Skills (CRT) variable. But, if the obtained mean score falls between the ranges 25-40, it exhibits a positive perception of the CRT variable.

Table 0

The scoring range for the DM variable

| No. of Items | Negative perception | Positive perception |
|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 8 | 8-24 | 25-40 |

If the obtained mean scores fall between the ranges 8-24 it shows the negative perception about the decision-making/problem-solving Life Skills (DM) variable. But, if obtained mean scores fall between the ranges 25-40, it exhibits positive perception about the DM variable.

Table 5

The scoring range for the IPC variable

| No. of Items | Negative perception | Positive perception |
|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 10 | 10-30 | 31-50 |

If the obtained mean scores fall between the ranges 10-30 it shows the negative perception about the interpersonal/ communication life skills (IPC) variable. But, if obtained mean scores fall between the ranges 31-50, it exhibits a positive perception about the IPC variable.

Table 6

The scoring range for the SAE variable

| No. of Items | Negative perception | Positive perception |
|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 9 | 9-27 | 28-45 |

If the obtained mean scores fall between the ranges 9-27 it shows the negative perception about the self-awareness/empathy life skills (SAE) variable. But, if obtained mean scores fall between the ranges 28-45, it exhibits positive perception about the SAE variable.

Table 7

The scoring range for the CSM variable

| No. of Items | Negative perception | Positive perception |
|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 12 | 12-36 | 37-60 |

If the obtained mean scores fall between the ranges 12-36 it shows the negative perception about the coping and self-management life skills (CSM) variable. But, if obtained mean scores fall between the ranges 37-60, it exhibits positive perception about the CSM variable.

Table 8

The scoring range for overall life skills variables

| No. of Items | Negative perception | Positive perception |
|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 49 | 49-147 | 148-245 |

If the obtained mean scores fall between the ranges 49-147 it shows the negative perception about the overall life skills variable. But, if obtained mean scores fall between the ranges 148-245, it exhibits a positive perception about the overall Life Skills variables.

Table 9

Overall teachers' mean scores about life skills

| Life skills | Mean Scores | Std. Deviation |
|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| CRT | 34.01 | 3.357 |
| DM | 34.36 | 4.032 |
| IPC | 43.07 | 3.518 |
| SAE | 39.56 | 3.532 |
| CSM | 49.96 | 5.125 |
| Life Skills | 200.94 | 16.136 |

It is perceived that overall teachers' perception about the life skills is positive as table 9 represents that teachers' mean score (34.01) about the creative thinking/ critical thinking life skills (CRT) variable falls between the ranges of 25-40 that exhibits positive perception of teachers about this variable. Similarly, mean scores (34.36) for decision making/problem-solving life skills (DM) variable falls within the range 25-40, scores (43.07) related to the interpersonal/ communication life skills (IPC) variable fall between the range 31-50, mean scores (39.56) related to the self-awareness/empathy life skills (SAE) variable surrounds the range 28-45, mean scores (49.96) about the coping and self-management life skills (CSM) variable comes within the range 37-60 and mean scores (200.94) about overall life skills are within the range 148-245 that portrays positive perception of all teachers towards the various variables of Life Skills. All of the teachers have a very positive perception for life skills for their students and especially coping and self-management skill is highly rated as an important life skill for students.

Table 10

Over all mean scores of male and female teachers of public schools

| Respondent | CRT | DM | IPC | SAE | CSM | Life Skills |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| Male Teachers | 34.65 | 34.75 | 43.05 | 40.50 | 50.30 | 203.25 |
| Female Teachers | 32.65 | 33.75 | 42.30 | 39.10 | 49.55 | 197.35 |

Table 10 represents that overall mean scores of male teachers (34.65) and female teachers (32.65) of public schools fall between the range of 25-40 which exhibits a positive perception of all teachers of public schools about creative thinking/ critical thinking life skills (CRT) variable. The mean scores of male teachers (34.75) and female teachers (33.75) of public schools related to decision making/problem-solving life skills (DM) variable fall within the range 25-40 that shows the positive perception of all teachers. The mean scores of male teachers (43.05) and female teachers (42.30) about the interpersonal/ communication life skills (IPC) variable fall between the range 31-50 that depicts their positive perception. Male teachers' mean scores (40.50) and female teachers' mean scores (39.10) related to the self-awareness/empathy life skills (SAE) variable fall within the range 28-45 that shows their positive perception. In the same way, the mean scores of male teachers (50.30) and female teachers (49.55) for the coping and self-management life skills (CSM) variable seems positive and fall within the range of 37-60. Overall male teachers (203.25) depict more positive perceptions as compared to female teachers' mean score (197.35) however, these scores fall within the range 148-245 that shows the positive perception of both male and female teachers of public schools for the overall Life Skills.

Table 11

Over all mean scores of male and female teachers of private schools

| Respondent | CRT | DM | IPC | SAE | CSM | Life Skills |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| Male Teachers | 34.84 | 33.75 | 42.30 | 39.84 | 50.63 | 204.31 |
| Female Teachers | 33.97 | 33.81 | 43.29 | 39.06 | 49.58 | 199.70 |

Table 11 signifies that overall mean scores of male teachers (34.84) and female teachers (33.97) of private schools fall between the ranges of 25-40 which exhibits positive perception about the creative thinking/ critical thinking life skills (CRT) variable. Similarly, mean scores of male teachers (33.75) and female teachers (33.81) related to decision making/problem-solving life skills (DM) variable fall within the range 25-40 that shows their positive perception. The mean scores of male teachers (42.30) and female teachers (43.29) about the interpersonal/ communication life skills (IPC) variable fall between the range 31-50 that depicts their positive perception. The mean scores of male teachers (39.84) and female teachers (39.10) fall within the range 28-45 that shows their positive perception for the self-awareness/empathy life skills

SAE variable. In the same way the mean scores of male teachers (50.63) and female teachers (49.58) for the coping and self-management life skills (CSM) variable fall within the range 37-60 that represents the positive perception of all teachers of private schools. The mean scores of male teachers (204.31) and female teachers (199.70) of private schools related to the overall Life Skills variable fall between the range 148-245 that depicts their positive perception but the mean difference shows that in private schools male teachers have a more positive opinion regarding the life skills than the female teachers about overall Life Skills variable.

Table 12

Overall male teachers' mean scores about life skills

| Life Skills | Mean Scores | Std. Deviation |
|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| CRT | 34.74 | 2.741 |
| DM | 35.10 | 3.331 |
| IPC | 43.28 | 3.170 |
| SAE | 40.18 | 3.347 |
| CSM | 50.46 | 4.254 |
| Life Skills | 203.76 | 13.133 |

Overall male teachers' perception about life skills is highly positive as Table 12 denotes that male teachers' mean score (34.74) related to the creative thinking/ critical thinking life skills (CRT) variable falls between the ranges of 25-40 which exhibits positive perception of teachers about the CRT variable. Similarly the mean score (35.10) of decision making/problem-solving life skills (DM) variable comes within the range 25-40, mean scores (43.28) related to the interpersonal/ communication life skills (IPC) variable fall between the range 31-50, mean scores (40.18) of the self-awareness/empathy life skills (SAE) variable surrounds the range 28-45, mean scores (50.46) about the coping and self-management life skills (CSM) variable comes within the range 37-60 and mean scores (203.76) about overall life skills are within the range 148-245 that portrays very positive perception of all male teachers towards the various variables of Life Skills. All of the male teachers supported various life skills as very important for their students but the coping and self-management skill is a most important skill which needs to be emphasized during teaching-learning process.

Table 13

Overall female teachers' mean scores about life skills

| Life Skills | Mean Scores | Std. Deviation |
|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| CRT | 33.45 | 3.690 |
| DM | 33.78 | 4.442 |
| IPC | 42.90 | 3.786 |
| SAE | 39.08 | 3.627 |
| CSM | 49.57 | 5.714 |
| Life Skills | 198.78 | 17.927 |

It is perceived that overall female teachers' perception about the life skills is positive as the Table13 represents that teachers' mean score (33.45) about the creative thinking/ critical thinking life skills (CRT) variable falls between the ranges of 25-40 which exhibits positive perception of female teachers about the CRT variable. Similarly, all-female teachers' mean scores fall within the range of positive perception such as mean score (33.78) of decision making/problem-solving life skills (DM) variable falls within the range 25-40, mean scores (42.90) related to the interpersonal/ communication life skills (IPC) variable fall between the range 31-50, mean scores (39.08) related to the self-awareness/empathy life skills (SAE) variable surrounds the range 28-45, mean scores (49.57) about the coping and self-management life skills (CSM) variable comes within the range 37-60 and mean scores (198.78) about overall life skills are within the range 148-245 that shows the positive perception of all female teachers towards the various variables of Life Skills. Female teachers considered all of the life skills very important for their students but coping and self-management is a most important skill which must be more focused during the teaching-learning process.

Hypotheses Testing

H_{o1} There is no significant difference between the mean scores of public and private school teachers regarding important life skills education for K-12 students

Table 14

Summary of results for private and public school teachers about life skills

| | Numbers of teachers | Mean score | SD | t | df. | Sig.(2tailed) |
|---------|------------------------|---------------|--------|-------|-----|---------------|
| Public | 246 | 200.3 | 12.973 | -.337 | 388 | .737 |
| Private | 144 | 201.4 | 18.395 | | | |

Table 14 shows that the public school teachers' mean score (200.3) is less than the private school teachers' mean score (201.4) but fall between the range (148-245) that shows both groups have positive perception but the difference in mean score

depicts that private school teachers have stronger perception as compared to the public school teachers about the overall life skills for K-12 school students.

An independent-samples *t* test was performed to analyze whether the perception of public and private school teachers about the asked variable differs significantly or not. The test results show no significant difference in the scores of public school teachers ($M=200.3$, $SD=12.973$) and private school teachers ($M=201.4$, $SD=18.395$); $t(388) = -.337$, $p = .737$ as $p > 0.05$; so the null hypothesis fails to be rejected and reveals that teachers of public and private schools have the almost same opinion and there is no significant variation between their perception about the importance of life skills education

H₀₂ There is no significant difference between the mean scores of female and male teachers about the importance of life skills education for students.

Table 15

Summary of male/female teachers' results about life skills

| | N | Mean | SD | T | df. | Sig. (2tailed) |
|-----------------|-----|-------|--------|-------|-----|----------------|
| Male Teachers | 147 | 203.7 | 13.133 | 1.461 | 388 | .147 |
| Female Teachers | 243 | 198.7 | 17.927 | | | |

Table 15 illustrates that overall the male teachers' mean score (203.7) is higher than the female teachers' mean score (198.7) and fall between the range (148-245) that shows both groups have positive perception but the difference in mean score depicts that male teachers have stronger perception as compared to the female teachers about all variables of Life Skills.

An independent-samples *t* test was performed to analyze whether the perception of male and female teachers about all inquired variables of Life Skills differs significantly or not. The test results show an insignificant difference between the mean scores of female teachers ($M=198.7$, $SD=17.927$) and the mean scores of male teachers ($M=203.7$, $SD=13.133$) and; $t(88) = 1.549$, $p = .125$ as $p > 0.05$; so the null hypothesis 'There is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of female and male teachers about the essential life skills for students' fail to be rejected and portrays no significant difference between the overall male and female teachers' perception about the Life Skills.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the study illustrated that all of the teachers possess very positive perception about every component of life skills for students but all of them emphasized significantly on coping and self-management skill which is related to personal and emotional aspects of their personality. A slight difference was observed regarding the overall perception of male and female teachers but it was not significant. It depicted

that male teachers have a stronger perception about all variables of life skills as compared to female teachers. It was also observed that private school teachers have a stronger perception of the overall life skills of their students as compared to public school teachers. The results of some other studies supported that positive perception and proper training of teachers regarding life skills education would enable teachers to embed life skills in their teaching-learning process effectively. For example, Simona (2015) highlighted the fact that both teachers and students should be well aware of life skills and their important role in their comprehensive development and successful life.

Researchers recommended in his study that effective schools can have long-lasting effects on a child's life that why schools need to ensure positive social activities and experiences because these long-lasting experiences surprisingly lead them to successfully handle complicated situations in the future (Rutter, 2009; Coskuner, et al., 2021). In another study, Vijayarani & Geetha, (2017) has emphasized the practical training of teachers particularly in context with self-confidence rising and providing support for communication skills development, problem-solving ability, and development of resilience attitude among disadvantaged students. Teachers' training programs should stress assisting teachers in developing their students' cognitive, social and emotional skills, raising their autonomy, and developing their self-management skills (Vijayarani & Geetha, 2017; Newman, et al., 2021). Furthermore, these training programs must include relevant pedagogical suggestions and assessment ways for students learning tasks which could help teachers to enable their students to learn how they could learn and develop their interpersonal skills. For the readiness and proper execution of such pedagogies teachers must be provided with all types of managerial support and resources (Gulati, 2019).

Baird et al. (2021) concluded in a periodic review that to develop life skills successfully among students, we have to ensure the appropriateness and relevancy of content for both academic and life skills education programs, effective methods of teaching, and valuable ways of assessment in which teachers should be properly trained. For the effective implementation of such programs, the involvement of students, parents, and the community is inevitable significantly (Simona, 2015; Newman, et al., 2021). Learning activities should be based on learners' interests and needs and they must be encouraged to apply newly learned life skills outside the schools, within their families, and communities. Gulati (2019) and Yuen, et al. (2010) explored the perception of students about the importance of life skills development and factors which support their life skills development. The students suggested some contextual factors which can influence the learning of life skills such as school experiences, curriculum activities, talent development programs, and opportunities and guidance and counseling opportunities in their schools. Besides this, it also highlighted that their relations with peers and family also contribute to their life skills development (Yuen, et al., 2010; Tan, 2018).

Smith, Swisher, Hopkins, and Elek (2006) pointed out that life skills education should be part of the whole curriculum instead of margin it to the specific areas. Various parents, teachers, and practitioners have certain doubts regarding the concept of life skills, ways to transfer these skills among students, and strategies to assess them properly (Gulati, 2019; Wertalik & Kubina, 2018). To eliminate their doubts, periodical and comprehensive orientation programs should be conducted which signifies that individuals having essential life skills would be able to handle challenges of life with confidence via using multiple strategies and lead their life successfully (Jain, 2011; Arasomwan & Mashiya, 2021).

Recommendations

Recommendations are made. As it was observed that teachers have a highly positive perception about the importance of life skills for students, but are unable to inculcate these life skills among students effectively. Therefore it is recommended that teachers could be provided opportunities in the form of workshops or training courses so that they come to know various techniques to impart life skills effectively among K-12 students. The Education Ministry needs to play an active role in organizing the various training opportunities for teachers and related resources. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has to ensure a life skills curriculum especially for teachers' training programs including content, instructional strategies, and evaluation/assessment techniques so that teachers may be acquainted with essential knowledge, skills, and attitude to develop essential life skills among students at all levels. Education departments at the provincial level may emphasize and materialize frequent training workshops for teachers to update their pedagogical skills and instructional strategies for effective instruction of life skills at the K-12 level. The school administration and heads need to ensure the proper implementation of life skills education at all levels; conduct frequent in-service training programs for their teachers to refresh their knowledge, skills, and competencies regarding life skills teaching to K-12 students and enable them to avoid misconduct and misbehaviors.

Conflict of Interest

Authors have no conflict of interest.

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