

Women's Perspectives on Life Skills Education: A Tool for Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the role of life skills education in promoting women's empowerment. Research reveals how women perceive the role of life skills education in enhancing their personal, social, and economic empowerment. It depicts the importance of acquiring essential life skills—such as communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and self-awareness—can lead to greater confidence, autonomy, and active participation in both family and society. The study aims to identify /study the women's perception of empowerment through life skills. Through qualitative and quantitative data collected from participants, the study identifies twenty key life skills that contribute to personal, social, and economic growth. The findings indicate that most participants recognized the relevance and effectiveness of the twenty identified life skills in their empowerment journey, it validates the comprehensiveness of the identified twenty life skills, as most participants recognized their relevance to women's empowerment. Therefore, these life skills can be confidently utilized in future research and training interventions. The study concludes that life skills training serves as a powerful catalyst for empowerment and recommends its integration into programs targeting women's development.

Keywords: Life Skills, Life Skills Education, Women Empowerment, Gender Equality, SDG

Empowering women through life skills is essential in today's rapidly evolving world. As life becomes increasingly complex and challenging, it is more important than ever for women to learn how to attain and maintain empowerment.

In India, the biggest obstacles in the way of women's empowerment include the patriarchal order, gender discrimination, female infanticide, child marriage, dowry system, illiteracy, lack of safety and health care, violence against women, low self-esteem due to ignorance of one's own abilities and potential, and a lack of appropriate educational programs.

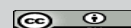
The fundamental requirement for empowering women is providing them with basic skills, abilities and power to identify and magnify their potential and therefore raise their status in society. Education is a key factor in empowering women. Life skills education is essential in empowering women, as it

helps them build the necessary abilities for personal growth. Life skills promote self-awareness and provide guidance and direction, enabling women to take control of their lives.

World Health Organization (1997) defines Life Skills as "the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable the individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life". In this context, being "adaptive" refers that a person is flexible in approach and can adjust in different circumstances and 'positive behavior' implies that a person is forward-looking and even in challenging situations can find a ray of hope (as cited in CBSE life skills Teacher's Manual, 2013).

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United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) defines life skills as "a behaviour change or behaviour development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: Knowledge, Attitudes, and Skill (as cited in CBSE life skills Teacher's Manual, 2013).

Life skills refer to the ability to maintain the state of mental and physical well-being while interacting with others within the local cultures and environment (Indian National Commission for cooperation with UNESCO, 2001 as cited in Daisy, 2016).

Life skills are essentially abilities that promote overall well-being and equip individual to effectively encounter real-life situations. They focus on fostering behavioural change and personal development by integrating three core components: knowledge, attitudes, and skills in a balanced manner.

Life skills can be many; some are specific to certain situations while others are of a generic in nature. Life Skills fall into three basic categories which compliment, supplement and reinforce each other: Social skills, Emotional skills, and Thinking skills which complement, supplement, and reinforce each other.

To develop healthy human beings worldwide, the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1997 has identified ten Life Skills which help the person to develop into healthy responsible and productive citizen. The ten core life skills are- Self Awareness, Empathy, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Decision Making, Problem Solving, Effective Communication, Interpersonal Relationships, Coping with Stress and Managing Emotions Our psychosocial competency is a result of these life skills, which also foster holistic development and increase our sense of self- esteem and self-efficacy. All these life skills are interrelated with each other.

Life Skills Education is a value addition programme for the youth to understand themselves and able to assess their skill, abilities and areas of development, which also enables them to analyse their capacity to enhance their function in the most productive way (Nanaware & Palanaethra, 2017).

Life skills education is instrumental in empowering women by equipping them with essential competencies for personal and social development. Life skills such as communication, decision-making,

critical thinking, and emotional resilience provide women with the tools to face personal, social, and professional challenges with confidence. These skills help women become more self-reliant, enabling them to take control of their lives, make informed choices, and assert their rights in various aspects of society.

Moreover, life skills education fosters a sense of self-worth and leadership among women, encouraging active participation in economic, political, and social spheres. It contributes to breaking cycles of poverty and dependence by enhancing their ability to seek employment, start businesses, and contribute meaningfully to society. It empowers women by developing critical competencies and providing the guidance necessary for autonomous decision-making and personal agency. Ultimately, empowering women through life skills not only transforms individual lives but also strengthens families, communities, and nations.

In many parts of the world, life skills form a significant and regular part of the school and adult curriculum. In India, The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2009) strongly emphasized on life skills education for students and teachers respectively. Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan (SSA) also took initiative and introduced life skills training for the upper primary girls along with providing quality elementary Education (Pathak, 2017).

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) introduced life skills education as an integral part of the curriculum for class VI in 2003 -04, for class VII in 2004-05 and subsequently in classes VIII, IX & X. In 2010 CBSE included the assessment of life skills under Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) class introduced during 2010-2016 with grading system. The CCE is a school-based evaluation of students that covers all aspects of student development. In 2012-CBSE introduced Life Skills Training programme as part of CCE for adolescent students of 10-18 years (as cited in Pathak, 2017). In 2013 CBSE published Teacher's Manual for Life skills for the teachers handling classes- VI to X. The teachers are advised to make the best use of these Manuals which provide guidelines for each of the ten core Life skills as identified by WHO. Considering the importance of

life skills for youth University Grant Commission (UGC) introduced life skills in higher education curriculum in 2019.

Recently, the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) has laid stress on the importance of the life skills of everyone. Apart from school education, realizing the importance of life skills for adults, NEP-2020 has also recommended to develop an adult education curriculum enriched with life skills in adult education and lifelong learning.

Gender equality and empowering all women and girls are one of the identified 17 sustainable development goals which must be realized by 2030. Empowerment of women brings gender equality which is greatly needed to achieve SDG 5 and other SDGs directly or indirectly. Gender equality is only possible if our women are competent enough and empowered. It has been long and widely argued that women are the key to sustainable development: 'the achievement of sustainable development is inextricably bound up with the establishment of women's equality' (WRI, 1994).

Recognizing the value of life skills, it is important to understand how women perceive the role of life skills education in transforming their lives and accelerating their empowerment.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the effective life skills which can induce empowerment among women.
2. To study women's perception of empowerment through life skills.

Method: Descriptive survey method was used to meet the objectives of the study.

Population: All the women of the Varanasi district comprised the population of the study.

Sample and Sampling Technique: The sample comprised of 100 women was selected through a convenient purposive sampling method.

Tools Used in the study

The Questionnaire to Assess the Need to Introduce Life Skills Training among Women (QNILST) was constructed to assess the perception of women to introduce life skills training for empowerment. There are forty-one close-ended and one open-ended questions for the women in both Hindi and English language.

Data Collection and Techniques of data analysis:

Data was collected from selected samples and both qualitative and quantitative data analysis were done. A master chart was created to facilitate the analysis, interpretation, and conclusion of the collected data. Percentages were calculated from the data gathered in Part A of the tool, while content analysis was applied to the data from Part B to draw meaningful inferences.

OBJECTIVE WISE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Objective 1: *To identify the effective life skills which can induce empowerment among women.*

For identifying and selecting the essential life skills the researcher studied number of reports, documents, and various taxonomies of life skills and analyzed them to gain insight into meaning of life skills and for a better understanding of the different type of life skills that can foster women empowerment. For the identification of essential life skills, two steps were followed:

- ❑ Identification of Essential Life Skills
- ❑ Validation of Identified Essential Life Skills
- ❑ Identification of Essential Life Skills

After a deep analysis of related studies to life skills researcher extracted twenty essential life skills that can foster empowerment among women, these are given in the table 1.

Table 1: List of Essential Life Skills

List of Essential Life Skills			
Sl. No.	Life skills	Sl. No.	Life skills
1	Self-awareness	11	Managing Emotions
2	Critical thinking	12	Legal Awareness skills
3	Creative thinking	13	Health Awareness skills
4	Decision -making	14	Self defence skills
5	Problem-solving	15	Literacy skills
6	Empathy	16	Vocational skills
7	Interpersonal Relationship	17	Financial skills
8	Effective communications	18	Digital skills
9	Leadership Skills	19	Domestic and parenting skills
10	Coping with stress	20	Time management Skill

Validation of Essential Life Skills

Validation of identified life skills was done at two levels:

- (a) From Experts' advice: Above twenty essential life skills were shown to experts for their advice. They supported that these twenty life skills are essential and can foster empowerment among women.
- (b) From Questionnaire: Further validation was done with data obtained from tool - QNILST "Questionnaire to Assess the Need to Introduce Life Skills Training among Women. Since the Questionnaire was of mixed type, data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively both.

FINDINGS

There are twenty essential life skills identified through review of related studies and further validated to study women's perception of empowerment. These skills are Self-awareness, Critical thinking, Creative thinking, Decision-making, Problem-solving, Empathy, Interpersonal Relationship, Effective communication, Leadership

skills, Coping with stress, Managing emotions, Legal awareness skills, Health awareness skills, Self-defense skills, Literacy skills, Vocational skills, Financial skills, Digital skills, Domestic/parenting skills and Time management skills. Validation from tool QNILST, also confirmed that all the identified twenty life skills were found appropriate and effective life skills which can induce empowerment among women.

Objective2: *To study women's perception of empowerment through life skills.*

The percentage-based responses from Part A of the tool are presented in the table 2.

Findings from Quantitative Data Analysis (Part A):

From part A of the tool (table 2) it is evident that the majority of the women (92-99%) strongly supported that all the identified twenty life skills are important for them to learn as these life skills can foster empowerment among them, supported that all the extracted twenty life skills are important for them to learn as these life skills can foster empowerment among them.

Table 2: Showing Responses in percentage obtained from part A of the tool

Sl. No.	Life Skills	% of Women (Yes)	Interpretation
1	Self-awareness	98.48	98.48% women are of the view that self-awareness skill is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
2	Critical thinking	98.50	98.5% women are of the view that critical thinking skills is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
3	Creative thinking skills	99.00	99% women are of the view that creative thinking skills is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
4	Decision- making	98.50	98.5% women are of the view that decision making skills is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
5	Problem-solving	96.45	96.45% women are of the view that problem solving skills is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
6	Empathy	92.40	92.4% women are of the view that self-awareness skill is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
7	Interpersonal Relationship	93.95	93.95% women are of the view that interpersonal relationship skill is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
8	Effective communication	99.33	99.33% women are of the view that effective communication skill is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
9	Leadership Skills	99.00	99% women are of the view that leadership skills is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
10	Coping with stress	97.22	97.22% women are of the view that coping with stress skill is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.

11	Managing Emotions	94.40	94.4% women are of the view that Managing emotions skill is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
12	Legal Awareness skills	92.30	92.3% women are of the view that health awareness skills is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
13	Health Awareness skills	96.40	96.4% women are of the view that self-awareness skill is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
14	Self- defence skills	94.90	94.9% women are of the view that self defence skills is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
15	Literacy skills	97.00	97% women are of the view that vocational skills is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
16	Vocational skills	98.50	98.5% women of view that self-awareness skill is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
17	Financial skills	94.35	94.35% women are of the view that financial skills is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
18	Digital skills	96.90	96.9% women are of the that digital skill is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
19	Domestic and parenting skills	97.00	97% women are of the that domestic and parenting skills is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.
20	Time management skills	99.00	99% women are of the view that time management skills is important for them to learn for fostering empowerment among them.

Findings from Qualitative Data Analysis (Part B):

From part B of the tool, it is evident that 87.04% of participants identified with life skills aligning with the twenty already included in the investigator's tool, while 12.96% felt no additional skills were needed. This confirms the relevance and appropriateness of the selected twenty life skills in the sense of empowerment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study highlights the critical role of life skills in fostering women's empowerment. The responses from participants indicate that the twenty identified life skills are relevant and effective in supporting their empowerment. This affirms the importance of structured life skills training as a vital tool in promoting women's empowerment initiatives. These life skills can be confidently utilized in future research and training interventions. Educators and policymakers must prioritize the unique needs of girls and women by formulating educational policies that incorporate these life skills as a core component. And these policies must be made mandatory across all educational institutions, thereby creating a strong foundation for empowering girls and women to become confident, capable, and socially responsible individuals.

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