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INDIAN ASSOCIATION OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION



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Life Skills in Adolescents and Youth in India 2022 - A Scoping Study

Dr. Saigita Chitturu*

Abstract

In the past three years, the COVID pandemic not only brought several challenges and adversities but also gave opportunities to reflect, explore, learn and unlearn. In this context, a study to understand the status of young people in pre- and post-COVID situations with particular emphasis on life skills looked critical. In this context, "Life skills in Adolescents and Youth in India 2022- A Scoping Study" was carried out across India to examine how life skills have helped adolescents & youth overcome, face, or address adverse situations in life. Secondly, to understand how and why they perceive life skills as core to sustaining quality lives. Mixed method approach was followed to collect data from multiple locations across India. Close and open-ended interview schedule has been developed for this purpose. Data from 270 online participants were collected.

Keywords: Adolescents, Youth, Life Skills, Sustainable, Quality life, mental health, Resilience.

Introduction

Life skills are considered one of the most fundamental necessities and are essential for everyone on the planet. They are an indispensable right needed for existence. These skills are crucial in building the abilities of the human race. The concept of "life skills" or "soft skills" has received significant attention from professionals across various fields over the past two decades. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2009, p. 3), life skills are the building blocks of adolescent health, including "dealing with conflict that cannot be resolved, dealing with authority, solving problems, making and keeping friends/relationships, cooperation, self-awareness, creative thinking, decision-making, critical thinking, dealing with

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stress, negotiation, clarification of values, resisting pressure, coping with disappointment, planning, empathy, dealing with emotions, assertiveness, active listening, respect, tolerance, trust, sharing, sympathy, compassion, sociability, self-esteem.” Similarly, UNESCO (2016) emphasized the importance of life skills in various contexts (“transversal skills”), which include critical and innovative thinking, intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, global citizenship, and media and information literacy. The significance of life skills in adolescent development is inherent in many models of adolescent growth (Shek et al., 2019b).

There is a growing demand to teach adolescents life skills to help them handle daily challenges and transition into adulthood with informed, healthy choices. Demonstrating its effectiveness, significance, and value, life skills have become a key part of many intervention programmes worldwide, especially those focused on preventing alcohol abuse, drugs, and smoking (Botvin & Kantor, 2000; Huang, Chien, Cheng, & Guo, 2012; Mandel, Bialous, & Glantz, 2006). Additionally, life skills programmes have been integrated into various settings such as sports, at-risk behaviour, and sexual and reproductive health programmes (Jones & Lavallee, 2009) (Aishath Nasheedaa, Hasli, 2019).

The importance of life skills has become increasingly prominent during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also interesting to observe how people, especially young ones, grappled with, struggled through, managed their lives in difficult situations, and tried to overcome them.

Methodology

The study on Life Skills in Adolescents and Youth in India 2022 - A Scoping Study was conducted with young participants aged 15-19. The study aimed to examine how life skills have helped adolescents and youth face, address, or overcome adverse situations in life, particularly in the context of COVID. It also seeks to understand how and why they perceive life skills as essential to maintaining quality of life. The researcher used mixed method approach & closed and open-ended questionnaires to collect data. Data was gathered from 270 participants through the snowball technique, using an online Google survey from multiple locations across India.

Findings & Results

I. Demographic Details

1. Age & Gender

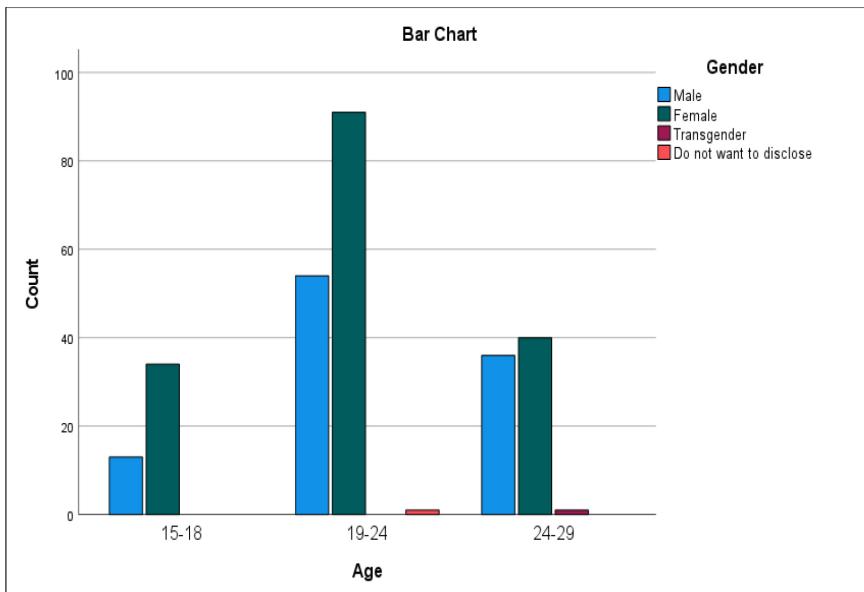
Table 1: Age and Gender of the Respondents

Age	N	%
15-18	47	17.4%
19-24	146	54.1%
24-29	77	28.5%
Gender		
Male	103	38.1%
Female	165	61.1%
Transgender	1	0.4%
Do not want to disclose	1	0.4%

As per the table, among 270 participants, 28.5% were in the age group of 24-29, 54% were in the 19-24 age group, and young people aged 15-18 were few, at 17.4%. Similarly, in terms of gender representation, 61.1% of participants were female, while males comprised around 38.1%.

2. Age * Gender

Figure 1: Graph showing Age and Gender



When we examine the relationship between age and gender, it is observed that most females who participated in the study belonged to the 19-24 years age range. Males in the 15-18 years age group were few. Additionally, more females were present in the 24-29 years age group. Female representation was higher in all age groups.

3. Caste & Religion

From the pie charts below, it is clear that most participants belonged to the Hindu religion and the general caste category. Participants belonging to the Sikh religion were few. It was also observed that some participants did not wish to reveal their religion and caste.

Figure 2: Graph showing Caste

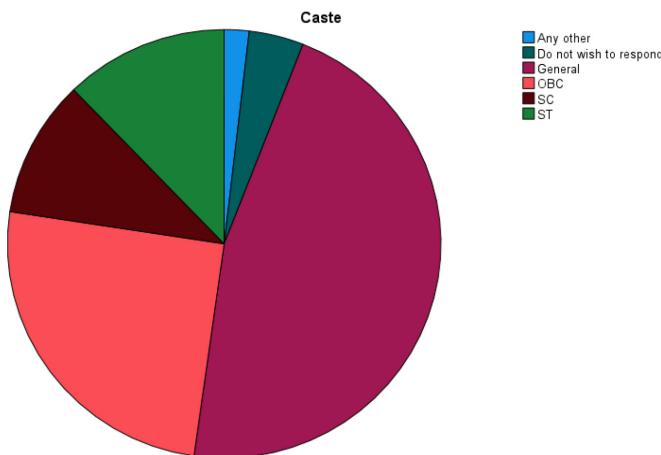
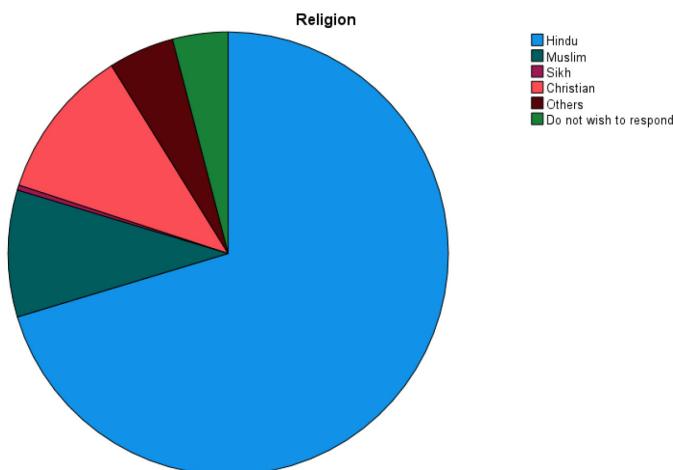


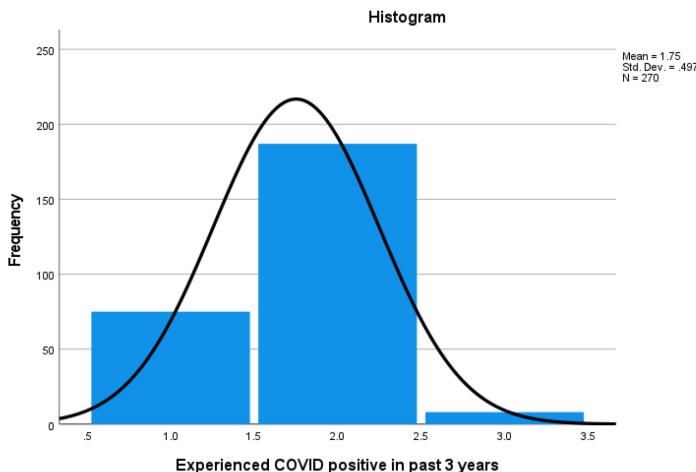
Figure 3: Graph showing Religion



II. COVID-Related Experiences

1. COVID Infection

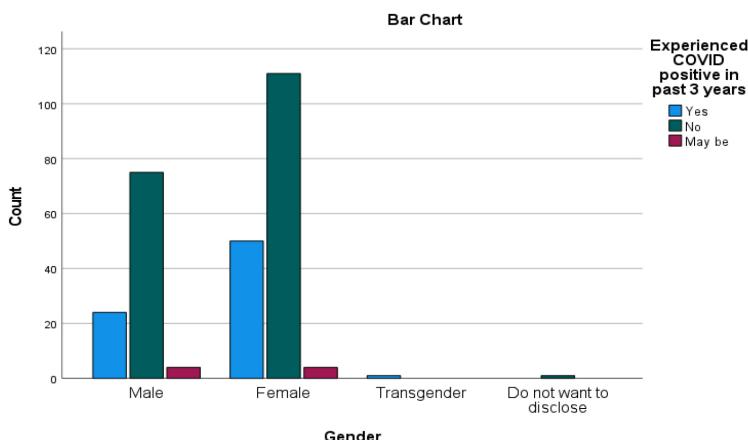
Figure 4
Histogram showing Experienced COVID-positive in past 3 years



The above graph shows the number of participants who experienced COVID over the past three years. When you look at the curve on the histogram, it indicates a standard deviation (SD) of .497 and a mean (M) of 1.75. This suggests that most participants did not test positive for COVID in the past. At the same time, some were unsure whether what they experienced was actually COVID or not.

2. Gender and COVID Infection

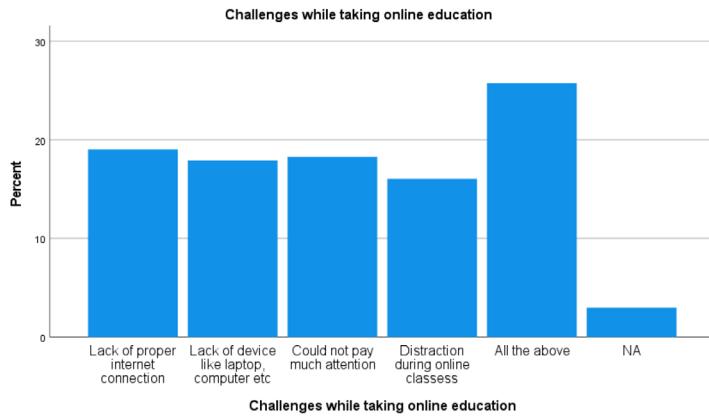
Figure 5: Graph showing Gender-wise COVID cases



From the graph above, it is clear that most participants did not experience COVID-19 infection. When examining the gender aspect, it is evident that a higher number of female participants suffered from COVID compared to males.

3. Challenges faced during online education during a pandemic

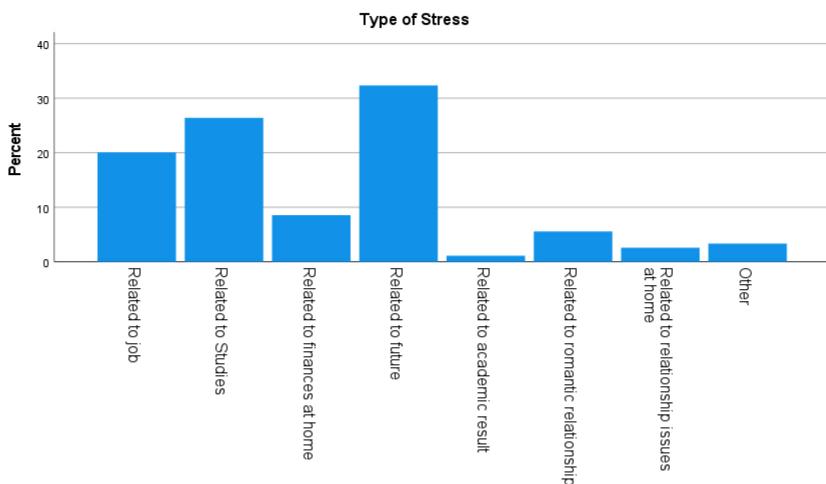
Figure 6: Graph showing challenges while taking online classes



From Figure 6, it is evident that students faced many problems in online education during COVID. They did not have a proper internet connection, lacked essential devices such as laptops and computers, and many struggled to pay attention during classes, frequently getting distracted.

4. Types of Stress

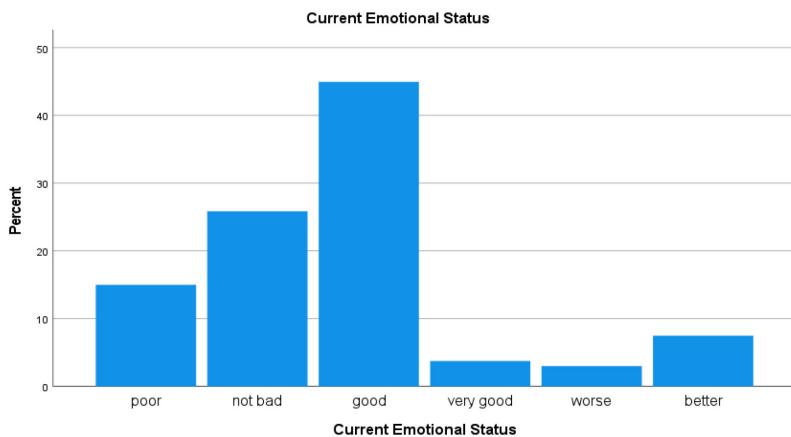
Figure 7: Graph showing Type stress



From Figure 7, it is clear that the majority, more than 30% of the respondents, have expressed stress related to the future. The future appears to be uncertain for most respondents. This is the leading cause of stress among young people. The second primary source of stress is related to studies. Very few individuals experience any tension related to their academic results.

5. Emotional Status

Figure 8: Graph showing emotional status

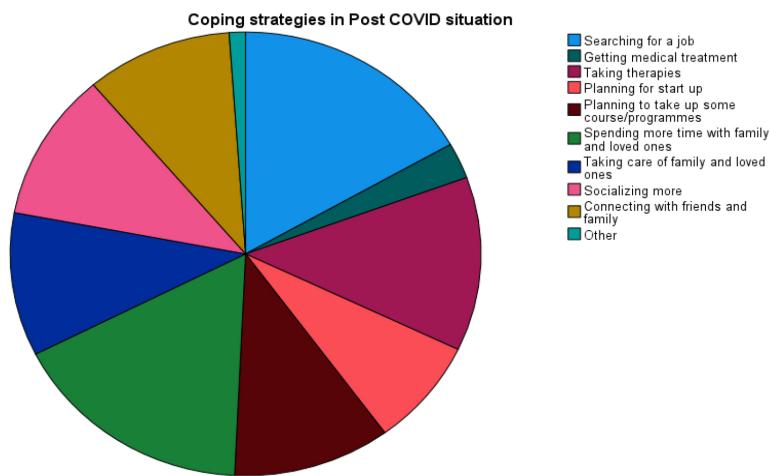


From Figure 8, it is seen that the majority of the respondents of the study are emotionally well at present, while a few are still struggling and are not in a perfect state of mind. Interestingly, only a few are doing very well and are emotionally stable and balanced in the present situation.

6. Coping Strategies

The pie chart in Figure 9 shows some of the coping strategies adopted by respondents to manage the post-COVID pandemic. Spending time with family and loved ones was clearly prominent in their responses. Many spoke about gaining a better understanding of their family members, their issues, and their interests during the lockdown. This was an opportunity valued by most of the young people in the study. Additionally, an equal number are searching for jobs due to losing employment themselves or within their families during the pandemic. Furthermore, as some participants reported, their home finances have changed because of the heavy burden of COVID, including no job, no income, and treatment expenses. Other coping strategies included socialising with friends, planning to start a business, enrolling in academic programs, and engaging in other activities to make productive use of the lost time.

Figure 9
Graph showing coping strategies in the post-COVID situation



7. Positive outcome of the COVID situation

Table 2: Positive outcomes of the COVID situation

Positive outcome of the COVID situation					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	109	40.4	40.4	40.4
	No	89	33.0	33.0	73.3
	Maybe	39	14.4	14.4	87.8
	Not sure	33	12.2	12.2	100.0
	Total	270	100.0	100.0	

A simple frequency table of the positive outcomes of the COVID situation in Table 2 shows that 40% of respondents experienced some positive results from the pandemic. In contrast, 33% found the experience to be entirely negative. Interestingly, 26% of respondents were unsure and could not categorise the outcome as either positive or negative.

The positive outcome of the COVID-19 situation is complemented by a study conducted by L. Principato, La Secondi, C. Cicatiello, and G. Mattia in 2022. The study “Caring more about food: The unexpected positive ef-

fect of the Covid-19 lockdown on household food management and waste” also offers valuable insights into how the pandemic has affected consumer food habits and routine behaviours at the household level. (L. Principato, La Secondi, C. Cicatiello, G. Mattia, 2022).

8. Biggest Learning from the COVID Situation

Figure 10
Word Cloud showing the most significant learning from the COVID situation

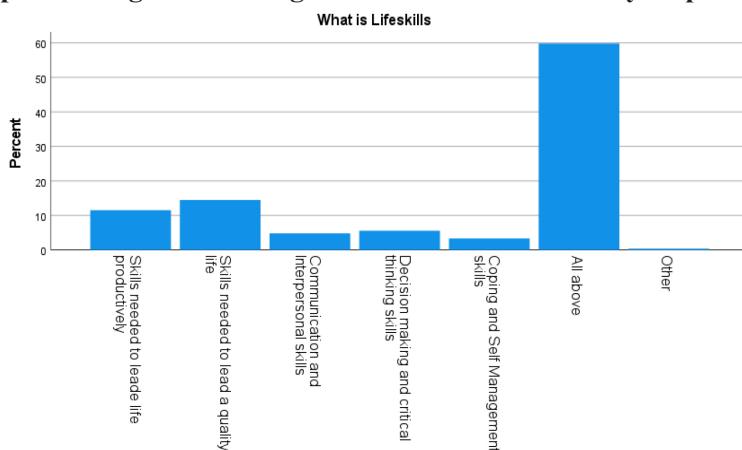


The word cloud in Figure 10 clearly highlights some key learnings for respondents. These learnings mainly focused on family—being with family, their health, concerns for family members, spending time together, and understanding them, as the most important aspects, followed by health, especially mental health. They also learned that life is uncertain and that life itself is precious, insights gained from the most challenging phases of life.

III. Life Skills

1. Meaning of Lifeskills

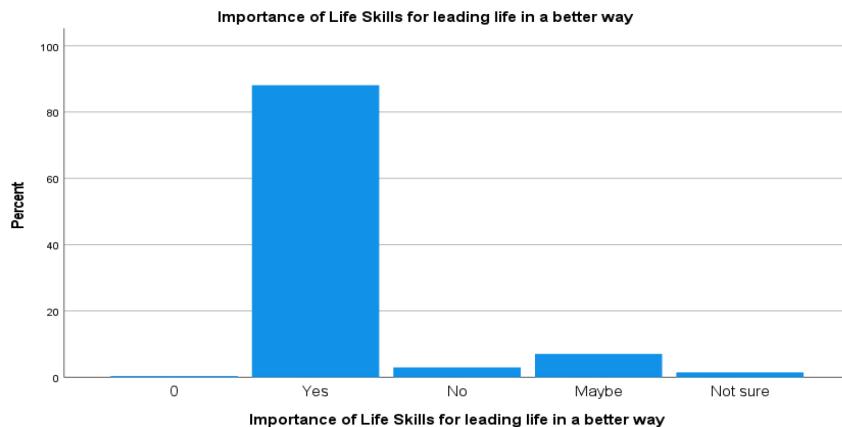
Figure 11
Graph showing the meaning of life skills understood by respondents



The respondents were asked about the meaning of life skills, how they define life skills, and which skill sets are considered part of life skills. Figure 11 shows that about 60% of the respondents said that life skills include many interpersonal skills such as coping and self-management, decision-making and critical thinking, communication, and skills needed to lead a productive life.

2. Importance of life skills

Figure 12: Graph showing the importance of life skills

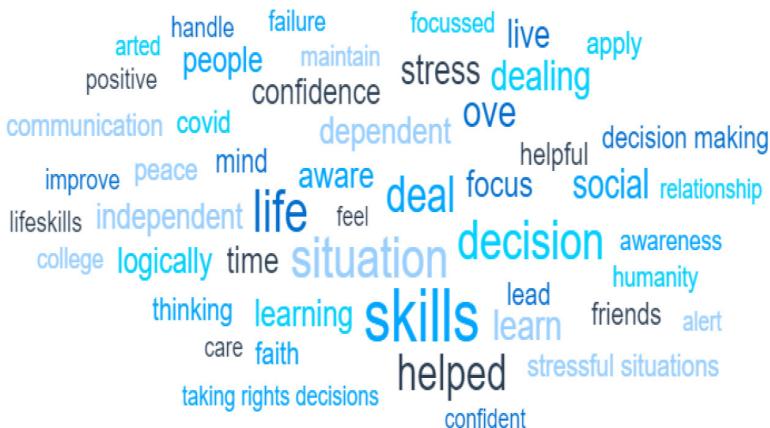


When asked about the importance of life skills during the COVID pandemic, respondents said that they realised the significance of life skills only during COVID times, which helped them use those skills to improve their lives. Similar findings are found in the study on the Importance of Life Skills Training in Preventing Addiction Recurrence between January and February 2020: A Narrative Review Article written by Bazrafshan, M. R., Delam, H., & Kavi, E in 2020. These findings are also supported by a study conducted by Nair, P. K., & Fahimirad, M. in 2019 on the Importance of Life Skills on Undergraduate Students' Personal and Social Competencies. Both studies emphasise the role and importance of life skills in human life.

3. Life Skills possessed by the respondents

Most respondents to the question on the life skills they possessed said they coped well during COVID and are emotionally stable. It was important to understand their life skills, which gave them confidence and the ability to handle life situations effectively. According to the word cloud data in Figure 13, key skill sets, such as communication, critical thinking, decision-making, and creative thinking, were identified as significant responses.

Figure 13: Word cloud depicting life skills possessed by respondents



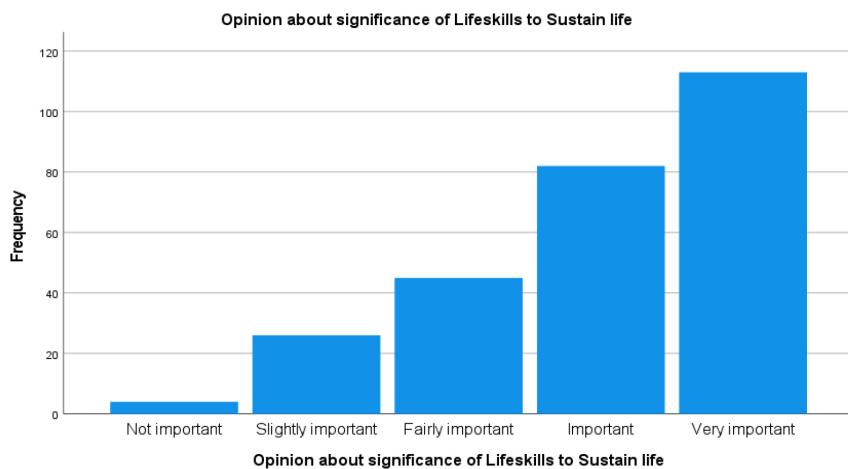
4. Coping using life skills

Figure 14
Word cloud depicting coping through life skills by respondents

The word cloud in Figure 14 aimed to illustrate responses on coping techniques used to overcome or manage adverse situations, such as during the COVID pandemic. It was reported that, due to their skills, individuals were confident in their ability to navigate difficult times; they could handle the situation effectively, and their decision-making and communication skills made their lives easier. Due to these abilities, they were able to escape stressful situations and improve their circumstances. Similar findings were reported in a study by Mohammadzadeh, M., Awang, H., Ismail, S., & Shahr, H. K. (2020) on improving coping mechanisms of Malaysian adolescents living in orphanages through a life skills education program: A multicentre randomised controlled trial. Additionally, the study by Khosravi, F., & Aghajani, T. (2019) on The Effectiveness of Life Skills Training on Adolescents' Coping with Stress and Psychological Capital also supported these findings.

5. Opinion about the Significance of Life Skills for the Sustainability of Life

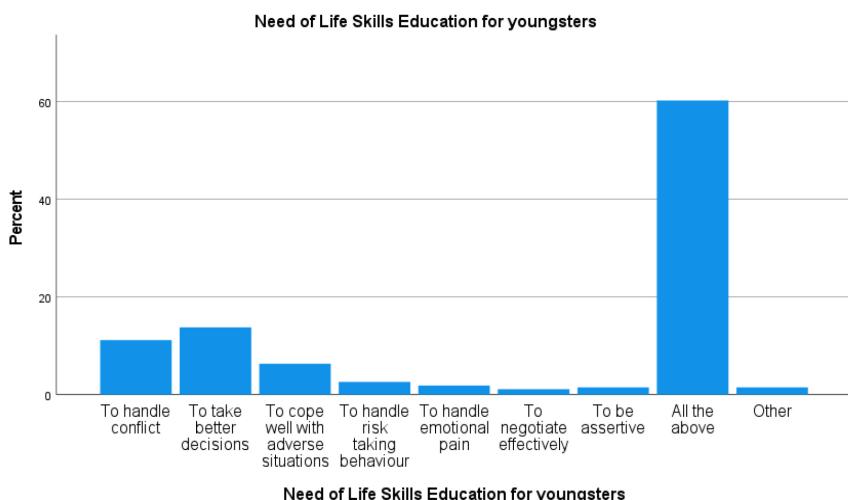
Figure 15: Word cloud depicting life skills possessed by respondents



The bar graph in Figure 15 shows the importance of life skill sets in maintaining people's lives. Most respondents said that life skills are essential and invaluable for managing and sustaining life. They believed they could only manage their lives because of the skills they acquired during tough times.

6. Need for Life Skill Education in Schools

Figure 16: Need for life skills education in schools



Regarding the need for life skills education in the education system, respondents expressed that such education should be provided to school and college-going youth. Figure 16 illustrates that life skills are crucial for managing conflicts, making informed decisions, coping with challenging situations, handling risk-taking behaviour, dealing with emotional distress, negotiating effectively, and being assertive. Providing young people with this knowledge and these skills from the beginning will help them build confidence to manage their lives. This finding aligns with the article “The Significance of Life Skills Education” authored by Prajapati, R., Sharma, B., & Sharma, D. (2017). The study, conducted by Mohammadzadeh, M., Awang, H., Shahar, H. K., & Ismail, S. in 2017, also supports this finding. It examined Life skills education for Malaysian institutionalised adolescents, focusing on their knowledge, needs, and priorities.

Discussion & Conclusion

Adolescence is a crucial period in human development because it is when the individual begins to form a stance towards the world or an “identity” (Erikson, 1963, 1963,1965). The process of self-definition in relation to culture starts in early adolescence. It reaches its peak in later adolescence with the development of an identity that becomes the main way of organising individual behaviour.

The period of adolescence begins with the onset of puberty, which brings about a series of biological events. The end of adolescence occurs when one enters the adult world—a social and psychological milestone. This phase is where adolescents may need support for a smooth transition from their immediate environments. Parents and school teachers are the best people to facilitate this by providing guidance and training to develop the necessary skills to handle different situations. Adolescents and youth need timely training to lead independent and successful adult lives. Allocating even a small part of the school curriculum to teaching how to control negative emotions, manage anger and stress, solve problems, make decisions, and handle interpersonal relationships can prevent many behavioural disorders. This can be achieved by enhancing psychosocial competencies through life skills training or education. Life skills education is essential for youth and adolescents from the most vulnerable and marginalised sections of society. As evidenced by recent studies, the importance of life skills was recognised and learned by young people during challenging times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Children and young people need to be prepared for any changes in life events. Having life skills does not prevent life’s challenges but enables one to handle and cope with situations effectively.

The pandemic and lockdown scenarios have highlighted the significance of life skills for all humans. They helped people survive and gave them the courage to move forward. Therefore, life skills are essential as enablers for the sustainability of the human race.

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Adaptive Holistic Curricular Integration of Life Skills for Empowering Tomorrow's Workforce

Shifali TV* & Prof (Dr.) M.N. Mohamedunni Alias Musthafa**

Abstract

Each generation asks the fundamental question: Why schooling? This question arises because when the school fails to fulfil society's expectations, a dilemma about the role of this social subsystem occurs—one that society has constructed to develop future citizens through social norms and to ensure the phylogenetic and ontological growth of Homo sapiens. Formal education is the tool that enables individual development in a sustainable and comprehensive way so individuals can integrate into society. Due to certain artefacts and bureaucracy, the formal education system has failed to achieve its objectives effectively and meaningfully at a certain point. Recognising this, society itself has developed a healing mechanism in the form of a transformative tool to address the existing gaps. The world scenario has been witnessing a tremendous shift in the labour and employability sectors. Across the globe, significant changes have occurred in the field of labour and labour organisations. The idea of a single job for a single individual has shifted to multitasking. Therefore, the question arises whether the compensatory transformative tool created by society, i.e., life skills, is sufficiently capable of meeting the changing landscape of employability. This research aims to explore the evolving nature of employability skills and employer perceptions within the new liberalised, global, technology-driven ecosystem. From the literature, it is clear that there is a need for a study that investigates the necessity of integrating life skills into academic curricula to address current employment challenges effectively. Building on this, efforts are made to analyse the transformative journey of life skills and life skills education, and to identify what kinds of adaptive changes are required to enable individuals for sustainable survival. An effort is made to consider the awareness of employability skills, sensitisation, the existing strengths of the curriculum for promot-

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ing these skills, and the planned integration of life skills across the curriculum through a focus group discussion with 60 in-service teachers. Merely integrating life skills alone will not be sufficient to develop the employability skills required by the current global economic and labour markets. The need of the hour is practical adaptation rather than reinvention.

Keywords: youth employment, life skills, soft skills, employability skills, Curricular integration

Introduction

A comprehensive and multidisciplinary education aims to develop an individual's moral, intellectual, artistic, social, physical, and emotional skills. In arts, sciences, social sciences, and professional, technical, and vocational areas, a well-rounded education encourages the growth of people with key 21st-century abilities. Alongside in-depth specialisation in a chosen field, it also instils a social engagement ethic and soft skills such as debate, discussion, and communication (National Education Policy, 2020).

According to the current state of the labour market, the five urban sectors most affected by the health crisis due to COVID are manufacturing (28 million), retail trade, hotel and restaurant (32 million), construction (15 million), transportation, storage, and communications (11 million), and finance, business, and real estate (7 million). These sectors employ an estimated 93 million informal workers. Of the 93 million jobless individuals engaged in these sectors, half work as independent contractors, 20% are daily wage earners, and 30% are contract or salary workers without social security benefits (International Labour Organisation, 2023).

According to the 2018 findings of the World Economic and Social Survey (WESS), developing digital and soft skills is a main priority in today's world. As automation in the workplace increases, human workers now need a new set of skills. While many jobs involve physical labour and repetitive tasks that technology will inevitably replace, this shift will also create more time for developing uniquely human abilities. In fact, a World Economic Forum survey (2019) indicates that the most valuable skills in the next decade will be people management, creativity, and critical thinking — all inherently human qualities that cannot be automated. Along with digital skills needed for today's changing times, employers will still require employees who can demonstrate these abilities. People have been, and will continue to be, essential in this innovative technological age. There will be only an evolution of the average worker, but what will

distinguish them is their capacity to comprehend and smoothly integrate into the new work environment.

India, with its growing young population, is on the verge of an economic revolution. However, it still has a workforce that lacks the skills needed to meet the demands of a rapidly changing labour market. Therefore, there is a need to revamp educational approaches. One of the most important strategies for improving the employability of young Indians is integrating life skills into academic courses (Sharma & Kaul, 2019). Studies show that although India produces a large number of technically proficient graduates, a significant portion do not possess critical life skills, which negatively affects their employment prospects (Mohanty & Das, 2020). Communication, cooperation, problem-solving, and flexibility are among the skills that Indian employers value most, according to research by Kapoor and Chawla (2018). However, because the educational system emphasises rote learning and theoretical training, graduates often lack these abilities (Kumar Mishra, 2017). The necessity for comprehensive skill development and the pursuit of employability are closely linked. The need for a workforce with both technical expertise and critical life skills is increasing as the economy diversifies and becomes more globalised.

The inclusion of fundamental life skills was recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the curriculum to enhance youth employment prospects. Research shows that deficiencies often hinder graduates' employment opportunities in essential life skills such as communication, cooperation, problem-solving, and flexibility (WHO, 1999; Bhatnagar & Sharma, 2019).

There is a need for a shift in focus toward integrating life skills into the curriculum. Educational institutions should prioritise developing comprehensive abilities alongside technical knowledge to better prepare students for today's competitive and dynamic job market. Technology will undoubtedly replace many labour-intensive, repetitive tasks every day in most jobs, but it will also free up time to develop uniquely human abilities. This advanced technological world was, and will continue to be, significantly shaped by humans. The ability to understand the changing nature of work and adapt to it will separate a few remaining standard workers from the rest.

This study examines the complexity of employability and identifies the essential life skills needed for success in today's workforce. The inclusion of life skills into the curriculum is a strategic response to the evolving demands of society and industry. By integrating life skills education into

academic programs, educational institutions can equip students with the necessary abilities to navigate complex work environments and achieve professional success.

The study aims to explore possibilities for facilitating comprehensive learning experiences that support the development of essential life skills. Teachers can help students learn and apply these skills in real-world situations by providing opportunities for experiential learning and innovative teaching methods.

Curriculum Development - Conceptualisation

In the past, adults went on food searches or fishing trips with their children to teach them survival skills. Despite their lack of formal schooling at the time, the children acquired the knowledge and skills necessary for survival. Because of this, they were following a curriculum known by other educators as the “Sabre-tooth curriculum.” This type of curriculum refers to an ancient approach where the primary goal of learning was survival (Benjamin, H. R. W., 1939). Nonetheless, as discoveries and advancements became inevitable, the ancient people’s way of life improved. Education became more structured as a result, and curriculum development, which is still ongoing today, grew more systematic, intentional, and forward-thinking.

The field of curriculum development is broad because it includes not only the school, students, and teachers, but also the progress of society overall. A civilisation cannot develop without a series of growth processes. Therefore, curriculum development plays a vital role in shaping change within an organisation, both at small and large scales.

Curriculum development involves creating a new curriculum or modifying an existing one by replicating or adjusting the material taught to students. Development consists of a series of decisions that come together to form a curriculum design. The primary sources of curriculum content—such as subject matter, societal and cultural demands, or student needs and interests that help achieve specific educational goals—serve as the foundation for curriculum designs. These goals often focus on helping students reach their full potential, transmitting cultural legacy through cognitive success, or preparing individuals for life in an uncertain and changing world.

The suggestions made in the Delors Report, which was released in 1996 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1996), have direct and indirect implications for the integra-

tion of life skills within educational frameworks. “Learning: The Treasure Within,” Delors Report, highlights the value of holistic education, which goes beyond the simple acquisition of information to include the development of critical competences for societal cohesion, personal fulfilment, and sustainable development.

Recent research has emphasised the importance of curriculum development for teaching life skills. Shek et al. (2020) conducted a study in Hong Kong to explore the opinions of teenagers, educators, and parents regarding the necessity and adequacy of life skills instruction for high school students. The findings highlighted how essential it is to include life skills education within the formal curriculum to better prepare students for various life situations. Lavy (2019) also addressed the significance of promoting character strengths in education, emphasising the connection between character qualities and twenty-first-century competences. The study outlined strategies for fostering the development of character traits in educational settings, including curriculum design and teacher training. Tam et al. (2021) proposed social entrepreneurship as a way to enhance the self-worth and professional skills of underprivileged youth amid changing educational contexts. The study clearly demonstrated the importance of addressing young people’s gaps in initiative, adaptability, and interpersonal skills by implementing curriculum-based youth entrepreneurship training in secondary schools. The aforementioned research underscores the need to integrate life skills education and leadership development into the educational program to support the overall growth and well-being of students.

The curriculum planning process is essential in helping students achieve their learning goals. It requires an approach that considers the needs of the teaching staff, students, and society at large. This process should be as productive and efficient as possible and be grounded in previous research. The actual educational process should follow clear guidelines, starting with defining the ultimate goals, selecting suitable tools to reach these goals, and integrating various elements into a cohesive curriculum. A curriculum should present a diverse range of courses, instructional methods, and learning strategies that work together to form a unique whole. It must also respect all of the institution’s current resources, both human and material.

Adaptive Holistic Curricular Integration of Life Skills

While the complexity of today’s socio-economic, political, and environmental concerns presents a significant challenge, it also offers remarkable opportunities for youth to demonstrate their strengths as a strong, self-or-

ganising force. The quality and efficiency of the youth shape the world's future. Therefore, we must first empower and strengthen young people to ensure a bright future. The younger generation is often regarded as a powerhouse of boundless energy. We must channel this youthful energy constructively and in the right direction, which will undoubtedly lead to the development and progress of nations. The creative potential of youth, combined with their zeal, enthusiasm, and energy, can bring about wonders for society. Hence, the most effective way to empower youth is to provide them with life skills education, as it enables them to become more logical, creative, self-respecting, responsible, and honest.

Young people need Life Skills Education (LSE) to be prepared for life's demands and to participate creatively and productively in society. By promoting healthy behaviour and psychosocial and economic well-being, life skills education helps individuals handle everyday challenges and obstacles. The aim of fostering creative youth through life skills education is to provide young people with accurate information, positive attitudes, and creative talents to support the development of a creative nation. Life skills refer to the ability to demonstrate adaptable and constructive behaviour that enables individuals to navigate the rigours and difficulties of daily life effectively.

In the Indian context, life skills education among adolescents and youth is poor, primarily due to the ineffective education system that is more rigid than creative. There has been a gradual positive change over the past few years, but education still falls short. With life skills education, they can promote positive, healthy, and productive personal growth and make meaningful contributions to society.

The adaptive holistic curricular approach must focus on designing the curriculum to develop students' employability skills. This is achievable only through a proper education system. However, the challenge of time is that the world and social systems face many complexities due to the over-influence of globalisation, privatisation, and liberalisation, along with some allied issues. Therefore, any change in the educational system should concentrate on the abilities essential for the 21st century. Hence, we must pursue a pragmatic, reformation-focused educational strategy capable of addressing modern challenges and issues. The traditional style of pedagogical practice is inadequate for preparing youth for the 21st century. We need praxis-oriented, life skills-based education.

Review of Literature

An extensive review related to the research question reveals a lack of studies directly focused on policy perspectives and curricular integration of life skills. A summarised profile of the efforts made by researchers in this area is presented here.

Economic growth may be promoted by incorporating life skills into schooling, as it has been shown to enhance labour productivity and employability (Skills Development, 2023). The UNICEF India Complete Life Skills Framework (2023) emphasises the vital role of life skills in education. It proposes a comprehensive framework that has been suggested as an effective way to support adolescents' transition into the workforce. According to 21st Century Skills evidence, challenges have been linked to life skills and their integration into educational programs, with a focus on improving basic education and STEM capabilities. Including life skills, such as problem-solving and adaptability, in training programs has proven to be an effective method for boosting employability (Comparative Analysis of Life Skills Education: Global Perspectives, 2023, Kirchhoff E and Keller R, 2021).

The illustration of various approaches to incorporate employability skills into core academic material and career training, which underscores their importance beyond just being an added aspect of the curriculum (Enhancing Youth Employability: What? Why? and How?), further supports this idea (NSDC, 2019). The advantages of integrating life skills into the curriculum have been highlighted, particularly focusing on enhancing teenage life skills through a curriculum that includes modules on nutrition and health (PACE Curriculum, 2023).

Life skills education is considered important, focusing on enhancing social, emotional, and cognitive abilities by including them in the regular school curriculum (Significance of Life Skills Education, 2023). The National Education Policy 2020 highlights the importance of integrating life skills into education by prioritising the identification and incorporation of specific skill and value sets across various domains at every level of learning (National Education Policy 2020).

According to Sung et al. (2013), employability skills are shifting from their initial concepts of life skills or basic skills to a more work-focused interpretation. Employability skills were initially defined in terms of being prepared for work and maintaining employment. Although graduate employability is generally perceived as limited, higher education is still viewed as

a key factor in securing employment in the current policy context. Using a case study of an information technology (IT) student who progresses to a graduate role in the IT sector, Clark et al. (2013) explore concerns about graduate employability. The survey aimed to understand how university students viewed their employability and how these perceptions related to positions that later connected students to the workforce: students' life-historical positions, such as their chosen field of study, degree level, and work experience, and their self-perception, or "ability self" (Räty et al., 2019).

Apart from the topic of study, it was found that the sense of employability was linked to how close individuals felt to graduation and the working world. The "theory of Interrole Learning Transfer" (ILT) and the "Human Capital Theory" (HCT) are used by Igwe et al. (2020) to explore factors influencing learners' attitudes, motivations, and behaviours to enhance their employability in the future. The 'employability model' results from this research and indicates that the use of employability skills depends on both institutional factors and individual orientations. The study by Kövesi et al. (2020) aims to examine how graduate engineering students perceive their employability concerning their career-related skills, approaches, and perspectives.

A fundamental concept in human capital theory is the importance of education in influencing the marginal productivity of labour and wages (Mwita et al., 2020). An interesting research topic is how recent graduates perceive the value of transversal skills learned in college and how they apply these skills in the workplace (Belchior-Rocha et al., 2022). The demands of current or future employability challenges may surpass the capacity of the existing educational system (Pew, 2017). Policymakers and curriculum planners have difficulties when incorporating new and developing topics into the curriculum (UNESCO, 2016).

Integrating life skills into current courses ensures their relevance and addresses issues in the modern educational system. Lack of resources or training can hinder the integration of 21st-century skills into the curriculum (A Comprehensive Guide to 21st Century Skills, 2023). Teaching life skills improves individuals' ability to meet the expectations and needs of contemporary society (Prajapati et al., 2017). The National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies strongly emphasise the need to tackle concerns and social problems that emerge in public life. To improve employability skills, these standards highlight how essential it is to incorporate life skills into the curriculum.

Four initiatives—a school vegetable garden, a raised worm bed, a sewing group, and community collaboration—were established by a school counsellor working with other staff members to promote work skills, life skills, and social and emotional development (Swank et al., 2013).

A study by Maheswari (2011) examines how engineering students acquire communication skills to enhance their employability in business. In the Indian context, an engineering student's ability to communicate effectively is a key factor in determining their success in the hiring process. While skill-based technological advancements in manufacturing and services have historically driven growth in income and employment opportunities for highly trained workers, the informal sector remains the largest employer of relatively unskilled workers.

In the coming years, there will likely be a significant and sustained demand for labour in India, both domestically and internationally. Paradoxically, it is not only uneducated and unskilled individuals who lack abilities; many educated individuals also often underperform. In light of these factors, Khare (2014) examines the expansion and changing structure of India's higher education system, considering the employability index for India's fast-growing sectors, the educational backgrounds of Indian job seekers, and labour market demands. Based on the identified skill gaps, the author suggests a comprehensive plan to address these gaps and fill the missing links.

To become a superpower, we must start from the bottom, in the field of education. (Joshi et al., 2015) Also emphasise the importance of choosing a profession in everyone's life and the process of selecting the best career path. These are what UNICEF calls “life skills,” or the ability to behave well and adaptively, which helps people successfully handle the challenges and difficulties of everyday life.

Conclusively, the incorporation of life skills into the curriculum has been acknowledged as a practical approach to augment employability within the Indian milieu, emphasising the provision of essential abilities for individuals to thrive in the labour market. It is important to include life skills in educational programs since research indicates that this integration has a favourable influence on social outcomes, labour productivity, and economic growth (Skills Development, 2023)

METHOD

Participants

Data for this qualitative study were gathered through focus group discussions. A purposive non-probability approach, commonly used in qualitative research, was employed to select the participants. This method ensures a diverse range of opinions. Sixty teachers from various parts of the country, representing different disciplines and levels of study, were identified. The goal was to include six to 10 participants in each focus group.

Procedure

Focus groups were conducted until the saturation point of new information was reached because the sample size for qualitative research is never fixed (Morgan DL, 1998). After estimating theoretical saturation, one additional focus group session was held to ensure no 'new' information was missed. Each focus group was scheduled at a time and date convenient for both researchers and participants. A brief questionnaire on employability, the Indian education system, and the curricular integration of Life skills was given to each participant before the session started.

Question Guide

According to the recommended focus group methodology (Krueger, RA, 1998), the researchers devised a semi-structured question guide (see Table 1) to explore various issues related to employability skills and suggest strategies for curricular integration of life skills. The questions were carefully developed using relevant literature and following extensive discussions with specialists who have considerable focus group experience (Krueger, RA, 1998). After creating the question guide, 10 university teachers participated in a pilot test, which was also reviewed and tested by the researchers. The findings from the pilot discussion were incorporated into the subsequent study (Morgan DL, 1998).

Table 1: Focus group question guide

Type	Questions
Opening	Name and designation of the participant
Introduction	Changing landscape of employability Challenges in the new employment scenario

Transition	Concept of Life Skills Curricular Integration of Life Skills
Key	What are the measures to be considered?
Ending	

Open-ended and introductory questions in the question guide allow participants to connect and get to know one another, as well as to begin the topic conversation. The study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of the changing landscape of employability, current practices of life skills integration, and suggest measures for practical adaptation of a life skill integrated curriculum to meet current challenges. Transition and key questions were used to guide the group towards the central part of the discussion and keep it focused. Most of the group conversations naturally centred on the main topics. Ultimately, participants were asked to share ideas on interventions that promote the curricular integration of life skills. To gather more detailed information, the moderator posed side questions throughout the focus group sessions, while still following the question guide and allowing enough freedom for open discussion among teachers. The discussion was recorded with the participants' prior consent, and the confidentiality of the data was maintained.

To analyse the information gathered from the focus group sample's questionnaire and question guide, verbatim transcriptions of the data were created from the audio recordings. Every quotation was encrypted. A coding method was used to organise the data (quotes) after repeated instances of any sort were systematically identified across the dataset using an inductive theme approach (content analysis) (Silverman, 2004).

Outcome of Focus Group Discussion

The perceptions and suggestions that emerged from the Focus Group Discussion are listed here, followed by a visual representation (Figure 1).

Current Employability Trends:

- Exploration of emerging industries and job roles.
- Analysis of the evolving demands of the job market.
- Identification of skills that are increasingly sought after by employers.

Relevance of Life Skills:

- Discussion on what constitutes 'life skills' and their importance.
- Evaluation of how traditional education prepares individuals for

the current job market.

- Examples of life skills that have become essential for success in the modern workplace.
- Examination of existing curriculum frameworks and their alignment with life skills development.
- Strategies for effectively integrating life skills into various educational levels and subjects.
- Challenges and opportunities in implementing a life skills-focused curriculum.

Teaching and Learning Approaches:

- Exploration of innovative teaching methods for fostering life skills.
- Role of experiential learning, project-based learning, and internships in skill development.
- Use of technology and online platforms in delivering life skills education.

Assessment and Evaluation:

- Consideration of methods for assessing life skills acquisition and proficiency.
- Balancing traditional academic assessments with assessments of soft skills and practical competencies.
- Incorporating feedback and self-assessment mechanisms into the learning process. Collaboration with Industry:
- Importance of partnerships between educational institutions and industries.
- Opportunities for real-world experiences, internships, and apprenticeships.
- Ways to ensure that curriculum updates are responsive to industry needs.

Equity and Inclusion:

- Addressing disparities in access to life skills education.
- Strategies for ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have equal opportunities to develop essential skills.
- Consideration of culturally relevant approaches to life skills education. Lifelong Learning and Adaptability:
- Discussion on the concept of lifelong learning in the context of changing employability.
- Strategies for fostering adaptability, resilience, and continuous skill development.
- Importance of providing support and resources for individuals to

upskill and reskill throughout their careers.

- Role of policymakers in promoting the integration of life skills into education.
- Advocacy efforts for curriculum reform and investment in life skills education.
- Examples of successful policies and initiatives from different regions.
- Gathering insights from students about their perceived skill gaps.
- Understanding student attitudes towards life skills education.
- Exploring student experiences with applying life skills in real-world situations.

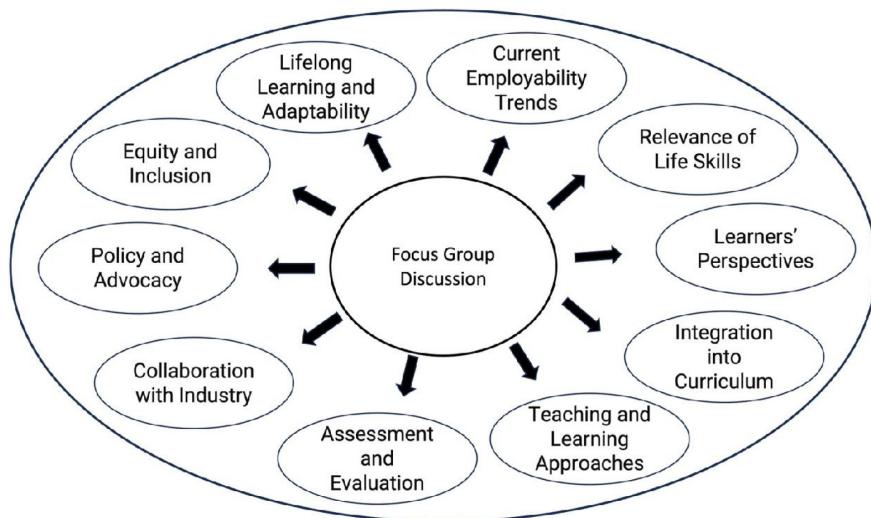


Figure 1 : Focus Group Discussion Outcomes

DISCUSSION

This research aims to examine the current state of life skills and the implementation of life skills education curricula at various levels. It seeks to gain a practical understanding of the field by using focus groups as a research method.

The derivatives and sub-themes that emerged from the focus group discussion have been subjected to a critical analysis, considering the background of changes identified in relation to employability skills and the compatibility of existing life skills practices. The central theme, as described above, highlights the need for adaptation in policy formulation and strategic implementation.

Life skills and life skills education are still in an early stage, added to education as a transformative tool. To keep up with the evolving needs of employment and employability, the integration of life skills into the curriculum also requires a new vision and perspective.

A lot of unlearning and new learning are inevitable as the skills needed to meet the challenges of the present world forecast new horizons and tools. Merely romanticising the life skills approach with a disciplinary focus is not a sustainable way forward. As reflected by the participants, it will lead to pedagogic monism that results in academic ritualism rather than the development of multiple skill sets required by the current economic and market scenarios. There is a common understanding that the formulation and articulation of life skills in the curriculum are somewhat compatible, but their evaluation reveals weaknesses. The integration of technology across all areas of life poses another challenge, with the emergence of new tools and techniques. Life skills must demonstrate their relevance and identity, overcoming external pressures of a tech-driven world. Substantial evidence and examples are needed to empirically prove the importance of life skills as a vital tool to address the complexities of today's global order.

There is no independent functional existence for any skill or skill set as a watertight compartment. Instead, different skills are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. From a broader perspective, it should be viewed as a systems approach. An intentional and collaborative exchange among different segments of society is highly essential. Industry-academic linkage must be established to identify skills and create pathways for articulation. The integration should facilitate inclusivity and access for all elements comprehensively by adopting a holistic approach. The psycho social and cultural transaction of the learner should be at the central position while forming policies and practices. Such a system needs a thorough adaptation.

CONCLUSION

The successful integration of life skills into the curriculum continues to face obstacles despite these efforts. Progress is slowed by inadequate teacher preparation, a lack of standardised evaluation tools, and resource limitations (Bhatnagar & Sharma, 2019; Sharma & Tiwari, 2020). To ensure these skills remain relevant and practical in the workplace, increased collaboration between academic institutions, industry partners, and policy-makers is also necessary (Pandey & Vohra, 2017).

The researchers propose an adaptive curricular integration model for life skills education that establishes reciprocity between the evolving employ-

ability landscape and the integration of life skills in a pragmatic way, taking a holistic approach. This model emphasises cognitive, process-oriented, and social skills, which ultimately empower the prospective workforce for sustainable living. The proposed model is shown in Figure 2.

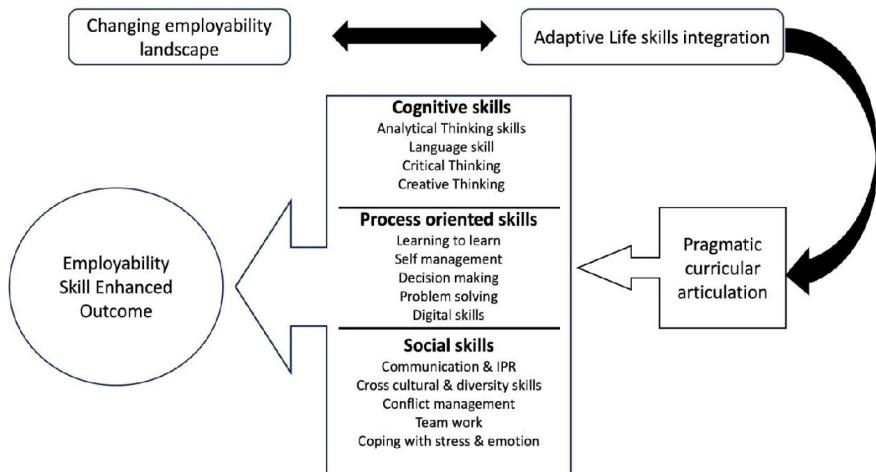


Figure 2 : Proposed adaptive curricular integration model

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The Need for Imparting Life-Skills Education to MBBS Students by Interns Using the Peer-Education Methodology

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Abstract

There is a growing need to provide life-skills education to medical students due to increasing cases of poor mental health and rising stress levels, which adolescents may struggle to handle. Delivering this education through interns and peer educators benefits both the interns and the undergraduate MBBS students. Since adolescent health is also part of the new CBME Curriculum, this training can be considered an essential component of undergraduate education. Therefore, the present study aims to explore perceived stress levels and the needs of medical students. Interns were chosen for this purpose because they will act as peer educators and have recently experienced the stressors of undergraduate medical education. The study included data from 37 interns at Padmashree D. Y. Patil Medical College and Research Centre, Pune, Maharashtra, India. Data was collected using the Perceived Stress Scale by Cohen and through personal interviews with the interns. The results indicated that 65% of interns experience a moderate level of stress. Qualitative insights from the interviews support these findings. Additionally, qualitative data highlighted a significant need for implementing a Life-Skills Education Program during the MBBS course.

Keywords: Medical Students, Peer Education

Introduction

Everyone faces stress at some point in their daily lives. Our lives are deeply connected to stress. Stress is a response of our body and mind to challenges or demands. When someone is under intense emotional or mental pressure

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and struggles to cope, it becomes stress. Stress can show up as physical or emotional tension. This can happen because of any event or thought that makes us feel tense, angry, disappointed, frustrated, depressed, nervous, and so on. Such events or thoughts are referred to as stressors. Research has shown that medical students in India experience significant stress for various reasons, which negatively affect their mental health (Priyadarshini K M, et al., 2021; Gupta, S., et al., 2015; Nandi, M., & Hazra, A., et al., 2012). The stressors reported by medical students include a heavy syllabus, increased exam pressure, less time for procrastination or revision, not getting the grades they expect, frequent exams, time constraints, and similar issues (Solanky P, et al., 2012; Ragab, E.A., et al., 2021).

India has a large number of doctors, making it one of the countries with the most medical professionals in the world. There are at least 1 million doctors in India, and more than 81,000 medical students graduate from 529 medical colleges annually (Kishor M, et al. 2021). The medical profession in India is regarded as highly prestigious. However, the mental health of medical students is a concern in the Indian context due to unrealistic expectations, a lengthy curriculum, and an inability to accept failure. A study by Kishor M, Chandran S, Vinay HR, and Ram D. in 2021 reported that thirty suicides of medical students and professionals occurred between March 2016 and March 2019. Additionally, there were 358 suicide deaths among medical students from 2010 to 2019 in India (Chahal S, Nadda A, Govil N, et al. 2022). The average age of those who committed suicide was 29.9 (12.2) years. The primary reason identified for suicide was academic stress (45.2%). This underscores the urgent need to incorporate life skills education into the medical curriculum, enabling students to manage stress and improve their mental health.

Many studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of intervention programmes in reducing stress levels among medical students (Priyadarshini, K. M. et al. 2021; Yusoff, M. 2011; Shapiro, S.L., et al. 1998). Since adolescent health is also included in the new CBME Curriculum, training in life skills education can be integrated into undergraduate training. All undergraduate students will be exposed to life skills education through this workshop. Peer educators can be developed through this programme, and peer support groups will be established, aiding in the dissemination of life skills to the broader community. Before implementing the training programme, it was essential to assess the current perceived stress levels of medical students and conduct a needs analysis through questionnaires and personal interviews. Interns were selected for this needs analysis because

they will serve as peer educators and have recently experienced the stressors of undergraduate medical education. Additionally, they are future doctors, so maintaining robust mental health is crucial. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a needs analysis to implement a Life Skill Education Programme for medical students at Padmashree D.Y. Patil Medical College and Research Centre, Pune, Maharashtra. The current stress levels among medical interns are being assessed using a standardised questionnaire and personal interviews. The findings will guide the planning and execution of a life skills education programme using peer education methodology.

Objectives

1. To explore and study perceived stress levels of medical interns at D. Y. Patil Medical College, Pimpri, Pune, Maharashtra, India.
2. to explore stressors, stress indicators/factors, as well as stress coping strategies used by medical students through personal interviews.
3. To provide a solution in terms of life skills education programmes as a part of the medical curriculum.

Methodology

Sample-

Institutional ethics committee approval was obtained. Data were collected with the prior consent of the participants. As this was a pilot study used to explore present perceived stress levels of medical students and assess the actual need for imparting life-skill education programmes, a random sampling method was employed for data collection. A total of 37 medical interns filled out the questionnaire and willingly participated in the study. After completing the perceived stress scale, all interns were contacted for personal interviews. Both quantitative and qualitative measures were taken and analysed.

Tools-

Quantitative measure-

Cohen Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

Psychometric properties (Indian Sample) (Pangtey, R., Basu, S., Meena, G.S., & Banerjee, B. (2020)) -

Internal consistency reliability: Cronbach's alpha = 0.731

Principal component analysis-three-component structure was accepted

(“perceived helplessness”, “perceived self-efficacy for coping,” and “distress”), which explained 61% of the total variance.

Qualitative measure-

Personal Interview

Results-

Part 1 - Quantitative Data

Table 1: Obtained levels of Stress among Medical Interns

Levels of Stress	Percentage
High Stress-	14%
Moderate Stress-	65%
Low Stress-	22%

Graph 1: Obtained levels of Stress among Medical Interns

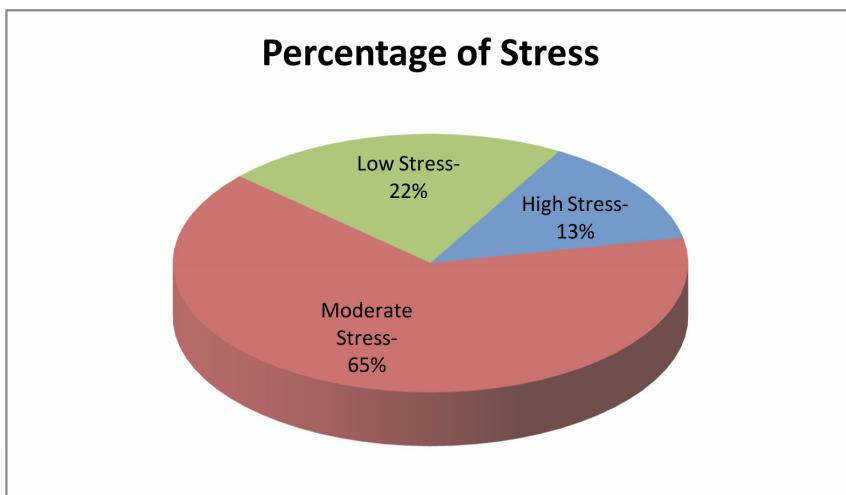


Table 2: Gender wise data of obtained levels of stress

	Male	Female
High Stress-	7%	17%
Moderate Stress-	64%	65%
Low Stress-	29%	17%

Graph 2: Gender wise data of obtained levels of stress

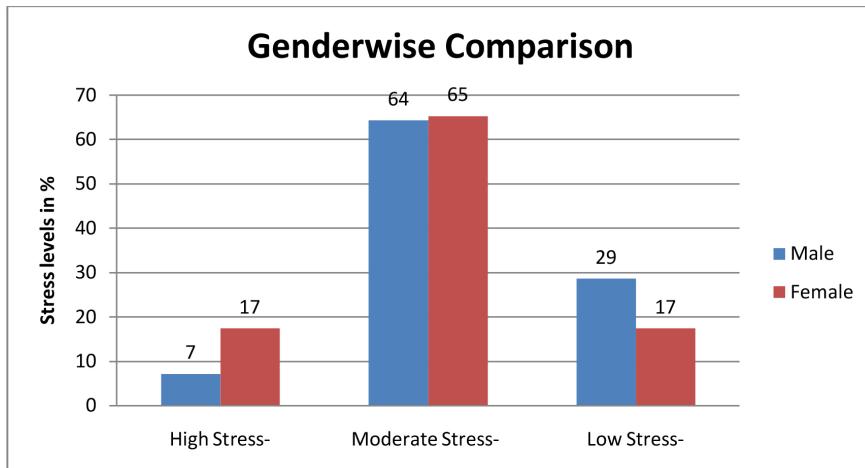


Table 3: Gender comparison

Fisher's Exact Test	
<i>P</i> value-	0.6160

Table 4: Question-wise patterns of responses

Q1- In the past month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

Q1	Frequency	Percent	Exact 95% LCL	Exact 95% UCL
Very Often	4	10.81%	3.03%	25.42%
Fairly Often	8	21.62%	9.83%	38.21%
Sometimes	20	54.05%	36.92%	70.51%
Rarely	2	5.41%	0.66%	18.19%
Never	3	8.11%	1.70%	21.91%
TOTAL	37	100.00%		

Q2- In the past month, how often have you felt unable to control the important things in your life?

Q2	Frequency	Percent	Exact 95% LCL	Exact 95% UCL
Very Often	9	24.32%	11.77%	41.20%
Fairly Often	7	18.92%	7.96%	35.16%
Sometimes	11	29.73%	15.87%	46.98%
Rarely	4	10.81%	3.03%	25.42%
Never	6	16.22%	6.19%	32.01%
TOTAL	37	100.00%		

Q3- In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?

Q3	Frequency	Percent	Exact 95% LCL	Exact 95% UCL
Very Often	7	18.92%	7.96%	35.16%
Fairly Often	17	45.95%	29.49%	63.08%
Sometimes	8	21.62%	9.83%	38.21%
Rarely	2	5.41%	0.66%	18.19%
Never	3	8.11%	1.70%	21.91%
TOTAL	37	100.00%		

Q4- In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

Q4	Frequency	Percent	Exact 95% LCL	Exact 95% UCL
Very Often	12	32.43%	18.01%	49.79%
Fairly Often	9	24.32%	11.77%	41.20%
Sometimes	12	32.43%	18.01%	49.79%
Rarely	2	5.41%	0.66%	18.19%
Never	2	5.41%	0.66%	18.19%
TOTAL	37	100.00%		

Q5- In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?

Q5	Frequency	Percent	Exact 95% LCL	Exact 95% UCL
Very Often	4	10.81%	3.03%	25.42%
Fairly Often	7	18.92%	7.96%	35.16%
Sometimes	20	54.05%	36.92%	70.51%
Rarely	3	8.11%	1.70%	21.91%
Never	3	8.11%	1.70%	21.91%
TOTAL	37	100.00%		

Q 6- In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?

Q6	Frequency	Percent	Exact 95% LCL	Exact 95% UCL
Very Often	1	2.70%	0.07%	14.16%
Fairly Often	15	40.54%	24.75%	57.90%
Sometimes	12	32.43%	18.01%	49.79%
Rarely	6	16.22%	6.19%	32.01%
Never	3	8.11%	1.70%	21.91%
TOTAL	37	100.00%		

Q7- In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?

Q7	Frequency	Percent	Exact 95% LCL	Exact 95% UCL
Fairly Often	9	24.32%	11.77%	41.20%
Very Often	9	24.32%	11.77%	41.20%
Sometimes	16	43.24%	27.10%	60.51%
Rarely	3	8.11%	1.70%	21.91%
TOTAL	37	100.00%		

Q8- In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?

Q8	Frequency	Percent	Exact 95% LCL	Exact 95% UCL
Very Often	3	8.11%	1.70%	21.91%
Fairly Often	9	24.32%	11.77%	41.20%
Sometimes	16	43.24%	27.10%	60.51%
Rarely	6	16.22%	6.19%	32.01%
Never	3	8.11%	1.70%	21.91%
TOTAL	37	100.00%		

Q9- In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?

Q9	Frequency	Percent	Exact 95% LCL	Exact 95% UCL
Very Often	6	16.22%	6.19%	32.01%
Fairly Often	8	21.62%	9.83%	38.21%
Sometimes	13	35.14%	20.21%	52.54%
Rarely	3	8.11%	1.70%	21.91%
Never	7	18.92%	7.96%	35.16%
TOTAL	37	100.00%		

Q10- In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Q10	Frequency	Percent	Exact 95% LCL	Exact 95% UCL
Fairly Often	4	10.81%	3.03%	25.42%
Sometimes	16	43.24%	27.10%	60.51%
Rarely	9	24.32%	11.77%	41.20%
Never	8	21.62%	9.83%	38.21%
TOTAL	37	100.00%		

Part 1- Qualitative Data

This data was collected using personal interviews with the participants. The themes observed are:

- As witnessed by students: The initial four months of MBBS and the final year are the most stressful. The stressors are mostly
 - Academic pressure and the vastness of the curriculum
 - Uncertainty regarding the future
 - Separation from the family/homesickness (during the initial months)
 - Interpersonal relations and adjustment issues, relationship issues
- Societal expectations and comparisons to peers in other fields, especially during internships and the financial burden in some cases
- Stress is also experienced because of work-life balance, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Lack of career guidance for future career planning
- Candidates mentioned that they prefer to talk with their roommates, friends, and/or mothers to release their stress. None of them felt comfortable talking with any of the faculty.

Discussion

The levels of perceived stress among medical interns show that up to 65% currently experience moderate stress. The stress is measured using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), which has been proven to be highly reliable and valid. The explanation for moderate stress on the PSS scale indicates that this level of stress can potentially interfere with daily activities. Therefore, it is essential to engage in activities that help manage stress and prevent serious psychological, physical, emotional, and behavioural problems. The results also reveal that 14% of the interns are experiencing high stress levels, highlighting the need for immediate and decisive action to reduce perceived stress among medical interns.

Males and females experience nearly equal patterns of stress, with no significant difference in their perceived stress levels, according to a gender-based analysis of perceived stress. Hence, there is no need for a gender-specific focus when designing and implementing life skills education programmes.

Question-wise analysis shows a similar pattern in answering all the questions except Q3 and Q6. For most questions, there is a tendency to choose the middle option, i.e., “Sometimes.” However, 46% of the participants

marked “fairly often” for the question “Q3 - In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?” and 41% selected “Fairly Often” for the question “Q6 - In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?” These responses reflect the current levels of stress experienced by the candidates, especially with the NEET PG exam just a few months away.

The qualitative data obtained from interviews with participants support the results from the questionnaire. Participants acknowledged feeling stressed and highlighted the need for a life skills education programme in the first year of MBBS. The interviews also revealed various stressors experienced by students at different stages of the course. They stated that stress during the first year primarily relates to adjusting to college, academic pressures, the extensive curriculum, and uncertainty about the future. By the second year, students become accustomed to these challenges. However, in the second year, stress shifts to issues like relationship problems, interpersonal relations, and adjustment difficulties. During their internship, students with non-medical backgrounds, who are more settled, create significant pressure among medical interns, as these interns lack certainty about their future careers. Additional environmental factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, required all medical students to perform field duties, which disrupted their work-life balance. Such conditions generated considerable stress for medical interns.

Participants also expressed the need for career guidance during their course to gain better knowledge about further opportunities and pathways. They experience stress due to their limited understanding of future options. Many only learn about different pathways and their procedures very late, which significantly increases their stress.

Interns rely on their friends, roommates, and family members to relieve the stress they face during MBBS. However, they hesitate to discuss their stress with their faculty openly.

A few of them also turned to their passion as a means to relieve stress. Meanwhile, some acknowledged that a few of their friends resorted to smoking and alcohol.

Conclusion

- 5% of medical interns experienced a “Moderate Level” of stress
- There is an immense need stated by interns during their interviews to have a Life-Skill Education Programme in the initial years of their MBBS

- There is also a need to have a career guidance programme during MBBS, which will provide knowledge regarding future career opportunities and pathways

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Enhancing Personal Agency for Empowering Adolescents: A Perspective on Health and Well-being

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Abstract

Adolescence, marks an important stage of growth and development. It is the period of transition from childhood to adulthood and is characterized by rapid biological changes and psycho-social maturation. India is home to maximum number of adolescent populations in the world. According to national estimates, around 40 percent of India's children and adolescents are vulnerable and living in difficult circumstances. Due to complex historical legacy of gender discrimination and obsolete social norms, adolescent girls are often most at risk. Adolescents tend to extend their relationships beyond parents and family and are intensely influenced by their peer groups and the external world in general. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has further compounded the issues of young population in India. In this light, it becomes important to talk about adolescent's agency and empowerment. The term agency concerns an individual's ability to take responsibility for his/ her own life. and is influenced by various intersecting economic, cultural, socio-structural factors including deep-rooted gender norms, unequal power relations, expanding mass-media culture, that affects the potential of adolescents in an adverse manner. An agentic adolescent empowered through meaningful education, vocational training and continuous mentorship on various life skills, have the potential to become a socially and economically transformative force for the nation.

Keywords: Adolescents, Health, Well-being

Introduction

“We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.” – Franklin D. Roosevelt.

We are living in complex times. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to chang-

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es and adaptations in key areas of our lives, including health, education, and employment. Adolescents (10–19 years) are the backbone of society and comprise a significant portion of the population, accounting for 16% of the world's population (a record high) and 21% of India's population (the largest in the world). With restrictions on mobility, learning, socialising, and a lack of physical activity, adolescents have been the silent sufferers of this pandemic. With their tender minds, they not only witnessed deaths on such a large scale but also lost two years of growth, exploration, and experimentation. It is high time that we shift our focus toward our youth and help them navigate these complex challenges through contextually appropriate plans and strategies.

The Teen Brain

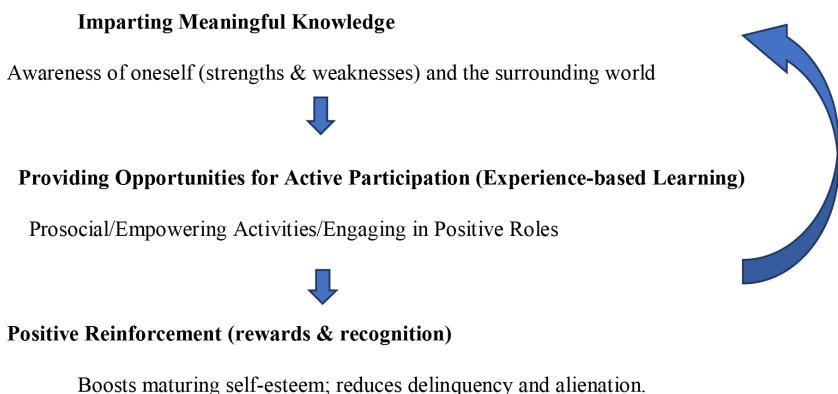
Adolescence is a unique stage of human development as individuals transition from childhood to adulthood with a host of rapid changes – physical, cognitive, and psychosocial. Of particular importance is the development of the human brain.

Back then, medical science believed that the brain is fully developed by age 6 or 7 and that teenage behaviour is solely due to hormonal changes during puberty. However, neuroscience research over the past twenty years has shown that this is not the case. The human brain undergoes significant and prolonged changes throughout adolescence, during which neural connections between the front part of the brain (prefrontal cortex) and other regions are strengthened (synaptogenesis). The adolescent brain changes in response to environmental input (neuroplasticity), which has important implications for behaviour (Hartley & Somerville, 2015). Since teenagers often struggle with self-image, emotions, addictions, relationships, and peer pressure, the majority of mental health issues first appear before the age of 18 years (WHO, 2019). Therefore, adolescence is a period of both opportunity and vulnerability.

The pandemic has further added to existing stress and has led to anxiety, anger, grief, depression, lowered self-esteem, and physical ill health among others. Through empowerment, these challenges can be transformed into stepping stones to achieve one's life dreams. In this light, the first section will explore the concept of empowerment with respect to adolescents. The second part will highlight the impact of the pandemic on adolescents' health and well-being.

Adolescent's Empowerment

Empowerment of adolescents is the entry point for promoting healthy behaviours and meaningful civic participation. An empowered girl or boy must have agency and an enabling environment. Agency is the core concept in social cognitive theory and is a dynamic, context-bound process (Bandura, 2006). It is the ability to pursue whatever goals a person wishes to and is foundational to well-being. It can be developed at micro (household), meso (community), and macro (state or country) levels. Components of agency at an individual level include self-confidence, self-efficacy, critical awareness, decision-making, and goal-oriented actions. At the community level, the agency empowers individuals to take on leadership roles or volunteer positions, thereby fostering civic participation. It can be cultivated by acquiring skills through a series of actions within an enabling or safe environment, as illustrated below.



Adolescent Empowerment Cycle

Through this process, adolescents learn valuable life skills such as critical awareness (a key component of empowerment), effective communication (particularly how to communicate effectively with peers), organisational behaviour (how to access resources within households or communities), and other skills like positive bonding with social institutions, decision-making, creativity, and leadership. Engagement in meaningful roles gives them a sense of purpose and fosters self-efficacy.

Adolescent Health: Key Domain of Agency Development

The COVID-19 pandemic not only impacted our physical health but also

caused significant damage to our mental health. Teenagers often receive mixed (and sometimes contradictory) messages about what to eat, whom to interact with, and how to spend their time. Therefore, accurate information is essential and should be conveyed in a youth-friendly manner.

1) Health Issues among Adolescents

Notably, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic varied with the socio-economic status of the adolescent population. Three crucial health implications of the pandemic among teenagers are obesity, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and poor sexual and reproductive health (de Figueiredo et al., 2021).

Obesity

According to the World Obesity Federation, by 2030, approximately 10.8% of India's child population (ages 5-9) and around 6.23% of adolescents will be obese. Obesity during COVID-19 has been called CO-OBESITY, as the pandemic created an obesogenic environment due to sedentary lifestyles and overeating. Young people turned to 'COMFORT FOODS' that were higher in salt, sugar, and fat, leading to excess weight gain. These foods are not only low in energy but also lack minerals and vitamins necessary for normal growth and development (Bhattacharya et al., 2021). Due to obesity, teenagers also face body image issues and discrimination and are more likely to develop poor self-esteem, which impacts their mental health. It also increases the risk of several diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, and some cancers (Browne et al., 2021).

Non-Communicable Diseases(NCDs)

The two most frequently diagnosed NCDs in adolescents are micronutrient deficiencies and mental health disorders.

1) Micronutrient Deficiencies

Globally, micronutrient deficiencies affect one-third of the population. In India, around 80% of adolescents suffer from 'hidden hunger,' which is the deficiency of one or more micronutrients such as iron, zinc, vitamin B9 (folate), vitamin B12, vitamin A, and vitamin D (CNNS, 2018). In the age group of 15-19 years, 54% of girls and 24% of boys in India are anaemic (NFHS, 2015-16). Children and adolescents comprise 31% of the vitamin D-deficient population in India (Amrein, 2020). However, the most overlooked deficiency among the

young population group is magnesium deficiency.

Magnesium deficiency among adolescents

Also known as a ‘relaxing mineral or stress-busting nutrient’, magnesium is responsible for more than 300 biochemical functions inside our body. Magnesium deficiency is considered a ‘modern nutritional issue among adolescents’ and leads to various health conditions, including sleep problems, irritability, frequent headaches, vomiting, muscle cramps, restless legs, weak teeth and bones, loss of appetite, low energy levels, anxiety, and depression. Magnesium deficiency is highly associated with stress – both physical and mental. During stress, our body utilises magnesium reserves, thus leading to deficiency (Black et al., 2015). Due to lockdown, teenagers experienced higher levels of stress due to fear, grief, uncertainty, and increased burden of household chores.

2) Mental Health Disorders

In developing countries, the economic burden of mental health issues outweighs that of other NCDs and can be as high as 4 per cent of the gross national product. Globally, more than 1 in 7 adolescents (10–19 years) is estimated to live with a diagnosed mental health disorder (UNICEF, 2021).

During the pandemic, adolescents’ mental health was adversely affected by four major factors: excessive worrying, loneliness, domestic abuse, and internet addiction. Thirty-one per cent of social media users in India are between the ages of 13 and 19 years (Statista, 2022). Studies have identified Problematic Internet Use (PIU) among the young population and linked it to impairments across various domains of human functioning. WHO has recognised two significant implications of PIU among adolescents: gaming disorder and hypersexual disorder.

In gaming disorder** the child/adolescent has impaired control over digital gaming. Gaming takes precedence over other interests and daily activities in his/her life. Hypersexual disorder is the compulsive need to view erotic images despite destructive consequences and is fuelled by the triple A engine, i.e. easy Accessibility, Anonymity, and Affordability. As a result, the viewer does not feel awkward while viewing the online pornography. In India, a child as young as 11 years is exposed to pornographic content. Nine out of ten adolescent boys

** Included by WHO in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)

and six out of ten girls are exposed to porn (Dixon, 2014). Studies suggest that internet pornography use for more than 11 hours per week is considered problematic pornography and can adversely affect body image, youth sexual behaviour and socio-emotional functioning. It not only objectifies women but also encourages sexual risk-taking, sexual aggression and low life satisfaction among adolescents (Kumar et al., 2022).

Poor Sexual & Reproductive Health

Worldwide, the leading cause of death among 15 to 19-year-old girls is complications arising from pregnancy.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted access to essential services, including those for sexual and reproductive health. Early pregnancy strains a country's economy by increasing demand for healthcare services and reducing productivity. In children, it can lead to undernutrition and other neonatal conditions.

Sexual self-efficacy is an important life skill that can be developed by enhancing communication about healthy sexual relationships, contraception, pregnancy, sexual dysfunction (myths vs. reality), and sexually transmitted infections.

The Way Out

When the healthcare system is overburdened and only catering to specific cases, the first thing we can teach our teenagers is self-care. Providing appropriate information about managing their own healthcare needs (particularly in adolescents with chronic physical and mental health conditions) helps establish healthy behaviours. Basic prerequisites for self-care are:

- Balanced Diet for Nutritional Deprivations**

Adolescents need protein to build muscle mass and healthy fat for growth and hormonal balance. About a quarter of calories should come from protein and a quarter from fat. Good carbohydrates make up half of the energy source during the teen years. Additionally, the diet should include enough vitamins and minerals. Of particular importance is magnesium, which can be obtained from nuts, legumes, greens, and whole grains. Magnesium is essential for sporty kids or young people doing strenuous exercise or household chores.

- Use of Aesthetic Resources for Mental Health:**

Cross-disciplinary research suggests that synchronising human aesthetic

concepts (music, art, and craft) with youth development has therapeutic effects (Baker, 2013) and should be incorporated into mental health education. In both daily life and extraordinary circumstances, the two vital aesthetic resources available to us are music and the art of meditation.

Music-Fostered Agency

Adolescence is a time of intense emotions and decreased stability. Boys and girls develop a sense of internal agency when they use music as a tool to change their negative emotional states. When individuals have little control over their external circumstances, they feel the need for an ‘auditory bubble’ to protect or strengthen their internal state. Thus, ‘listening to cope’ is important for boosting positive moods (Saari Kallio, 2020).

Meditation & Learned Agency

Studies have shown that meditation reduces stress, improves classroom concentration, and promotes social-emotional learning among adolescents (Su & Sham, 2019). As a factor of positive psychology, meditation develops a key life skill of the 21st century, which is self-leadership (the ability to establish self-direction and self-motivation) by boosting meta-cognition in young people. Meta-cognition refers to awareness of one’s own cognitive (knowledge and thinking) processes and helps develop self-regulation. Therefore, meditation is a learned skill and is immensely beneficial in addressing addictive and compulsive behaviours among adolescents (Chen & Zhang, 2022).

• Sexual & Reproductive Agency

Receiving sex education from lay sources like online pornography has led to increased sexual aggression among the young population. A comprehensive sex education is needed now and should not only include lessons on sex and sexuality but also cover healthy relationships, managing emotions, and the importance of informed consent. Boys should be taught about alternative masculinities so they can adopt different ways of relating to girls, rather than just being physically and sexually aggressive. This will improve relationship quality and adolescents’ ability to make informed sexual decisions (preventing unwanted pregnancies, STIs, and sexual violence).

In Indian settings, teaching sex is tricky because adults often struggle to navigate the topic. Instead of normalising the adolescent’s sexuality as a natural part of development, they tend to dramatise teen sexuality by giving them blanket warnings like ‘don’t talk to boys,’ which is very counterproductive. During adolescence, caregivers should look for various ‘teachable

moments' (e.g., menarche) rather than relying on 'big talk'—a one-time information session—to start conversations about sex and reproductive health. Technology can also play a significant role, as 12- to 19-year-olds in India make up 32% of the country's total internet users. Through an integrated telemedicine system, we can connect youth to essential health-care services and experts. Online platforms like Udemy and YouTube approach topics like sexuality, risky sexual behaviours, and addiction in a youth-friendly way through videos, podcasts, and more. Telepsychiatry by the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at NIMHANS demonstrates a good model to adopt in other healthcare settings.

Of particular mention is raising awareness about the use of emergency and long-acting reversible contraceptives among sexually active girls, as preventing a pregnancy is better than terminating it. These methods offer young women the most control over their reproductive process and strengthen their reproductive agency.

Conclusion

While several programmatic interventions have been developed for adolescents, these have not been adequately scaled up to address the needs of this group. We should move beyond tokenism and avoid a 'one size fits all' approach. Every intervention should consider the socio-cultural and economic backgrounds of adolescents, especially the structure and functioning of their households, so that each teenager can develop practical skills to navigate their unique challenges. Drawing inspiration from our ancient Guru-Shishya tradition, where the teacher is responsible not only for education but also for personality development, we can make our schools ideal environments for Positive Youth Development. As Dr S. Radhakrishnan rightly observed,

For education to be complete, it should include not only the training of the intellect but also the refinement of the heart and discipline of the soul.

Therefore, investing in adolescents can provide a 'triple dividend' by improving health immediately, extending it throughout their adult lives, and benefiting the health and well-being of future generations.

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Absence of Life Skills Resulting in Alienation: An Analysis of Janice Pariat's *The Nine Chambered Heart*

Sumi Choudhury* & Pratiksha Alamman**

Abstract

A sustainable future requires including people in society regardless of their religion, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality. However, in the post-pandemic era, as society moves toward new levels of inclusivity, many aspects of human life are going unaddressed or unnoticed. Janice Pariat, a renowned figure in Northeast Indian English Literature, portrays an unnamed female protagonist—a loner in a crowded world—in her novel *The Nine Chambered Heart*. She is burdened with childhood trauma, abandonment issues, and a lack of genuine connection to the outside world or her family. It is also suggested that she is unaware of her own sexuality. This study will utilise the mentioned novel as the primary source, with related texts, such as theoretical discourses, research papers, and articles, serving as secondary materials. This paper aims to explore the protagonist's psyche to examine how the absence of essential life skills—such as effective communication, interpersonal relations, self-awareness, creative thinking, and emotional coping—contributes to her feelings of isolation and trauma. The article attempts to establish that the lack of these life skills is what causes her to feel alienated and unsettled.

Keywords: Alienation, Gender, Life skills, Sexuality, Trauma

Introduction

Janice Pariat is an Indian poet and writer from Meghalaya, a Northeastern state. She has authored *Boats on Land: A Collection of Short Stories* (2012), *Seahorse: A Novel* (2014), and a novella titled *The Nine Chambered Heart* (2017). This paper focuses on her work, *The Nine Chambered Heart*, to analyse how the alienation experienced by the central character may have

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resulted from the lack of life skills in her personality. In the novella, nine characters narrate their experiences with a woman who is anonymous and whose personality remains ambiguous. Despite being the central character, her perspective is not provided to readers. However, from the descriptions of her by the nine narrators, it is clear she lacked essential life skills from a young age.

Talking about Life Skills, these are defined by the World Health Organisation as “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life” (WHO, 2003). The ten core life skills are identified as Self-Awareness, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Decision Making, Problem Solving, Effective Communication, Interpersonal Relationships, Empathy, Coping with Stress, and Coping with Emotions. These ten core life skills may be categorised into three sections: Thinking Skills, Social Skills, and Emotional Skills. This article aims to establish the view that the protagonist of *The Nine Chambered Heart* lacks at least five of the ten core life skills. As a result, she can never blend into her surroundings; she constantly feels left out and alienated. Alienation can be defined as “a psychological state of an individual and...alienated is the person who has been estranged from, made unfriendly toward his society and the culture it carries” (Nettler, 2020, p. 2). In other words, when one feels detached from the society and culture to which they belong, a vacuum is created. In such a state, a person can no longer identify with their surroundings and is alienated.

Review of Literature

Janice Pariat, a renowned figure in Northeast Indian English Literature, has authored several works, starting with *Seahorse* (2014), followed by the novella discussed in this article, *The Nine Chambered Heart* (2017), and her latest publication, *Everything the Light Touches* (2022). Additionally, she has compiled a collection of short stories titled *Boats on Land* (2014). Pariat’s narrative technique, regardless of genre, is rooted in the traditional life and belief systems of the northeastern region of India. Her writings extensively explore interpersonal relationships, individuality, rituals, customs, religion, and the supernatural. A melancholic undertone is a constant feature of her work. Notably, influenced by the lush greenery of the region, her content can also be examined through an ecocritical lens, given the prominent use of natural imagery in all her compositions.

Scholarly studies have been conducted on Janice Pariat’s writings from various perspectives. Her *Boats on Land* is analysed from the viewpoint

of queer studies in Harajit Goswami's "Lesbian Consciousness and the Subaltern's Voice: Reading Janice Pariat's *Boats on Land*" (2017). In the research article, the researcher examines the short stories to explore lesbian consciousness in an unbiased, non-prejudiced, and non-judgmental manner. Additionally, Arbina Phonglo, in her "Perspectival Truth in a Postmodern Novel: A Study of Janice Pariat's *The Nine Chambered Heart*" (2019), emphasises that the protagonist's story is narrated from the perspectives of nine different individuals. Therefore, there cannot be a single truth or an unbiased narration. Instead, the portrayal of reality itself is perspective-based.

The importance of life skills in the day-to-day lives of individuals cannot be ignored at any cost. Ravindra Prajapati's "Significance of Life Skills Education" (2017) emphasises that life skills enhance an individual's ability to meet the needs and demands of today's society. It is through life skills education that individuals in modern society are empowered to navigate their surroundings and integrate into the community.

The term 'Alienation' originates from Karl Marx, who used a four-dimensional approach to describe the estrangement or detachment of people from aspects of their own human nature. The third dimension of his theory is alienation from others, while the fourth is alienation from self. Richard Schacht, in his book *Alienation* (1970), explores the concept of alienation in the works of Marx and Hegel to examine its modern usage, including its causes and effects.

Method

The researcher aims to investigate the absence of different Life Skills, such as self-awareness, creative thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relations, and coping with emotions, which lead to alienation in the character of the anonymous protagonist of Janice Pariat's *The Nine Chambered Heart*.

The research design used in this study is qualitative. Qualitative research methods are generally employed to gather in-depth insights into a problem or to generate new ideas. Here, the researchers will closely read the text, analyse it, and understand it based on the insights gained and the formulation of the problem.

The research questions of the study can be stated as follows:

1. How do life skills help an individual cope with their surroundings to lead a sustainable life?

2. How does the absence of different life skills lead to alienation?

The objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To study the lack of Life Skills evident in the protagonist.
2. To show that the absence of Life Skills leads to alienation.
3. To read other critical theories related to Life Skills and alienation.

It is hypothesised that essential Life Skills, such as self-awareness, creative thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, and coping with emotions, are absent, and this invisibility leads to the protagonist's alienated nature.

There are two types of data collected for the study: primary data and secondary data. The primary data is the novella, Janice Pariat's The Nine Chambered Heart. The secondary data for the article is gathered from various relevant articles, research papers, and internet sources related to Life Skills and Alienation.

Variables in this article are of two types: independent variable and dependent variable. The independent variable is unchangeable and is the cause of the research problem, whereas the dependent variable changes in response to the independent variable and represents the effect of the research problem. In this study, the independent variable is Life Skills, and the dependent variable is the Alienation faced by the protagonist.

Since a qualitative method will be used for the research, the researchers should conduct an extensive study and critically analyze the primary data, the text, i.e., Janice Pariat's The Nine Chambered Heart. For the secondary data, the researchers have engaged in library research and collected data from various internet sources. The research procedure will thus rely on the researchers' insights developed through close reading of the text and the materials associated with the dependent and independent variables of the research.

Discussion

The anonymous protagonist of The Nine Chambered Heart exemplifies someone who feels isolated due to a lack of social skills. She often appears aloof and rarely speaks to anyone. She is stubborn, complex, and hard to understand. As the nine narrators share their stories, it becomes clear that they struggle with effective communication. Instead, she prefers to keep to herself. In the first chapter, titled "The Saint," the narrator, a teacher, meets

the protagonist when she is a schoolgirl who cannot express what she is feeling. She hardly participates in class and mostly remains silent. Multiple narrators in the novel attempt to understand her personality, but fail due to her poor communication. In the chapter “The Caretaker,” the narrator states, “your face indecipherable. Are you thoughtful? Bored? Dulled by your surroundings? Quietly contemplating setting the place on fire?” (Pariat, 2017, p. 46). It is clear that other narrators also see her as someone who does not openly reveal her feelings but is often shrouded in mystery.

Perhaps due to her limited meaningful communication with the people in her life, the protagonist struggles with forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships. The readers do not get references to any of her friends. There is plenty of evidence showing her detachment even from her family since childhood. She refers to her parents as “part-time parents” (68) and openly admits, “I’d tell people they (her parents) were dead. That they died in a car crash” (30). The character experiences anxiety throughout her life but cannot identify the cause or control it; this further contributes to her sense of alienation. Since she lacked a sense of belonging as a child, she faces difficulty in getting along and communicating with others later in life. Fear of abandonment affects her psyche. Under this emotional burden, the central character recounts her childhood memories and laments, “I couldn’t understand why I was left behind” (30). It is noteworthy that “Life Skills play important roles in developing interpersonal skills and self-development” (Kumar, 2021, p. 2273). These skills are clearly missing in the protagonist, leading her to live an unsettled life. She moves from place to place, falls in love, gets hurt repeatedly, falls in love again, seeks warmth and passion, yet does not feel fulfilled.

According to Ouane (2002), the development of life skills results from the constructive processing of information on both social and individual levels. This information may be extracted from daily life, work, and the rapid changes that occur throughout a person’s life. Because the protagonist has lived a secluded life since childhood, she never had the chance to engage in fruitful interactions with others that could have helped her become more adaptable in terms of life skills. As a loner, she lacked the experiences necessary for developing essential life skills that might have prevented her from feeling alienated among the crowd. It is observed that alienated people suffer from “a chronic feeling of inner emptiness caused by the inability to integrate past and future into present and thus to establish a coherent sense of identity” (Fuchs, 2020, p. 382). In the novella, frequent flashbacks and flash-forwards are used to show the characters’ loss of sense

of time and space. Several incidents demonstrate that she is both alienated and fragmented to the point that she can no longer make sense of her own feelings. In this context, the protagonist's lack of self-awareness is evident. She is even alienated from herself, unable to understand her own feelings and emotions. Many times, she appears numb and unresponsive; perhaps not because she does not feel anything, but because it is almost impossible for her to comprehend her emotions fully. This kind of detachment from oneself deepens the sense of alienation. Leopold (2020) argues that alienation is “a distinct kind of psychological or social ill; namely, one involving a problematic separation between a self and other that properly belong together” (1). This separation is clearly evident in the characters under analysis. Therefore, when she attempts to process and express her emotions, she often feels disappointed. In the chapter “The Undertaker,” the only female narrator in the play offers another dimension to the protagonist's personality. Their developing female friendship deepens into a more intimate one. It reaches a point where the narrator says, “We are close enough to kiss... Your fingers graze mine, intertwined, and you do not release them” (Pariat, 2017, pp. 78-79). However, she again struggles to cope with her emotions; hence, the narrator describes her as “impassive” (76).

The protagonist's lack of another Life Skill is evident from the very beginning of the novella. She is portrayed as a student poor in drawing and imagination, as her teacher, the narrator of the chapter “The Saint,” describes her and the other students in the class as “A few are truly accomplished, you are not one of them” (3). She prefers subjects like mathematics and science, which require rationality, rather than any emotional or imaginative qualities. This explicitly points to the lack of creative thinking as a life skill. This trait can be linked to the numbness she experiences in adulthood. When asked why she does not pursue her childhood dream of becoming an origamist, she responds, “I don't know if I have enough paper” (185). This shows that she desires happiness and fulfilment, but acts in opposition. Such behavioural traits can also be associated with alienation, which conveys “the emotional tone which accompanies any behaviour which the person is compelled to act self-destructively” (Lewis, 1970, p. 4). The protagonist also acts self-destructively when she does not meet her own emotional needs or those of others. She fears attachment and prefers to remain a nomad. However, she ultimately ends up getting lost and hurt more than ever.

Findings

After a close analysis of Janice Pariat's The Nine Chambered Heart, re-

searchers have found that Life Skills are essential for an individual. Life Skills enable a person to become both a good citizen and a successful person. They are the tools people use to connect with their surroundings, society, and others. Without Life Skills, a person may face alienation, detachment, and a sense of unfulfillment. Therefore, it is important to focus on developing Life Skills from childhood. If the protagonist could have managed her emotions and developed self-awareness, much of her suffering could have been alleviated. Additionally, if she had communicated effectively and built interpersonal relationships, her aloofness and challenging behaviour might have been understood by others, allowing her to be integrated into society. Thus, her alienation can be rightly attributed to the lack of essential Life Skills in her character.

Limitations

The researchers aim to focus solely on how the lack of life skills leads to alienation in the selected novella. The character on whom the entire research is based, the novella does not provide a point of view from her side. Hence, the analysis of the character is done from the perspectives of nine different narrators, who view her life and personality through their own individual lenses. The limitation of the study could be further demonstrated by the researchers' selective perspective, which tends to overlook many other important aspects, such as social taboos, customs and traditions, gender roles, economic inequality, injustice, religion, and many other trending research issues in today's era.

Implications of the study

Following the paths of the new critics, the researchers closely read the text and tried to critically analyse not only the protagonist's lack of Life Skills but also the detachment and alienation stemming from the same. The importance of Life Skills for a sustainable and fulfilled life is a significant aspect of study in contemporary times. In our current pedagogical landscape, incorporating Life Skills courses into the curriculum is of utmost importance, as it would help individuals develop both their intrinsic and extrinsic behaviours.

Conclusion

Life skills today act as a catalyst that enables a person to live a seamless life. The protagonist of the novella discussed in this article suffers solely because of her lack of life skills. Starting with being alienated from her family, she grows up to be someone who is alienated from her surround-

ings and even from herself. She has no opportunity to develop the life skills that could have made it easier for her to integrate into society. With life skills education becoming mandatory in the school system, it is expected that young people will have ample opportunities to develop the skills that will help them become effective members of society.

Scope for further Research and Practical Relevance

As a Northeastern-born author, Janice Pariat primarily explores local flavours, such as folklore and traditions, that convey culture and practices. Her characters are mystical, filled with internal ethos and pathos that are difficult to interpret unless viewed closely. The aspect of Life Skills is a newly recognised focus that not only explains the external behaviour of Pariat's problematic characters but also encourages researchers to analyse her texts through various lenses, including Ecocriticism and gender studies.

In the novella *The Nine Chambered Heart*, Janice Pariat portrays the protagonist as alienated and detached from her surroundings, leading a life of unfulfillment due to a lack of important Life Skills. The twenty-first-century pedagogy facilitates all-around development of the learners, and the absence of Life Skills poses a learning barrier. Hence, the amalgamation of Life Skills in the present curriculum would pave the way for the teaching-learning process to become a full-fledged discourse.

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Life as a Drama: A Basic Tenet of Rajyoga and Its Potential as a Life Skill Enabler

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Abstract

Rajyoga is a set of teachings and practices of the Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya - a spiritual organisation that was established in the year 1937. Its teachings are based on a series of divine revelations received and visions experienced by its founder. They offer a deep insight into profound questions such as who we are (nature of the self), the identity of God and the meaning of the world cycle. Accordingly, three core tenets defining Rajyoga are Soul Consciousness (awareness of the self as a soul), God Consciousness (awareness of God as a Supreme Soul and His relationship with souls) and Life as a Drama.

Adopting a phenomenological approach, this paper reflects on the third tenet - life as a drama. This tenet sees life as a play where individuals enact predetermined roles. Drawing from daily discourses (murlis - recorded teachings that are being read out every day) as well as lived experiences of practice, the researchers analysed the narratives associated with this tenet to extract meaning and implications. The analysis suggests that adopting this worldview fosters life skills such as wilful surrender, acceptance, forbearance and contentment. Furthermore, it cultivates spiritual detachment, equanimity, interpersonal understanding and forgiveness through the psychological distance that the drama demands from the audience. Finally, the cyclical dimension of the drama anchors the rajyoga practitioners in stronger values and enables them to realign their goals in a purposeful direction.

Keywords: *Rajyoga, Life as a Drama, Life Skills*

About Rajyoga and its Tenets

Rajyoga, as practiced in the Prajapita Brahma Kumari Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya is described as an intellectual and loving communion of the in-

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dividual soul with the Supreme Soul or the remembrance of the Supreme Soul by an individual soul (New Beginnings, Brahma Kumaris, 1996). This communion is considered grounded in spiritual knowledge concerning three interrelated aspects: individual self as soul, its relationship with God and His attributes and the nature of the world cycle. Collectively, they form the three basic tenets of Rajyoga: Soul Consciousness, God Consciousness, and Life as a Drama. All these three tenets are interlinked and form a systematic spiritual understanding about life. Soul Consciousness emphasizes that the physical body is not the true identity of the individual. Rather, the self is understood as a soul—a point of light—endowed with intrinsic qualities such as knowledge, purity, love, happiness, bliss, peace and power. God, too, is conceived as a soul—a point of light—but supreme in His role and function, embodying the boundless ocean of all the qualities that a soul possesses. When souls become depleted through repeated cycles of birth and death, reconnecting with God is considered essential for spiritual renewal and re-empowerment.

Life as A Drama: Third Tenet of Rajyoga

The famous quote from William Shakespeare's play "As You Like It" (Act 2, Scene 7) let out a big secret of life. It goes as follows: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances;..." A similar and complete understanding and implications of life as a drama is articulated in murlis (daily discourse that is being read every day at all Brahma Kumaris centres). The basic understanding offered about life in these murlis is that human life is a vast play unfolding on the world stage.

यह मनुष्य सृष्टिरुपी बेहद का नाटक है | यहाँ हम आते हैं पारूट बजाने |(Sakar Murli Revised Course dated 7th December 2016). जो कुछ होता है सब नैध है | (Sakar Murli Revised Course dated 3rd November 2022). यह ड्रामा है, इसका नाम है हार-जीत का खेल | सुख-दुःख का खेल | (Sakar Murli Revised Course dated 19th October 2016)

Yeh manushya srushti roopi behad ka natak hai. Yaha hum aate hai part bajane. ... Jo kuch hota hai sab nundh haiYeh drama hai, iska naam hai haar-jeet ka khel. Sukh-dukkha ka khel

The concept is further expressed through phrases like lila, prabhu ki lila, khel, char din kaa natak. The human beings are actors in this drama, who are enacting their assigned roles. Even God is understood to have a specific part in this cosmic drama. Just the way different characters in drama (hero, heroine, villain) are important and necessary to entertain the audi-

ence, there are people with diverse temperaments in each one's lives too, to create the experience of life.

Important dimensions about life as drama are reflected in this basic tenet. They are – the drama is “अनादी” (unbegotten); “बना बनाया” (preordained/predetermined/purva niyojit); “बेहद का” (all-encompassing/applicable to everyone and everything in this world), “अवनिशी” (non-destructible – unchangeable) and cyclical and repetitive. It is expressed using various other words such as destiny, भाग्य (bhagya), नियती (niyati), संयोग (sanyog), होनी (honi), प्रालब्ध (pralabdha). It is also reflected in expressions like “होनी तो हो के रहे, अनहोनी न होय” (“honi to ho ke rahe, anahoni na hoye”) (Matawale, 2021, p. 46) and “lines on the palm cannot be eliminated” from other literary sources.

Practice of Life as a Drama: Enabling of Life Skills

Emotional Regulation (Equanimity) and Contentment

If life is a preordained drama in which every role is already configured, then human activity in this world may be likened to “mere paperwork” (“कागजी कारवाई”). Events such as birth, death, education, career, wedding and countless other life milestones are already scripted in the cosmic manuscript. Human beings simply enact these roles in the corporeal world and record them through lived experience. What lies unmanifest in the seed becomes manifest in this world. In this sense, nothing truly new is created, even though human beings often believe themselves to be the doers.

Two terms – करन-करावनहार and करनहार – that appear in murlis (eg. Sa-
kar Murli Revise Course dated 24th May 2022) helps us understand roles of human beings vis-à-vis the role of the God. Parampita Parameshwar is said to be the करन-करावनहार – He is the ultimate doer and human beings are करनहार – instruments through whom action is carried out. This comprehension diminishes the ego (अहंकार) which is considered to be the root cause of the suffering and relieves individuals from the heavy burden of personal responsibility.

Understanding life as drama fosters ‘अचल अडोल स्थिति’—a state of grounded steadiness— One remains steady and equanimous in the midst of change, conflict and chaos. Drama thus acts as a protective shield (ढाल) which takes all the blows of adversity, allowing people to accept circumstances with phrases such as “it was meant to be this way...” or “it was never meant to happen...”.

परस्थितीयोंमें ड्रामा हमारी मदद करता है, सुरक्षा कवच बन जाता है।

Paristitiyo mei drama humari madad karata hai, suraksha kawach ban jata hai.

Moreover, when events are all considered to be preordained, then fear about something untoward happening becomes redundant.

जब हुआ ही पड़ा है, वजिय नशिचति है, तो घबराना वा भयभीत होना हो ही नहीं सकता | (Sakar Murli Revised Course dated 18th January 2017)

Jab hua hi pada hai, vijay nishchit hai, toh ghabarana va bhaybheet hona ho hi nahi saktा

Finally, since existence itself is regarded as play, the practitioner develops an attitude of playfulness.

कसी भी प्रकार का विधिन या समस्या अभी खेल के समान अनुभव होनी चाहयि | वार नहीं है, खेल है | तो खेल समझने से खुशी-खुशी पार कर लेंगे और वार समझने से घबरायेंगे भी और हलचल में भी आ जाएँगे | ड्रामा में पार्टधारी होने के कारण कोई भी सीन सामने आती है तो ड्रामा के हसिब से सब खेल है, यह समृद्धी रहे तो एकरस रहेंगे, हलचल नहीं होगी | (Avyakta Murli dated 2nd January 1982 – Revised course 25th December 2016)

Kisi bhi prakar ka vighna va samasya abhi khel ke saman Anubhav honi chahiye. Waar nahi hai, khel hai. Toh khel samazane se Khushi-khushi paar kar lenge aur waar samazane se ghabarayenge bhi aur halchal mei bhi aa jaayenge. Drama mei partdhari hone ke kaaran koi bhi scene samane aati hai toh drama ke hisab se sab khel hai, yah smruti rahe toh ekras rahenge, halchal nahi hongi

This helps develop a skill of being content with one's lot, as one understands the destined nature of the drama and the futility of desiring to have one's way.

ड्रामा की अंडरस्टैंडिंग नहीं तो हरेक परस्थिति में संतुष्ट रहना संभव नहीं है | ड्रामा के राज को सामने रखते संतुष्ट होना है |

“Drama ki understanding nahi toh harek paristithi mei santushta rehena sambhav nahi hai. Drama ke raaz ko samane rakhate, santushta hona hai”

Sense of Self-Efficacy and Virtuous Living

Life as drama is understood to be cyclical—it unfolds within a stipulated span, concludes, and then repeats ditto, just like a theatre performance.

यह चला ही नहीं आया है, लेकिन कल्प कल्प ऐसा ही चलेगा |

“Yah chala hi nahi aaya hai, lekin kalpa kalpa aise hi chalega”

It implies that every part has been enacted umpteen number of times before. Nothing is truly “new” happening. This understanding changes the perception – from facing a situation for the first time to having faced it before multiple times. One starts operating from “Been there, done that”. This relieves one of stress of uncertainty/unknown and gives confidence and a sense of self-efficacy: “I can manage this because I’ve done it before.”

The philosophical resonance of this idea is evident in two well-known concepts:

Amor fati (Latin for “love of fate”) (as cited in Taylor, 2008): An attitude of wholeheartedly embracing whatever happens as both good and necessary. It is the practice of saying “yes” to life without blame or resistance. Within the metaphor of life as drama, amor fati encourages one to accept their role and lines without protest, trusting that even apparent setbacks are integral to the larger play. This perspective reduces resistance, transforms uncertainty into acceptance, and strengthens self-efficacy: if the script must recur, one can perform it with greater wisdom and virtue each time.

Eternal recurrence (as cited in Taylor, 2008): The proposition that one must imagine living the same life, with all its moments, over and over for eternity.

When placed alongside the cyclical nature of the world drama, these ideas highlight the moral urgency of the present moment. If one is destined to live the same life repeatedly till eternity, then the responsibility to set one’s aims rightly and to live virtuously in the now becomes paramount. Choices made in this cycle determine the quality of experience in the cycles to come.

Thus, awareness of the drama not only fosters self-efficacy but also inspires virtuous living—a commitment to purity, responsibility and ethical alignment in everyday life.

Acceptance and Surrender

The metaphor of life as drama reduces suffering by nurturing the skills of surrender and acceptance toward His will, His design, and His plan. When events unfold against one’s wishes, the human tendency is to magnify suffering by endlessly asking “Why? How? How come?”—questions that often yield no clear answers. This leads to complaining and grumbling. One plays the victim by asking “why me?”, draining one’s time and energy.

ड्रामा की सीन पर मंथन करना - क्यो, क्या, कैसे - यह कसि चीज का मंथन है? दही को जब मंथन किया जाता है तो मक्खन नकिलता है। अगर पाणी को मंथन करेंगे तो क्या नकिलेगा? कुछ भी नहीं, रजिस्टर में वही होगा - एक तो थकावट; दुसरा - टाइम वेस्ट। (Prajapita Brahmakumari Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, 2014, pg 20).

Drama ki scene par manthan karana – kyo, kya, kaise – yah kis cheez ka manthan hai? Dahi ko jab manthan kiya jata hai, toh makkhan nikalata hai. Agar pani ko manthen karenge toh kya nikalega? Kuch bhi nahi. Result mei vahi hoga – ek toh thakawat; dusra – time waste.

Moreover, as one broods over the past, one is not available for the next scene of the drama and faces it with the same old habits and tendencies (BK Classes Madhuban, 2013, 24.01). Instead of struggling and fighting one's circumstances, the key to peace is acceptance and surrender to the drama – be willing and agreeable (राजी) - and play the part given. Be it a success or failure, loss or gain, respect or disgrace, the one who develops this skill remains unperturbed and uninfluenced.

ड्रामा की भावी पर अडोल रहना है। ड्रामा में जो हुआ सो राइट। कभी डगमग नहीं होना है। कसी भी बात में संशय नहीं लाना है। (Sakar Murli Revised Course dated 29th oct 2016)

drama ki bhavi par adul rehena hai. drama mei jo hua so right. Kabhi dagmag nahi hona hai, kisi bhi baat mei sanshay nahi lana hai.

ड्रामा के राज को जो जाणते हैं वो ही राजी रहते हैं। जो नहीं जाणते वो नाराज रहते हैं।

Drama ke raaz ko jo janate hai woh raazi rehete hai, jo nahi janate woh naraz rehete hai.

Moreover, Acceptance and surrender prevents ruminations and neurotic tendencies and ushers one to become solution-focused. As Kaiser (cited in Regan, 2021) puts it “when you are no longer tied to the outcome of how it must be, you free yourself up to abundant possibilities”. Instead of wasting time, energy in questioning life, one can employ one's resources more effectively; one can surrender one's compulsion to control and develop a deeper trust (श्रद्धा) in the universe. That's how, Bruneau (2000) maintains, one enters a space of receiving rather than resisting and allows life to present us with even more possibilities. This strengthens our skill of flying over the mountain of difficulties rather than crashing ourselves on those mountains or trying to bring them down (Brahma Kumaris Om

Shanti Music, 2022, 20:15). The distinction between pain and suffering is crucial here. Life circumstances can be painful, yet one need not suffer if one is facing them effectively by accepting and surrendering themselves.

जैसे इरामा का सेकेण्ड बाई सेकेण्ड जसि रीति से, जैसा चलता है - उसी के साथ-साथ मन की स्थिति ऐसे ही इरामा की पटरी पर सीधी चलती रहे, जरा भी हलि नहीं - चाहे संकल्प से, चाहे वाणी से | ऐसी अवस्था हो | (Avyakta Murli dated 1969, pg. 36)

jaise drama ka second by second jis riti se, jaisa chalata hai – ussi ke sath-sath mann ki sthiti aise hi drama ki patari par sidhi chalati rahe, jara bhi hile nahi – chahe sankalp se, chahe wani se. aisi avastha ho.

At first glance, this point of view seems to take away the locus of control from human beings. It is in a way deterministic, appearing to be suggesting that one must live with the given and not do anything to improve it. Yet, paradoxically, belief in life as drama offers the real choice. Our ignorance about script ahead in drama gives us all the controls back and we are being challenged about what we do now with the life offered to us. With the conviction that good actions will determine good outcomes, one is encouraged to exercise control and live authentically and not give up. One must continue one's efforts (पुरुषार्थ) (purusharth) towards the set goals and not leave it to drama.

...पुरुषार्थ बनि तो पानी भी नहीं मलिगा | आपेही थोड़ेही पानी आकार मुँह में पड़ जायेगा | (Sakar Murli Revised Course dated 3rd December 2016)

...Purusharth bina toh pani bhi nahi milega. Aape hi thodehi pani aakar muh mei pad jayega.

This point against passivity is very aptly penned in Marathi saying “असेल माझा हरी तर देईल खाटल्यावरी” (“Asel Maza Hari Tar Deil Khatlyavari”) (If my God exists, He will serve me on the platter). So murlis clarify: knowledge of life as a drama is to be utilized for whatever has gone by; one is still absolutely free to influence the future and shape the destiny. It in no way implies that one is helpless. Acceptance and surrender is not about giving up one's pursuits; it is about letting go of the compulsion to control things. It simply means - one has just created a space within oneself for life circumstances not of one's liking and which cannot be changed at this moment (Bruneau, 2000). The key is to discern in which spheres of one's life one has control and expand that circle of control by acting tactfully. As Carl Rogers (1961) insightfully said, “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change” (p. 17), acceptance is the first

step towards transformation. When one holds this tenet in the back of one's mind, accepts fully oneself and one's lot and does not struggle, one is more inclined to change (oneself and one's life) in the favourable direction.

Detachment

The murlis prescribe how one should view and enact life's drama: just as one watches drama in the theatre - as an audience, witness or observer with a good amount of detachment. Detachment is a feeling of emotional freedom resulting from a lack of involvement in a problem, situation or with a person (APA Dictionary of Psychology). In fact, the condition to enjoy drama is that one maintains a detachment. The moment one gets involved, it turns into “संसार” (“sansaar”) (worldly entanglement), whereas with detachment, it remains “नाटक” (“natak”) (play) (Prajapita Brahmakumari Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, 2014, pg 15). In other words, one does not internalize or absorb life's events; instead, one allows them to pass through like images on a screen. Entanglement—identifying with or becoming attracted to events—generates stress, worry and confusion, leading to pain and suffering. But when the same events are viewed with detachment, they appear as drama—something to observe, learn from, even enjoy with a sense of amusement and wonder.

तादात्म तथा आसक्ती कि मनोवृत्ती होने पर संसार दुखःदायक, जटील और जंजाल मालूम पड़ता है और साक्षी तथा अनासक्ती की मनोवृत्ती होने पर आनंददायक नाटक | (Prajapita Brahmakumari Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, 2014, pg. 15)

tadatyma tatha asakti ki manovrutti hone par sansar dukhdayak, jatil aur janjal malum padata hai Sakshi tatha anasakti ki manovrutti hone par ananddayak natak.

Thus, life has to be lived by psychologically removing oneself from action scenes, taking a step back or by taking an aerial view so that one can see clearly what is happening. This is also called taking a metacognitive stance (Wells, 2000). Still better, it is advised, to sit next to the Creator-Director of the play, the Parampita Parameshwar, and watch the play with the same “non-transactional” stance (साक्षीभाव) - that He has towards this world. This shift in perspective elevates awareness, producing inner peace. Thus, practice of viewing life as a drama teaches one to exercise the skill of detachment. A timeless symbol of spirituality – lotus in the mud – illustrates this meaning. Though rooted in mud, the lotus remains untouched by it. Similarly, one may live in the world but can remain insulated from its happenings of all kinds.

सीट पर बैठकर खेल देखते हो | साक्षीपन है सीट. इस सीट पर बैठकर ड्रामा देखो तो बहुत मज़ा आयेगा | सदा अपने को साक्षी की सीट पर सेट रखो, फरि वाह ड्रामा वाह! यही गीत गाते रहेंगे | (Avyakta Murli dated 11th December 2016)

Seat par baithkar khel dekhate ho. Saakshipan hai seat. Iss seat par baithkar drama dekho toh batut maza aayega. Sada apne ko saakshi ki seat par set rakho, fir wah drama wah. Yahi geet gate rahenge.

This practice parallels the concept of “Externalizing the Problem” in Narrative Counselling (Morgon, 2000). Externalising establishes a context where people experience themselves as separate from the problem where the problem no longer speaks to them of their identity or the ‘truth’ about themselves. It helps them gain a better perspective; rather than personalizing it which one typically does. “The problem is the problem, the person is not the problem” (Morgon, 2000). Just as clients experience relief when they cease identifying with their problems, one can get the similar relief when one sees oneself separate from the events and situations of one’s life. Moreover, the study and practice of tenet “Life as drama” fosters mindfulness – awareness that drama is going on and that one is playing a part and one is the audience too. This prevents impulsive mistakes and cultivates clarity and appropriateness in responding to situations.

Interpersonal Relationship Skills

Holding in awareness that life is drama also reshapes relationships. When others are seen as simply playing their assigned parts, they will be perceived as innocent. Judgment towards them softens and acceptance deepens. One is less likely to blame and more likely to relate with compassion and understanding.

हर आत्मा के पार्ट को अच्छी तरह से जानकर पार्ट में आओ | आत्माओं के संबंध-संपर्क में आते न्यारे और प्यारे पन की समानता रहे तो हलचल समाप्त हो जायेगी | ऐसे सदा अचल और साक्षी रहना ... (Sakar Murli Revised Course dated 4th November 2016)

Har aatma ke part ko acchi tarah se jaankar part mei aao. Aatma ke sam-bandh-sampark mei aate nyare aur pyarepan ki samanata rahe, toh halchal samapt ho jayegi. Aise sada achal aur sakshi rahana....

Just like theatre actors change their costumes and go home once drama is over, Life as a drama tells us to get going – to move on. This wisdom is

echoed in the verse – “बत्ती ताही बसिारी दे, आगे की सुधि ले” (“Biti tahi bisaari de, aage ki sudhi le” (Giridhar ki Kundaliya), that is, let bygones be bygones; improve those that lie ahead.

बत्ती को परवित्तन में जाने, बल भरने के लिये, उस रूप से सोचो. ...क्वेश्चन नहीं करो. क्वेश्चन मारक के बदली फुलस्टौप, बट्टी लागाओ (Prajapita Brahmakumari Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, 2014, pg. 20)

Biti ko parivartan mei jane, bal bharane ke liye, uss roop se socho. ...question nahi karo. Question mark ke badali full stop, bindi lagao.

That is, not get stuck with any scenes of the past. Thus, the skill of letting go (बत्ती को बत्ती करना) (biti ko biti karana) will further help one develop the skill of forgetting and forgiving all sorts of wrongdoings. When each soul is seen as bound by the script, performing its part, interpersonal negativity transforms into equanimity, harmony and joy.

इरामा के भावी के बंधन में सर्व आत्माये बंधी हुई हैं | सभी पार्ट बजा रही हैं | (Avyakta Murli dated 1969, pg 15) इरामा में नशिचय होने से इर्षा, द्वेष, नफरत, झगड़ा खत्म हो जाता है | हरेक के पार्ट को देख खुश हो जाना |

drama ki bhavi ke bandhan mei sarve aatmaye bandhi hui hai, sabhi part baja rahi hai. Drama mei nischay hone se, irsha, dwesh, nafrat, zagada khatam ho jata hai.

Harek ke part ko dekh kar khush ho jana.

Thus, life as drama nurtures forgiveness, tolerance, acceptance, and compassion—cornerstones of healthy and resilient relationships.

Conclusion

When life circumstances cannot be changed, changing one's perception is an effective coping strategy and counselling technique. Metaphor of life as a drama often highlighted in the Murlis serves this purpose well. From birth onwards, the conditioning places individuals on the path that leads to suffering. In the absence of a right understanding about self, God and world cycle, one cannot change that path. More specifically, complete understanding of all dimensions of Drama metaphor can facilitate this shift. Its preordained nature helps regulate emotions and fosters contentment. It also teaches surrender and acceptance towards those things that cannot be changed. The cyclical and repetitive dimension of drama enhances self-efficacy and ushers one to lead a virtuous life. Constant memory that drama is taking place and one is both actor and audience creates a metacognitive

stance, cultivating detachment (saakshi bhaav) that protects the self from being entangled in stress and suffering. Thus, the drama metaphor not only illustrates spiritual wisdom but also aligns with contemporary psychological insights, offering a practical and transformative framework for living with resilience, peace and virtue.

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