

POSITIVE SCHOOLING: THE EMERGING CONCEPT AND ROLE OF INTERVENTION BASED LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION

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Abstract- Education has the power to influence the thinking, behavior and attitude of an individual and the community. To maneuver the society towards positive growth and to yield sustainable happiness, it becomes imperative that schools, the keystones in imparting knowledge, become inclusive of the innovative methodologies, novel technologies and state of the art template of education.

The traditional schooling method of imparting information is experiencing a paradigm shift. The current trend of education shows a penchant towards a more comprehensive and positive framework of education spreading itself to all aspects of development with special attention to promotion of mental wellbeing of students. This new pattern of education not only enables adolescents within school but also prepares them for future real world challenges as adults.

Keeping in view the vitality of contemporary education pattern, the New Education Policy (NEP 2020) has vehemently stressed on the need for making Life Skills Education a part of school curriculum. According to WHO, Life Skills are “the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable the individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.” Life Skills promote mental wellbeing and competence of an individual. They provide individuals with the capacity to understand their surroundings and situations better and also build better relationships with people. The use of Life Skills is widespread and multidimensional. These skills can prove to be of use in specific domains such as drug abuse, HIV/AIDS or internet addiction as well as in a general sense such as helping people to adjust better with their environment, developing a more empathetic approach towards others or developing better relationship with self and others.

Keywords: Positive Schooling, Life Skills Education, Mental Health, Wellbeing.

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.
Nelson Mandela

Introduction

Education is the process of facilitating learning of skills, acquisition of knowledge and formation of beliefs, values and habits. It is a very important developmental marker for any nation. It has unmediated as well as circuitous impact on the overall growth of the society. It influences numerous sectors like employment, health, economy, lifestyle, politics, societal dynamics and hence it becomes a very important determinant of well being of individuals, progress of a nation and quality of life of entire humanity.

The education pattern in India has a long and rich history. From the early gurukul pattern of education to the modern comprehensive prototype, education sector has always welcomed changes to accommodate the growth and globalization of the modern world. The gurukuls in ancient India were traditional Hindu schools imparting knowledge of subjects like Religion, Philosophy, Warfare, Mathematics, Astrology, Medicine etc. Education was free in gurukuls requiring the students to pay ‘Gurudakshina’, which was a voluntary contribution, after the completion of studies. When India came under foreign rule and became a British colony, western style of education began to influence and overpower the traditional methodology of schooling. In the 19th Century, by the recommendations of Macaulay (Minute on Indian Education, 1835), a new education pattern was introduced that focused primarily on promoting European science and Literature. Although this education system was introduced to deem the western education system better in comparison to the traditional Indian system, it did pave way for contemporary education in the country and the emphasis on English language ultimately helped in the freedom struggle. In the early 1900s, the Indian National Congress called for national education, placing an emphasis on technical and vocational training. In 1920 Congress initiated a boycott of government-aided and government-controlled schools and founded several ‘national’ schools and colleges. These failed, as the rewards of British-style education were so great that the boycott was largely ignored.

After Independence, education became one of the most important fields requiring modifications and developments in India. Various commissions and policies were made to formulate the best possible education pattern that addressed almost all the fragmentary issues. In 1952, the Mudaliar Commission was set up and in 1964, the Kothari Commission was set up to formulate and implement cogent education policy. These commissions were appointed to look into and make recommendations to various segments of education like school education, higher education, adult education, education of women and backward classes. These recommendations led to the implementation of Nation Policy on Education in 1968, 1979, 1986 and 1992. The New Education Policy (NEP 2020) is the most recent stratagem formed on education system. It has recommended new pattern of education as well as made modifications in the syllabus and the inclination of the entire education system. The new policy advocates a system that is more positive, comprehensive and disposed towards holistic development of every individual along with vocational training and gaining of factual knowledge.

Positive Psychological Intervention: the modern desideratum

Positive psychology is a rather novel branch of psychology differing from the traditional concept of diagnosis, classification and treatment of mental illnesses. It focuses on identifying, highlighting and enhancing the inherent goodness and capacities of people. It has led to the formulation and acceptance of a more comprehensive definition of mental health- “Mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (WHO, 2004). It advocates the development of attributes such as imagination, optimism, foresight, interpersonal talents, moral judgment, patience, humor, and fearlessness, as well as how to promote pleasure and life satisfaction (Gillham and Seligman, 1999). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) published their work on positive psychology marking the formal beginning of the new branch of Psychology - positive psychology and therefore, Seligman is often called the “Father of Positive Psychology.” The application of psychological ideas, research, and intervention strategies to comprehend the good, adaptable, imaginative, and emotionally satisfying elements of human behavior is known as positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The interventions based on Positive Psychology also termed as positive psychological intervention (PPI) is defined as “building its intervention on positive psychology theory and employing its coherent theoretical model to achieve the objective of promoting happiness” (Carr et al., 2020). Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) comprehensively define positive psychological interventions as “treatment methods or intentional activities that aim to cultivate positive feelings, behaviors, or cognitions”. A tremendous amount of research evidence is available that supports the effectiveness of positive psychology intervention. Meta-analysis results showed that positive psychology interventions significantly enhance subjective and psychological well-being and reduce depressive symptoms (Bolier et. al., 2013). Another study was performed to see the effect of PPI showed reduced stress and depression levels and increased subjective happiness (O’Leary et. al., 2015). A study based on PPI on a diverse sample of participants (Mongrain et. al., 2016) showed significant decreases in depressive symptoms predicted increases in meaning, pleasure, engagement, and satisfaction in life across follow-ups. Celano et. al (2017) performed a study on a group comprising of males and females with primary diagnosis of major depressive disorder to find improvements in depression, suicidal ideation, optimism and gratitude.

The need of positive psychology intervention in education

As a consequence of globalization and the advent of the technological era almost all spheres of life are experiencing a change to keep pace with the developments taking place. Education is one such domain. The current trend of positive schooling finds its roots in the principles of positive psychology. In accordance with the view that a full state of mental health involves more than the absence of illness (Keyes and Lopez, 2002), and a sharp focus on the promotion of well-being – beyond the treatment of ill-being the positive psychology intervention aims to assist people to flourish (Aspinwall and Staudinger, 2003; Gable and Haidt, 2005). This revolution in field of psychology had a major impact upon the field of education and schooling (Rusk and Waters, 2013; Donaldson et al., 2015). Seligman et. al.(2009) put forth an argument that psychological interventions should not only focus on eradicating student distress but also work as a “vehicle for increasing life satisfaction.” The concept of positive psychology intervention paved the way for promotion programs in schools dealing with enhancing the positive end of mental health rather than reducing the negative end (Waters, 2011; Waters et.al., 2017). Adolescence holds a significant position among the developmental stages as it witnesses some major changes, developments and transitions. It is a stage of risk as well as opportunities. Research findings indicate that adolescent mental health is pretty vulnerable and that mental illness in this specific population is on the rise (Gunnell et al. 2018; Mojtabai et al. 2016; Srivastava, 2021; Srivastava, 2022). In a study by Huebner et.al.(2000) on adolescents , 11% of all surveyed sample reported poor life satisfaction, with another 7% registering “terrible” or “unhappy” living.

Such reports deem it necessary to plan and implement an effective program based on the concept of positive psychology to attain a flourishing and thriving society. Research findings have already demonstrated the manifold benefits of positive psychology interventions. Implementing them in schools can help to deal with issues related to classroom and

academics as well as prepare the children and adolescents to deal effectively with their environment and surroundings. schools play a major role in children's development, including relationships, cognitive development, social skills, academic attainment, emotional, and behavioral control (Fazel et al., 2014). Classroom based intervention programs may be either targeted or universal. Building happiness into the school curriculum can be a successful approach to intervening in student mental health (Boniwell et al., 2016). This can be achieved by having PPIs that run as a year-round addition to the timetable (Shoshani and Steinmetz, 2014). There is also evidence to support the view that positive psychology interventions are effective in increasing students' motivation to study and enhancing their academic performance (Muro et al., 2018). Another step in this direction is KidsMatter. It is an intervention based program which has been shown to be effective in improving mental health outcomes. It functions by improving social and emotional skills (Littlefield et al., 2017). The Hummingbird project run in schools showed significant improvement in the wellbeing of school children (Platt et. al., 2020).

Intervention programs for life skills education

One important positive psychology intervention is Life skills education. The new education policy has introduced Life Skills Education in school curriculum in order to corroborate the concept of holistic development as well as to ascertain good mental health and wellbeing of every individual. Student mental health has become a global priority in education (WHO, 2013; UNESCO, 2015; WHO and UNESCO, 2021). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2015) suggests that "[p]erhaps the ultimate goal of education policy makers, teachers, and parents is to help children achieve the highest level of well-being possible." Life skills are a set of strategies and techniques that provide competence and dexterity to the individual to deal effectively with his or her environment, have a better understanding of oneself and others and also utilize the available resources in best possible fashion. WHO defines Life Skills as "the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life." Adaptive means that the person is flexible in approach and is able to adjust in different circumstances. Positive behavior implies that a person is forward looking, and even in difficult situations can identify a ray of hope and opportunities to find solution.

Another definition of Life Skills has been given by UNICEF, Life Skills are "a behavior change or behavior development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills. Hamburg (1990) defined life skills training as the teaching of requisite skills for surviving, living with others, and succeeding in a complex society. Powell (1995) defines life skills as the life coping skills consonant with the developmental tasks of the basic human development processes, namely those skills necessary to perform tasks for a given age and gender in the following areas of human development – psychological, physical, sexual, vocational, cognitive, moral, ego and emotional. Thus it is clearly seen that Life Skills can be utilized in dealing with specific issues like drug abuse, HIV/AIDS or internet addiction as well as in a general sense such as helping people to adjust better with their environment, developing a more empathetic approach towards others or developing better relationship with self and others. There is no dearth of research that indicated and highlights the importance of life skills in the developmental journey of an individual. Life Skills fall into three basic categories which complement, supplement and reinforce each other:

- Social or interpersonal skills
- Cognitive or thinking skill
- Emotional skill

WHO has identified ten core life skills- 1. Self Awareness 2. Empathy 3. Critical thinking 4. Creative thinking 5. Decision making 6. Problem solving 7. Interpersonal skills 8. Effective communication 9. Coping with stress 10. Managing emotions

Various researches have advocated the idea that introducing life skills education as an intervention based program within school curriculum gives positive results relating to academic achievement, mental wellbeing and stress and anxiety level of students. The inception of life skills program started in Community Mental Health Unit of NIMHANS, under the guidance of Parthasarathy who developed a 'Student Enrichment Program' for the rural adolescents (Vranda et.al., (2014). Another model was developed at Department of Psychiatry, NIMHANS Bangalore, Cascade Model of Life Skills Education Model in collaboration with World Health Organization – South East Asia Region Office (WHO-SEARO). The modules were developed according the developmental levels of adolescents separately 8th, 9th and 10th standards students using a teachers as a facilitators. The module covers various developmental themes of Nutrition, Hygiene, Academics, Interpersonal Relationships, Substance Use, Gender Issues, Career, Sexuality and Social Responsibility (Bharath et al., 2002; 2003; 2005). The psychiatric department of NIMHANS has launched another program - Life Skills Education Work Book for Children in Difficult Circumstances. Under this program child care community level workers implement the program in child care centers run by NGOs in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh. The workbook contains the various activities such as school dropout, healthy living, migration, running away,

child marriage, sexuality, anti social behavior, HIV/AIDS, sexual abuse, money management, maintaining relationship and caste discrimination.

There is enough evidence to support the effectiveness of life skills based intervention programs. A study by Ramesh and Farshad (2010), on a sample consisting of 500 students, life skills training was proved to be effective in increasing mental and physical health and also in decreasing the behavioural and social problems. Life skills training can promote social adjustment.(Rahmati et al. 2010). Maryam et. al.(2011) found that life skills training lead to significant increase in self esteem of adolescent students.

Conclusion

The paradigm shift in the thoughts of Psychology has led to a lot of changes in the concept of mental health and its scope. "Mental health is beyond the absence of illness", this thought has led to the revolutionary concept of positive psychology interventions. These interventions have put forth us a wide array of benefits and merits. Implementing positive psychology interventions has led to a significant decrease in student related problems like motivation, stress and anxiety levels or relationship issues. Positive psychology interventions based on life skills helps to create the competence to deal with such issues very efficiently. Life skills are the skills that help an individual to navigate though life problems in a positive and constructive manner.

Therefore inclusion of life skills program in school curriculum can be very helpful in day to day problem solving, decision making, building harmonious and fruitful relationships and making the best possible use of one's capacities and resources.

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