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Integrating Life Skills through ESL Learning Activities

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Abstract

Life Skills are very important for everyone particularly, students studying in schools. Today, English language has become the most indispensable component of everyone's mode of communication and also a means of survival. Though most of the textbooks/ course books including curriculum emphasizing on life skills in the content but teachers are not well trained to teach life skills and always it is neglected in English classroom which are necessary for students and this can cause a bigger problem in the future. English and Life Skills are very important to excel in ones career. These skills have to be taught very early during school days. Teaching English and Life Skills in schools have to have an entirely different approach than our traditional language teaching methods, which are strong in some sense but too rigid to meet the needs of today's fast growing world.

This paper primarily addresses the need of life skills in students and how effectively English and Life Skills can be taught with variety of ESL activities along with teaching suitable methods in a classroom setup. Secondly, it talks about how Life Skills can be incorporated in English language teaching and how the English teachers can implement in classroom with no difficulty.

Keywords: Life Skills, Communication, English, Survival, Curriculum.

Introduction

The phrase 'Life Skills' itself refers that the skills we need to make the most out of life. Life skills are usually connected with managing and living a healthier quality of life.

Generally, Life Skills can be defined as a set of skills gained either from classroom or society which helps individuals or groups successfully to handle problems and questions commonly encountered in their daily life. Life skills help people to encounter their life situation at home, school, work, and any other context in which they find themselves (Manglallan and Raskauskas, 2003; UNESCO, 2010).

The UNICEF has expanded the concept and defines life skills as a large group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills, which can help young people, make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills (Maclang-Vicencio: World Scientific Conference p. 3).

Evolution in our education can be more often termed as unskilled illiterate to unskilled literate. Though this statement is not true about everyone it does refer to the majority of people who graduate from colleges and get rejected for employment because of inadequate skills. With the current rate in number of literates in India; we should have been

global leaders. We have made education affordable to everyone and have made many amendments in the law to allow the underprivileged to benefit. All of this shows the emphasis and importance we give to education. If what Nelson Mandela said is true that "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" then in India we have missed an essential essence perhaps. For education to become meaningful and powerful enough to equip people with the strengths to change their life and the world around them. It has to impart skills, not merely information. Skills that give opportunity to change lives. Life Skills are an essential part of education now, like information is important so is life skills. This paper addresses the need of teaching life skills to underprivileged.

Life skills help people to encounter their life situation at home, school, work, and any other context in which they find themselves (Manglallan and Raskauskas, 2003; UNESCO, 2010).

Why teaching Life skills through English Language Activities?

Teaching English and Life Skills is very essential to children. Children in rural India do not have exposure to English from sources such as English movies, English news, and other English language programmes unlike students from urban areas. Primary source of learning English to these children is English teachers in schools. In the globalisation era, companies need efficient and skilful candidates. And life skills are needed to be successful in ones career and life. English teachers usually read different genres of literature. Literature reflects culture, traditions, habits, emotions, nature of people and many other things to lead one's life effectively. Here, in the process of reading literature they understand and imbibe life skills which are essential to an individual. Hence, it is the responsibility of an English teacher to teach English and Life skills to children.

Life Skills according to W.H.O., every learner must be self reliant and skills such as Communication skills, Interpersonal skills, Life-long learning skills, Problem Solving skills, Creative Thinking, Leadership, and Empathy.(WHO, 1997). Development of Life Skills is closely linked to

pedagogy of active learning. It is "through participative teaching methods, such as role play, debates, situation analysis, and one-on-one problem-solving, life skills programs can actively engage young people in their own development process" (Mangrulkar, 2001, p.6). In the words of Mangrulkar, Whitman and Posner, Develops skills in adolescents, both to build the needed competencies for human development and to adopt positive behaviors that enable them to deal effectively with the challenges of everyday life.(2001, p.5). The World Health Organization (1997) reports that a skills requires where a person should have capacity to sustain a condition of mental well-being and to exhibit it in adaptive and optimistic behaviour while interacting with others in his /her or others' cultural environment.

Similarly as UNESCO, the UNICEF too emphasizes on Life Skills and strongly suggests that a learner need to be taught in a participatory learning mode where he/she can engage the whole learner in an experiential learning environment. Learners require attitudinal and behavioural changes to adopt themselves in an experiential learning environment and there would be a change in the learners' previously obtained behaviour and conduct and the institutions make divergent changes in them.

Life Skills promote

- Prepare learners for self dependency.
- Prepare a child to become self confident.
- Promote skills based learning for overall development of children.
- Training is an effective means for empowering the students to take steps correctly
- to tackle everyday changes, challenges, problems efficiently.

Integrating Life Skills in English Classroom:

The problem of teachers in teaching life skills in classrooms today, majority of the teacher of English do not have knowledge and understanding of the life skills. In fact, they do not know what life

skills are and how it should be integrated in language teaching. Apart from this, the teachers are not aware what methods they need to use in building up life skills among the students. And, many difficulties face by teachers in integrating life skills in ESL activities.

Integration means combining (parts) into a whole or completing (something that is imperfect or incomplete) by adding parts (Horn by, 1988: 444). Referring to the definition, integration means adding components to them. In the context of ELT curriculum, the integration of life skills tends to develop communicative competence on the part of English language learners. The acquisition of analyzed life skills occurs simultaneously with that of language skills.

English language has to be intrinsically woven with Life Skills teaching because learning a language is a life skill and Life and they are very important for everyone. Isolating English from life skills can pose a bigger problem in the future of a student. A student who can read and write English well should also possess the confidence to speak his mind to different audience be it at home, friends or in a large auditorium. Many students who graduate do not get jobs because they lack English communication and Life Skills to prove it language teaching is to help learners in any way that motivates them to work with language. (Richard & Rodgers, 2001:157).

The Ten core Life Skills as laid down by WHO are: 1. Self-awareness 2. Empathy 3 Critical thinking 4. Creative thinking 5. Decision making 6. Problem Solving 7. Effective communication 8. Interpersonal relationship 9. Coping with stress 10. Coping with emotion.

Self Awareness:

Self awareness is knowing oneself. It might be knowing ones strengths, weaknesses, desires, feelings and character.

This can be developed in English classroom while teaching adjectives.

Activity:

- Teacher asks the student to write a few words of adjectives.

- Ask the students to find the words that are suitable to their personality.
- Ask the students to describe themselves with the help of adjectives.
- For example, students might use the following adjectives: Courageous, Brave, Gorgeous, Kind, Timid, Superb, Naughty, Beautiful, Ugly, Handsome, Smart, Pretty, Talented, Foolish, Happy, Sad, Angry, Calm, Cool.

Empathy:

Brown (1994) describes empathy as “the projection of one’s own personality into the personality of another in order to understand him or her better.” Brown holds that there are two necessary aspects to the development and exercising of empathy: first, awareness and knowledge to one’s own feeling, and second, identification with another person. According to him, empathy is probably the major factor in the harmonious coexistence of individuals in society, and it facilitates communication, since social communication requires people to “permeate” their ego boundaries so that they can send and receive messages clearly.

Empathy refers to thinking in others perspective. Society needs empathetic skills in the 21st century.

Activity:

- Teacher divides the classroom into groups.
- Teacher gives the topic like “Is dowry good or bad?”
- Give them some time for preparation for the debate.
- After the preparation, debate begins.
- If there are two groups, one is for dowry and the other is against dowry.
- Each group defends their view for 10 minutes.
- Now, teacher switches the roles. Then the teacher talks about empathetic skills.

Critical Thinking Skills:

Learning a foreign/second language is useful for survival and to understand cultural similarities and differences. However, when a foreign language is taught/learned, even the survival language level may require more thinking of how to communicate in a foreign language. This is because languages are culturally determined (see David Chrystal's book *The Stories of English*, 2004). And as cultures differ, so do languages.

Raymond S. Nickerson (1987) provides us with a whole list of abilities and attitudes which characterize the individual who thinks critically. This individual is someone who:

- Organizes thoughts and articulates them concisely and coherently.
- Can learn independently and has an abiding interest in doing so.

Activity:

- Teacher gives the three parts of the story. I.e. the beginning, the middle of the story and the end of the story. For example, once upon a time there was a king....

The daughter of the king disappeared.....

The ministers were punished.....

- Give them some time.
- Then, ask them to build the story with the help of the given clues.

Effective Communication:

Effective communication skills are needed in everyday life be it personal or professional life. Effective communication skills include body language, being confident, using verbal and non verbal communication. These can be improved through various language activities.

Activity:

- Teacher divides the classroom into groups.
- Give them a topic for making advertisements for their x, y, and z products.

- Give them 15 minutes for preparation.
- After 15 mins, ask them to present their advertisement in 2mins.

Coping and managing with Emotions:

Coping and managing with emotions is a very important life skill in the modern era. Students have to be trained to show or express their emotions when necessary with proper verbal and non verbal communication.

Activity:

- Teacher gives them words and meanings of emotions like happy, sad, angry, hungry, fear, love, hatred, surprise, bored, pity, shame. etc.
- Ask them to draw these emotions in their notebooks/plastic balls.
- Then ask them to express these emotions in front of the class one by one.

Interpersonal Relationships:

Interpersonal relationship is maintaining healthy with people around us. Language plays a major role in keeping good relationships with people.

Problem Solving:

Problem solving skills can be developed by using word puzzles, jumbling words and sentences.

Creative Thinking:

The main benefits of problem-based learning which can promote the development of critical and creative thinking in EFL/ESL contexts are: a) it promotes interaction and cooperation among students) it promotes self reflection in action (Schon, 1983) and the ability to reflect on "both the individual and the collective activities during and after knowledge construction" (Faidley et al, 2000, p. 110), c) it fosters self directed learning skills (Dolma&Schmidt, 1994)

Activity:

- Teacher divides the classroom into groups.
- Give them a bundle of waste news papers.

- Give them some time for the preparation.
- Ask them to make something out of it like boats, home, birds, animals, palace...etc

Decision making:

Decision making skills can be developed by using word puzzles, jumbling words and sentences as they a time limit to finish the tasks.

Conclusion:

There is a need to equip children with life skills to make them successful in their life and career. The life skills can be taught in ESL classroom effectively since language learning is one of the major life skills and the teacher's role is immense in teaching life skills. When a teacher of language could have broad idea and understanding of life skills, then there would be no difficulty in imparting life skills in students. Life Skills Education has long term benefits to the society which include educational, social, health, cultural and economic for the learner and make learner the best citizen as product to the nation.

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Gummidelli Mahender, an M.A, B.Ed from Osmania University, PGDTE from EFLU, Hyderabad and qualified TS and A.P State Eligibility Test. Worked as a Life Skills and English trainer at Ignis Careers Private Limited. And has an experience in training teachers in Telangana state.

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