International Journal of Enhanced Research in Educational Development, IJERED,
ISSN: 2320-8708, Vol. 13 Issue 3, May.-June, 2025

Development of A Life Skill Proficiency Scale and Investigation of Environmental Determinants of Academic and Personal Success in Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

Creating and validating a thorough Life Skill Proficiency Scale for use with secondary school students is the primary goal of this research. Also included are the environmental elements that have an impact on this demographic's academic achievement and personal success. The research seeks to offer educators and policymakers practical insights to improve student outcomes by combining psychological, social, and educational components.

Keywords: Social, Policy maker, Student, Life Skill, School.

INTRODUCTION

Educators, psychologists, and politicians throughout the globe are paying more attention to the need to teach children important life skills in secondary school due to the dynamic nature of the social and educational scene. For complete maturation, one must acquire what are often known as "life skills," which are the proactive actions that help one deal with the inevitable ups and downs of daily living. Adolescents gain the ability to make good decisions, solve issues, speak clearly, control their emotions, and create positive connections via the development of these skills, which include a broad variety of cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, and practical talents. Adolescence is a pivotal developmental period that lays the groundwork for a successful adulthood; it is characterised by fast physical, psychological, and social changes, and the need of life skills is most obvious at this time. Nevertheless, there is a lack of standardised, psychometrically sound instruments that are tailored to evaluate students' ability in life skills in secondary school, even though their relevance has been widely acknowledged. Creating this scale is crucial for research and real-world applications in education, where it may help pinpoint areas of weakness and guide targeted treatments. (Abdi, M., & Davoudi, R. 2015).

The foundation of educational results that impact young people's future chances is the development of life skills, which is closely tied to academic accomplishment and personal success. When people talk about academic success, they usually mean things like grades, test scores, and percentages of students who finish high school. On the other hand, when people talk about personal success, they usually mean things like psychological health, self-esteem, resilience, and social competence. Both aspects are closely related to the life skills that a teenager has. For example, kids who are good at regulating their emotions and solving problems are better able to deal with the stresses of school and social situations, which in turn leads to higher grades and more happiness. However, teenage achievement in school and in life is not an isolated event; rather, it is heavily influenced by the contexts in which these events take place. In order to address the elements that help or hurt people acquire and use life skills, it is crucial to understand these contextual determinants.

Family dynamics, school environment, peer interactions, neighbourhood resources, and larger socioeconomic and cultural variables are all parts of an adolescent's ecological context. Attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that promote life skill development are significantly influenced by the home environment, which is the immediate microsystem. Adolescents are more likely to develop resilience, social competence, and self-control when they grow up in homes where there is positive role modelling, open dialogue, and supportive parenting. Neglect or inconsistency within the family, on the other hand, might hinder this process and make the child more susceptible to social and scholastic problems. A similar critical venue for skill development and academic learning is the school setting. Motive,

involvement, and the development of social and cognitive abilities are fostered in an atmosphere of good school climate that is defined by inclusive practices, supportive teacher-student connections, and chances for collaborative learning. On the flip side, pupils' self-esteem and ability to learn may suffer in schools characterised by harsh disciplinary measures or an absence of necessary resources. (Avcı, D. E., Turgut, S., & Korur, F.2021)

DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES INFORMING LIFE SKILLS

Many educational and psychological theories provide explanations for how people learn, practise, and ultimately use the core competencies necessary to deal with the intricacies of everyday life, and these ideas have strong roots in the adolescent development of life skills. Gaining an understanding of these theories of development lays the groundwork for developing successful assessment methods and treatments suited to students' needs in secondary school, as well as for understanding life skills in general. Psychosocial development theory by Erikson, social cognitive theory by Bandura, sociocultural theory by Vygotsky, and cognitive development theory by Piaget are among the most important. Different aspects, such as identity development, social interaction, cognitive maturation, and observational learning, are highlighted in each of these theories, which together shed light on the processes via which teenagers acquire life skills. (Bernhardt, A. C., Yorozu, R., & Medel-Añonuevo, C. 2014).

When trying to make sense of how teenagers pick up useful skills, Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is crucial. Each of the eight psychosocial phases of human development, according to Erikson's theory, is defined by a fundamental conflict that, in order to advance healthily, people must overcome. Adolescence is characterised by a period of "identity versus role confusion," which usually happens between 12 and 18 years old. Throughout this stage, people experiment with different personas, worldviews, and ideals in an effort to solidify their sense of self. Competence in self-awareness, emotional management, and decision-making are among the life skills need to successfully traverse this stage. Failure to overcome the identity crisis can cause confusion, uncertainty, and maladaptive behaviours; on the other hand, adolescents who successfully acquire these abilities can build a strong identity that promotes adaptive functioning. The significance of helping teenagers develop skills that shape their self-concept—which impacts their academic performance and interpersonal relationships—is emphasised by Erikson's theory of development. Life skill education is based on Erikson's theory because it helps teenagers manage identity discovery and create meaningful social roles via the development of abilities including goal-setting, critical thinking, and interpersonal communication.

Adolescents' skill development is further understood in Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, which places an emphasis on the significance of reciprocal determinism, self-efficacy, and observational learning. Bandura argues that witnessing the actions, attitudes, and results of others is just as important as first-hand experience when it comes to learning. Adolescents are able to internalise and reproduce adaptive skills through this modelling process, rather than relying solely on trial-and-error. An individual's confidence in their own abilities to carry out a job to completion is called self-efficacy, and it is fundamental to Bandura's theory. The ability to motivate oneself, persist, and bounce back from setbacks are all aspects of self-efficacy that are essential for mastering life skills. For instance, teenage self-esteem could take a boost when they see a friend or classmate dealing with stress in a healthy way. Adolescents' life skill development is influenced by the constant feedback loop between themselves and their environment, according to Bandura's model, which also takes into account the reciprocal determinism process, which involves personal variables, behaviours, and environmental effects. This theoretical perspective promotes educational techniques that give positive examples and encourage students to believe in themselves by highlighting the significance of supporting settings and role models in the learning of life skills. (Bharath, S., & Kishore Kumar, K. V. 2008).

MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF LIFE SKILLS

Everyone needs a set of "life skills" to help them deal with the inevitable challenges they'll experience in their daily lives. These talents include a wide range of topics and abilities. Life skills encompass a diverse range of talents that work together to support adaptive living. These abilities include cognitive, emotional, social, and practical capacities, among others. Especially during the formative years of adolescence, when emotional, social, and cognitive development occur at a dizzying rate, this multifaceted nature becomes crucial to comprehending life skills as an all-encompassing and holistic aspect of human growth. Understanding the complex nature of life skills helps to clarify theory and directs the creation of useful evaluation instruments and intervention programs that promote holistic personal and academic achievement. (Costas Batlle, I. 2019).

The ability to comprehend, reason, and solve problems is an essential life skill, and it is a subset of cognitive abilities. The ability to think critically, make sound decisions, be creative, and solve problems are all vital life skills that help teenagers assess situations, consider all of their options, and ultimately make decisions that have an impact on their academic and personal success. One way in which critical thinking helps students learn more effectively and make better decisions is by encouraging them to question and evaluate claims and evidence rather than just taking everything at face value. With so many options available to us every day, from how to go in school to how to connect with others, the ability to make sound decisions is crucial. Adolescents enhance their ability to adapt to new conditions and solve

issues successfully through creative thinking, which encourages flexibility and inventiveness. Students gain the self-assurance and ability to tackle challenging tasks when they cultivate these cognitive capacities, which in turn enable higher-order thinking.

The ability to identify, comprehend, and control one's own and other people's emotions is a crucial component of emotional intelligence, which complements the cognitive domain. Adolescents' ability to handle adversity and keep their mental health in check depends on their emotional competences, which include self-awareness, resilience, emotional regulation, and stress management. In order to avoid inappropriate or maladaptive reactions, it is important to learn to control one's emotions and express them in a healthy way. Strongly emotionally regulated adolescents are better able to deal with peer pressure, personal problems, and academic demands. Relaxation, mindfulness, and efficient use of time are all stress management strategies that can lessen the toll that stress has on one's emotional and physical well-being. Being resilient means that you can keep going even when things are tough. It's a quality that helps young people stay motivated and optimistic even when things get tough. Another important emotional skill is self-awareness, which helps one to recognise their own strengths and areas for growth. These emotional competences, when put together, provide the groundwork for a healthy psychological development, which is essential for long-term success in school and in life. (Coskuner, Z., Buyukcelebi, H., Kurak, K., & Acak, M. 2021).

Skills in interpersonal communication, relationship development, and social problem-solving make up the social or interpersonal component of life skills, which is just as important. Adolescents are able to get along with everyone in their social circles when they develop skills including empathy, active listening, confidence, teamwork, and dispute resolution. A capacity for empathy, or the ability to put oneself in another person's shoes, increases compassion, decreases social friction, and fosters the development of mutually beneficial relationships. Building trust and understanding by meaningful and reciprocal communication is the goal of active listening. Teens who are able to assert themselves are better able to voice their thoughts and demands without fear of judgement or retaliation, striking a healthy balance between the two. Collaborative learning and social integration in educational settings need the development of cooperation and collaboration abilities. Equipping young people with conflict resolution skills allows them to skilfully handle conflicts in a positive way, turning possible setbacks into chances for personal development. Evidence suggests that students' motivation, engagement, and academic performance may be improved by cultivating supportive peer networks and a favourable school atmosphere, both of which need these social competences. (Fallahchai, R. 2012).

Practical or life management skills, together with competences in the cognitive, emotional, and social domains, enable the translation of theoretical competencies into day-to-day functioning, thereby connecting information with action. Achievements in time management, goal setting, health awareness, financial literacy, and decision execution are examples of practical skills. Teens that are good at managing their time are able to fit in all of their extracurricular activities, leisure time, and academic obligations. Students are encouraged to develop goals that are both challenging and attainable so that they may monitor their progress and stay motivated. Adolescents can better prepare for adult independence by acquiring financial literacy, which is increasingly seen as an essential life skill. This skill teaches them how to handle money responsibly, create budgets, and comprehend financial products. To promote physical well-being, health awareness entails making educated decisions about food, exercise, and drug use. Through enabling consistent, goal-directed behaviour that leads to overall achievement, these practical skills operationalise the cognitive, emotional, and social competences.

THE SOCIAL COGNITIVE MODEL OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

A thorough framework for understanding the complex interplay of psychological, behavioural, and environmental factors that impact students' academic achievement is provided by the Social Cognitive Model of Academic Achievement, which is mostly based on Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory. Academic performance is not seen as a static end result but as an ever-changing process moulded by the learner's environment through this paradigm, which highlights the interdependent nature of cognitive processes, self-regulatory behaviours, and contextual effects. It offers a multi-faceted perspective that researchers, teachers, and psychologists can use to examine the interplay between students' intrinsic motivation, their perceptions of their own abilities, the goals they set for themselves, and the social support they receive, all of which play an important role in students' achievement in secondary school and beyond, despite the rising academic and social demands placed on students. (Kaur, M. 2014).

The Social Cognitive Model revolves around the idea of self-efficacy, which is defined by Bandura as people's confidence in their ability to plan and carry out the steps needed to achieve their goals. Students' belief in their own abilities to study for tests, finish assignments, and understand difficult subjects is known as self-efficacy in the context of academic performance. A person's drive, determination, and capacity to bounce back from setbacks in the classroom are heavily influenced by their worldview. Students who believe in their own abilities to study are more likely to take an active role in their education, overcome obstacles, and succeed academically; in contrast, students who doubt their own abilities may suffer from anxiety, avoid difficult work, and put in less effort than their peers. Thus, self-efficacy is

a potent cognitive mediator that connects students' beliefs in their own abilities with their real actions and results in the classroom.

Many factors, such as physiological states, social influences, vicarious learning, and experiences of mastery, contribute to the formation of ideas about one's own abilities. Students' confidence in their own abilities is most strongly influenced by their mastery experiences, which are defined as the effective completion of assignments. A positive feedback loop of motivation and accomplishment is created when pupils experience academic success on several occasions, which boosts their confidence. Witnessing the achievements of one's peers or role models can lead to heightened self-confidence if the observed persons are seen as comparable. This phenomenon is known as vicarious learning. Managing one's physiological and emotional states, such as a low anxiety level and a good mood, can boost self-efficacy beliefs, while social persuasion, in the form of support from parents, instructors, or peers, can have the opposite effect. To foster self-efficacy and encourage academic engagement, it is crucial to provide students with good role models, constructive criticism, and supportive environments that give chances for achievement. (Liao, W., Jiang, J. M., Yang, B., Zeng, X., & Liao, S. S. 2010).

The Social Cognitive Model also includes self-regulation as one of its essential components. This includes activities such as goal-setting, planning, self-monitoring, and self-reflection. Students are seen as having agency over their own learning and the results it produces, which leads to academic success. Setting goals entails deciding what you want to achieve and making sure those goals are concrete, quantifiable, and within your reach. Students are more likely to put in the necessary effort and stay motivated when they have well-defined academic objectives to work towards. Using a study schedule or mnemonic devices are examples of strategic study strategies that may be organised to maximise learning efficiency. Students may take charge of their own learning by keeping tabs on their progress and making course corrections as they go. In order to better understand one's own learning processes, pinpoint areas of strength and improvement, and guide one's own future activities, self-reflection is essential. When students are able to control their own thoughts and actions, they are better able to persevere and adjust to new situations, which is particularly important in challenging academic settings. (Sheikhzade, M., & Bookani, F. K. 2013).

Motive, along with self-efficacy and self-regulation, is a key component of the Social Cognitive Model's emphasis on academic success. Within this paradigm, intrinsic and extrinsic variables interact in a complex web to motivate students to actively participate in learning activities. A person's interest in and fulfilment from learning constitutes intrinsic motivation, whereas rewards and demands from outside sources impact extrinsic motivation. When students have high expectations of their own abilities, they find academic work more enticing and worthwhile, which in turn increases their motivation. The perceived importance and worth of academic objectives, which are influenced by both individual ambitions and societal norms, also play a role in maintaining motivation. For students to maintain their effort over time, it is crucial to provide educational settings that encourage curiosity, autonomy, and meaningful interaction, according to this motivating approach.

CONCLUSION

Essential, multi-dimensional abilities, life skills have a major impact on the academic and personal performance of teenagers. Some models and theories of development, like the Social Cognitive Model, emphasise the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic variables in moulding a person's skill set. It is possible to equip secondary school pupils to overcome obstacles, realise their dreams, and succeed in and out of the classroom by gaining an understanding of and cultivating life skills via thorough evaluation and supporting teaching methods. If we want our youth to have happy, successful lives in the future, we must make sure they have the skills they'll need to succeed.

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