



Enrichment Programme Efficacy on Core Life Skills: A Quasi Experimental Study Among University Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted in 2021, with an objective to examine the impact of enrichment programme on core life skills of undergraduate students. The study consisted of 60 first year undergraduates of Punjab Agricultural University enrolled in 2021-2022 academic session having low level of overall life skill. Life Skills Assessment Scale by Nair et al., (2010) was used to collect the data on measuring variable. One group quasi experimental research design was conducted by using module based online training sessions for the intervention. Evaluation of pre-intervention data highlighted that all the student participants were in low level life skill with none at average and high levels, whereas, in post-intervention evaluation, more students were found at average and high levels with merely few of them remained in low level of life skill. Dimension-wise analysis indicated significantly improved in each dimensions of life skills with non-significant gender differences after attending enrichment programme. The study recommends that life skills education should be an integral part of the university curriculum mainly at graduation level for optimal development of required psychosocial skills among 21st century youngsters enabling them to lead a successful living.

INTRODUCTION

With the technological advancement in 21st century, human life has undergone substantial change globally and these changes primarily have an impact on youth development. Currently, India is on the verge of being the world's youngest nation with the highest youth population (Verma et al., 2017). In this quick-paced modern world, the youth of today encounter many more choices and demands than ever before (Chavan, 2012). Studies found that socio-emotional development of emerging adults is dependent on social media networking for better social health (Dhanwal et al., 2022), but sometimes it also causes more conflict and frustration, mental health issues, and behavioural disorders (Pedrelli et al., 2015). As the time goes by, such kind of problems are bound to increase. There is an urgent need of promoting socio-personal development and successful living, and in this regards life skills

education acts as facilitator that focuses on teaching culturally and developmentally appropriate psychosocial skills through participatory learning that is needs- and outcome-based (UNICEF, 2003 & UNICEF, 2015).

Life Skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (WHO, 1997). These are combination of several psycho-social competencies that assist in translating knowledge into action for positive functioning, healthy living and productive life (Emanuel, 2008 & Saravanakumar, 2020). World Health Organisation has enlisted ten core life skills which fall under three main categories: thinking skills, social skills, and emotional skills. Thinking skills include self-awareness, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, decision making; social skills include empathy, interpersonal relationship, effective communication; and emotional skills include stress management and coping with emotions.

By practicing and developing these life skill skills can lower the risk and capitalise on constructive and adaptable behavior (Munsi & Guha, 2014 and Prajina, 2014). In order to prepare youngsters for overcoming developmental obstacles, the higher education system can play a mentoring role in helping them acquire information, skills, attitudes, and values. Experts claim that curriculum courses offered during the first year of college life can remarkably influence future progress and inspire them to grow continuously (Tinto, 1993). Numerous studies suggested that life skill education at any level can bring a positive change in the trainee (Roodbari et al., 2013). Although considerable studies have been made in the past decades showing the effectiveness of life skills for empowerment of school students regardless of their socio-personal profile (Bharath & Kishore, 2010 & Sulfikar, 2016 & Josephine, 2015) but there is a dearth of studies indicating its effectiveness for students in higher education (Nair & Fahimirad, 2019). Therefore, this study aimed to assess effectiveness of enrichment programme on life skills among undergraduate students.

METHODOLOGY

A one-group pretest-posttest quasi-experimental study was conducted in the year 2021 among the purposively selected cohort sample of 60 students (30 males and 30 females) having low level of life skills. The respondents were aged between 18-20 years and enrolled in the first year of undergraduate programmes for the academic session 2021-22 at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. A self-structured information sheet and Life skills assessment scale by Nair et al., (2010) was used to collect baseline data. The scale consists of 100 items in the form of the statements in built with a 5-point scale for measuring life skills in ten dimensions which were self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, creative thinking, critical thinking, decision making, problem solving, coping with emotions and stress.

Online questionnaire of Life Skill assessment scale was prepared through google form and shared to 300 students from constituent colleges of Punjab Agricultural University along with attached consent form to participate in the interventional study. Out of 300 questionnaires, 230 returned and only 165 responded questionnaires were considered satisfactory. Out of 165 students, 60 respondents who scored low at overall life skill as per the

norms of the test were selected for the intensive online intervention program. There were three essential phases of the research for data collection namely pre-testing phase, intervention phase (for 3 months) and a post-testing phase (after a gap of one months from the second phase).

The selected 60 students during pre-testing phase were further categorized into three small groups with 20 students in each group (10 males and 10 females) with the purpose to check the attendance and to facilitate discussion during the intervention sessions. The intervention was given to students for a period of three consecutive months (one session per week for each group) by using developed need based training module covering all the ten dimensions of life skills where respondents were at low level. The intervention was to be imparted through twelve online sessions (one introductory session, ten sessions based on dimensions, and one booster session two weeks following the core session). Participants received the 4 hours per week of intervention for each life skill, which comprised of online session of 60 to 90 minutes depending on the input content (ppt. and interactive exercises), psycho-educational texts, and remaining activity packages (activity sheets, readings and videos). The free of cost intervention sessions were presented via online platform (Google meet) by the beforehand trained researcher in life skills education. An informed consent was obtained from every participant after a brief explanation regarding the study. Confidentiality of the respondents was maintained during the research. The obtained data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software version 16.0. Descriptive analysis (frequency and percentage) was done to find out the distribution of sample across different levels of life skills. Independent t-test and paired t-test was applied as inferential analysis to study the differences in the respondent's mean scores of life skills (pre- and post-intervention).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 projects the pre and post-assessment mean scores of study participants across various dimensions of life skills. It was clearly depicted that significant differences were observed in all dimensions with higher mean scores during post-intervention assessment. Similarly, in case of overall life skills, the pre-assessment mean scores was found to be (289.93 ± 16.28) which were significantly improved to (355.93 ± 27.28) after receiving

Table 1. Comparison of pre and post-assessment mean scores of total respondents across various dimension of life skills

Dimensions of life skills	Pre-Test		Post-Test		t-value
	Mean	SD ±	Mean	SD ±	
Self-awareness	31.55	1.74	38.75	3.43	25.438*
Empathy	33.17	2.16	40.25	3.61	19.22*
Effective communication	24.27	2.12	29.75	3.69	12.45*
Interpersonal relationship	32.62	2.03	38.35	3.25	14.85*
Creative thinking	23.87	2.69	30.45	3.39	15.38*
Critical thinking	33.65	2.21	40.97	3.96	16.81*
Decision making	32.25	2.59	38.32	2.81	15.96*
Problem solving	28.77	3.04	36.28	3.28	17.98*
Coping with emotion	29.33	2.46	36.48	3.87	16.44*
Coping with stress	20.67	2.03	26.33	3.26	15.54*
Overall life skills	289.93	16.28	355.93	27.28	24.97*

* p<0.01

intervention. The overall table shows that intervention had a positive impact on all dimensions of life skills. From these results, it could be concluded that along with proper assessment of their training needs, capacity building efforts through hand on-trainings in combination to social media exposure acts as great way to bring optimal behavior change among young adults (Sanjeev et al., 2021 & Ray et al., 2022). In support to these results, Choudhary & Rani (2019) also found that Life Skills Intervention Program showed a significant improvement in life skills of experiment group and recommended the integration of such enrichment program in the educational curriculum for improving the life skills of students. Numerous studies support the effectiveness of educational training that helped learners to develop required skills to solve interpersonal social issues (Malik, 2003 & Malik et al., 2010 & Balda & Turan, 2010 & Balda et al., 2010).

Table 2 depicted significant improvement ($p < 0.01$) in all dimensions of core life skills among participants across both the gender as they scored significantly higher in the post-test after receiving intervention as compared to the pre-test. Further, the difference in mean scores of both female and male respondents was found to be statistically significant across all dimensions of life skills. Assessment of overall life indicated that the mean scores was improved after intervention with significant difference ($p < 0.01$) in pre and post intervention means scores of female respondents.

In support of the results, Pathania & Chopra (2017) also reported that the intervention had significant impact on improvement in various dimensions of life skills. Overall view of the table revealed that there is a significant effect of enrichment program on life skills of students and even after a gap of one month, children showed improvement in their skills and were able to retain the gained skills.

The pre-assessment data indicated non-significant gender difference in most of dimensions of life skills except interpersonal relationship, decision making and coping with stress dimensions (Table 3). The mean scores of female participants were found to have significantly higher in interpersonal relationship ($p < 0.10$), decision making ($p < 0.10$) and coping with stress dimensions ($p < 0.10$) as compared to boys. Similarly, assessment of post-intervention data also revealed non-significant gender difference in self-awareness, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, creative thinking, decision making and problem solving skills. Significant gender differences were found in empathy, critical thinking, coping with emotions and coping with stress skills. The post-assessment means scores of female participants were found to have significantly better in empathy ($p < 0.10$), coping with emotions ($p < 0.10$) and coping with stress ($p < 0.10$) skills as compared to boys who scored higher in critical thinking ($p < 0.10$) skill. Overall analysis of dimensions of life skills revealed that girls

Table 2. Within group comparison across various dimensions of life skills

Dimensions of life skills	Females $n_f=30$					Males $n_m=30$				
	Pre-assessment		Post-assessment		t-value	Pre-assessment		Post-assessment		t-value
	Mean	SD±	Mean	SD±		Mean	SD±	Mean	SD±	
Self-awareness	31.77	1.91	39.43	3.39	10.783*	31.33	1.56	38.07	3.39	9.893*
Empathy	33.47	2.24	41.33	3.61	10.133*	32.87	2.06	39.13	2.95	9.529*
Effective communication	24.47	2.21	29.43	3.68	6.329*	24.08	2.05	30.07	3.57	7.970*
Interpersonal relationship	33.3	2.22	38.7	3.34	7.375*	31.93	1.6	38.00	2.94	9.933*
Creative thinking	23.83	2.69	29.83	3.17	7.905*	23.90	2.73	31.07	3.47	8.895*
Critical thinking	33.6	2.25	40.1	3.96	7.817*	33.70	2.22	41.83	3.64	10.444*
Decision making	32.8	2.88	37.87	2.29	7.547*	31.70	2.18	38.77	3.05	10.329*
Problem solving	28.67	2.86	36.27	3.28	9.565*	28.86	3.26	36.3	3.21	8.907*
Coping with emotions	29.7	2.14	37.3	4.14	8.932*	28.96	2.74	35.67	3.14	8.819*
Coping with stress	20.77	2.34	27.07	3.41	8.344*	19.77	1.55	25.6	2.89	9.737*
Overall life skills	292.37	17.88	356.97	27.59	10.762*	287.10	14.32	354.5	27.16	12.023*

* $p < 0.10$

Table 3. Gender wise comparison of pre and post- assessment mean scores of respondents across various dimensions of life skills

Dimensions of life skills	Pre-Assessment					Post-Assessment				
	Females $n_f=30$		Males $n_m=30$		t-value	Females $n_f=30$		Males $n_m=30$		t-value
	Mean	SD±	Mean	SD±		Mean	SD±	Mean	SD±	
Self-awareness	31.77	1.91	31.33	1.56	0.977 ^{NS}	39.43	3.39	38.07	3.39	1.554 ^{NS}
Empathy	33.47	2.24	32.87	2.06	1.080 ^{NS}	41.33	3.61	39.13	2.95	2.585*
Effective communication	24.47	2.21	24.08	2.05	0.709 ^{NS}	29.43	3.68	30.07	3.57	0.684 ^{NS}
Interpersonal relationship	33.3	2.22	31.93	1.6	2.742***	38.7	3.34	38	2.94	0.862 ^{NS}
Creative thinking	23.83	2.69	23.9	2.73	0.100 ^{NS}	29.83	3.17	31.07	3.47	1.445 ^{NS}
Critical thinking	33.6	2.25	33.7	2.22	0.173 ^{NS}	40.1	3.96	41.83	3.64	1.762***
Decision making	32.8	2.88	31.7	2.18	1.668***	37.87	2.29	38.77	3.05	1.292 ^{NS}
Problem solving	28.67	2.86	28.86	3.26	0.240 ^{NS}	36.27	3.28	36.3	3.21	0.036 ^{NS}
Coping with emotions	29.7	2.14	28.96	2.74	1.166 ^{NS}	37.3	4.14	35.67	3.14	1.718***
Coping with stress	20.77	2.34	19.77	1.55	1.951***	27.07	3.41	25.6	2.89	1.801***
Overall life skills	292.37	17.88	287.1	14.32	1.260 ^{NS}	356.97	27.59	354.5	27.16	0.349 ^{NS}

* $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.10$ NS- Non Significant

reported to have better social and emotional skills but slightly lower cognitive skills than their counterparts. The differences in cognitive and social performance of males and females could be the result of gender roles expectation of society and cultural.

Further, non-significant difference was found in pre and post assessment mean scores of overall life skill of male and female participants. Sandhu (2014) also reported non-significant gender difference in overall life skill. Observable, from the above statistics, most students seem to have benefited from life skills lessons across both the genders. Girls for instance showed better improvement in most of the dimensions of core life skills as compared to boys after participation (Ndirangu et al., 2013). Goyal & Jain (2016) also supported the significant effectiveness of intervention programme on empowerment of participants. Empowerment is a state of wellbeing as well as mindfulness that not only need to act differently, but also different thinking pattern, self-management, and self-confidence (Priyanka et al., 2019). Accordingly, overall results of the study proved that intervention on life skills could act as a good support system for youth empowerment to take positive action and improve significant psycho-social skills required to lead healthy and productive life.

CONCLUSION

Life skills education also serve as an efficacious tool for empowering the youth's abilities to make them responsible for making healthier choices, resisting negative pressures and abstain from risky behaviours. The results of the study revealed that the life skills based enrichment programme has a significantly positive effect on psycho-social competencies of the graduate students. Non-significant gender difference in most of the dimensions of core life skills among graduate students at pre and post-intervention phase indicate alike need and effectiveness of programme. Incorporation of LSE as a subject in higher education curriculum that appeals more to the affective domain of the learners than cognitive domain to bring attitudinal change in life is recommended. The pedagogy of LSE has to be included in the teacher training curriculum for pre-service teachers as well as refresher course should be encouraged for in-service teachers to update their knowledge about core life skills as well as incorporate life based practical teaching methodologies for effective learning of life skills by university students.

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