

## The Place of Life Skills Education in Iranian Primary School Curricula

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**Abstract:** One of the most important objectives of school curricula is to prepare students for living in a dynamic society. School curricula should ensure that students learn essential life skills. Research conducted in both developed and developing countries indicates that the educational authorities in these countries have given the priority to the inclusion of “life skills” in school curricula. This paper identifies the required life skills for students at primary school level and evaluates the current state of Iranian school curricula in meeting these needs. Main questions of study are: 1. what kinds of life skills are required for students at primary school level? 2. How much attention is paid to the life skill at various phases of curriculum development (curriculum design, curriculum implementation and curriculum evaluation)? Data is drawn from a survey conducted with a stratified random sample of social education specialists, curriculum developers at ministry level and Tehran’s primary school teachers. In this research a questionnaire is administrated consisting of two sections; the first section is related to the essential life skills and the second section includes the adaptation of curricula with such qualities.

**Key words:** Curriculum • Life skills • Citizenship education

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### INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of educational institutions and schools is to prepare students to perform in society as active citizens. Culture needs to be learned formally and informally. Culture is totality of values and traditions which are closely linked people's daily lives and allow them to make sense of the world [1]. Culture thus represents the similarities and differences between the lives of individuals from different societies. When people from these different cultures understand and respect each other, their lives become richer [2].

Schools are expected to organize their curricula in such a way that students, after experiencing a general education, acquire necessary qualities to go on in their social life and establish an effective interaction with others. Challenges and concerns in the 21th century (eg; globalization, population crisis, IT evolution, employment, terrorism, etc) shows that schools have a remarkable mission to develop students social skills.

Iran as a developing country has a great historical background and a rich cultural heritage and, so far, has experienced a lot of ups and downs through centuries. Moreover situating in a strategic position in Asia, Iran has many interactions with other countries in the world , leading to formation of a multicultural soceity that is characterized with various conditions. Generally speaking many conditions and reasons have paved the way for scholars and educational authorities to pay an increasing attention to life skills education in the Iran’s present soceity that most of them are as follow:

**Social Challenges:** In last two decades, Iran population has been growing at an alarming rate. According to data published by the government in July 2005, Iran population exceeds 70 million and it is growing at 1.5% annual rate (3.5% in 1992). Almost two-thirds of Iran's people are under age 30 [3]. Most Iranian resides in densely populated urban areas. The population of the Tehran metropolitan area including the city, some of its suburbs and the surrounding area is approximately 12 million [4]

Such a situation has brought serious challenges for the Iranian community including unemployment, drug abuse, HIV and breaking the social order and rules. For example according to Iranian central police report nearly 100,000 Iranians have been killed in traffic accidents in the past five years. That includes close to 26,000 last year, or three an hour which in most of them human factor specially breaking traffic and road rules was the main cause [5] further more other challenges like using different drugs

among youths, increasing rate of HIV are most important problems of Iranian society.

**Communication Development:** Another important factor for paying much attention to the life skills education in Iran is the development of mass media and the emergence of new technologies such internet and the satellite that have created broad interactions between Iran and other countries all around the world. Increased use of the internet is helping many young Iranians to access to the outside world. But this poses a major challenge to the government as the new generation calls for greater communication and even economical and political reforms. At the present all of universities and most schools have access to such new technologies. So because of this factor, life skill education has become the focus of attention more and more, so that; based on which, schools be able to educate citizens who are aware of individual and international rights, also are familiar with their own culture heritage and that of other nations.

**Broad Immigration:** Broad immigration is one of the most important reasons of paying attention to the life skills education [6,7]. Relatively, immigration is resulted in serious attention to life skills education in Iran. Especially during past two decades, a considerable immigration from rural areas to big cities has taken place in the country [8] and since they are not familiar with citizen rights and regulations, a lot of problems have been occurred. Furthermore, due to wars and crises in the neighboring countries (Such as Afghanistan and Iraq), hundreds of thousand immigrants have rushed in to Iran as refugees. This situation has imposed various political, economical, social and educational crises on Iranian society.

Based on the abovementioned reasons for paying attention to life skills education in Iran, one can say that the ideal citizen in the Iranian society is one who has social competences which is required for living in the

Iranian community. Various factors called the reasons of interest to pay attention to the life skills education in Iran have introduced the importance and the necessity of including social education in school curricula, in particular and in society in general. In educational system of Iran that is centralized and all curriculum decisions are made at central level, some fundamental changes in school textbooks, especially social science are observed, so that the content of such books are continuously changing and revising to prepare some suitable and ideal citizens. According to the ministry of education, the life skills course will be introduced to schools soon [9] and many teachers are attending some training courses on life skills education at national level. (Ibid, p4) All these have done without conducting any scientific research on life skills needs at local and national levels and also evaluating the school curricula to meet the identified needs [10,11].

**Life Skills Concept:** The literature does not present a clear definition of life skills [12,13]. For instance some specialists define it as a set of knowledge, attitude and behavior that are essential for life success [14-16]. Other writers argue that life skills include abilities such as inter-personal communication, decision making, conflict resolution and perform social responsibilities [17-19,12].

In Stanton's view, life skills include how people communicate with each other and how conduct their daily life affairs [7]. In this respect, life skills are defined as some essential competencies to increase social and psychological abilities so that man able to manage needs, hardships and daily life pressures effectively [20-22]. In a general sense, life skills are a collection of abilities that cause some positive and adaptive behaviors which are essential for happiness and success in daily life.

**Life Skills Types:** If we define life skills as a determining factor to bring about adjustment success and happiness in life, we can accept that these skills are, essentially, rooted in needs and hardships of daily life. Due to different human conditions in various communities and social cultures, students' life skills will be different. As a result, a review of life skills literature [23,7,18,20,24,13,25] show that most specialists of this field based on social conditions consider various types of life skills for different society.

For instance, based on a content analysis of some selected scientific sources related to life skills, the following Table in relation to types of life skills and their dimensions are provided:

Table 1: Types of life skills from researchers point of views

Specialists Life skills types	W. Prior (2000)	WHO (1994)	K. Fathi (2001)	D. Selby (2000)	W.O. Lee (1999)	M. Dumas (1999)	R. Marzano (2000)
Participation and contribution in social problem resolutions	*		*	*	*	*	*
Civic understanding	*		*		*	*	
Creativity and Critical Professional ability	*	*	*	*	*		*
Parents roles	*				*		
Health and safety		*	*	*			
Life affair management	*	*					*
Inter-personal communication and conflict resolutions	*	*	*	*		*	*

As it is seen in Table 1, various skills are emphasized by scholars. Though the Table refers to a few researches, at least it has two significant messages:

- There is no consensus among researchers regarding life skills types
- Students based on social conditions and their educational levels, need different life skills training

**Curriculum Approaches in Life Skills Education:**

Researchers pointed out the necessity of discovering the way children learn the social skills, their features of conversation and subtle indicators of learning life competencies [26].

Life skills education through curriculum can be organized in two different ways: education through distinguished curriculum (in which a specific school curriculum for life skills is developed) and second, education through an integrated curriculum (in which life skills are integrated within various curricula). Evidence suggests that both approaches are effective [6, 27, 7, 18].

Employing each of these forms requires some basic considerations in different stages of curriculum design, implementation and evaluation. In Iran curriculum is developing in centralized manner, there is no independent curriculum under the title of life skills at primary school level, but life skills are thought through other school curricula thus, the present study focuses on the degree of attention to these life skills in stages of curriculum design, implementation and evaluation at primary school level.

**Research Questions**

**Basic Research Questions Are as Follow:**

- What types of life skills are essential for Iranian students at primary school level?
- How much attention is paid to life skills training in Iranian primary school curricula?

**MATERIALS AND METHDOS**

In this research a survey study, was employed. Research population includes educational life skills specialists (15), curriculum developers in ministry of education in courses such as persian literature, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Mathematics (45) and also Tehran primary school teachers (18500). All the educational life skills specialists and curriculum developer took part in the study but since the range of teachers was too largest, through employing cluster sampling 220 participants were selected.

**Data Collection Instrument Was a Specific Questionnaire, Consisting of Two Sections:**

- A list of life skills that was collected based on review of literature and organized based on two way Likert Scale in which respondents were required to indicate the necessity of training for each type of life skills for present and future time.

The reason for use of such a classification is to clear the skills which, at present time, must be urgently considered at school curricula and also, to distinguish them from skills which, must be considered in future curriculum decisions through a strategic perspective.

- The second section of questionnaire assesses the degree of attention given to life skills in school curricula at different levels of curriculum design, implementation and Evaluation. In this section, samples were, also, required to answer posed questions in Likert-Scale.

Questionnaire validity was checked through a face to face interview with university professors and the questionnaire's items were modified. Finally, a pilot study

was conducted with 30 samples, employing efficient and the result employing Cornbach Coefficient Alpha was 90% that shows high reliability of instrument

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**What Are Some Essential Life Skills for Iranian Primary School Students:** From an analysis of the data, individual life skills were categorized as falling into one of four priorities. These four categories can be shown in a conceptual form as the following Table.

Based on the conceptual model drawn from study, each of four life skills can be defined as follow:

**Urgent Life Skills:** Urgent life skills refer to those skills which reflect, crucial problems in society and should be included in school curricula urgently but there may be no necessity for them in future. Research finding shows the urgent life skills as follow.

**Proactive Skills:** These include those skills that, essentially needs no urgent attention at the present time but must be included in future schools curricula decisions. T- test results in relation to considered skills shows that the proactive skills are as follow:

**Null Skills:** Null life skills refer to those life skills that neither is there any necessity for their training at present time nor samples do feeling necessity to pay attention to them in future. Analysis of the data showed that none of individual life skills can be considered in this category.

**Continuous Life Skills:** Continuous life skills refer to those skills that must be taught both in the present and the future. From the research participants’ point of views the following life skills must not only be of great importance at present school curricula but must be considered in future curricula decisions.

Based on research findings, priority and significance of the four skills categories can be shown as following

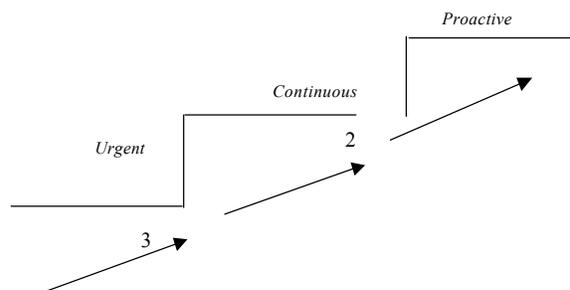


Table 2: Questionnaire form as used in the study

Future necessity for life skill education importance of training in future					Necessity for life skills importance of training at present time					
Very high	High	Mid	Low	Very low	Life skills	Very high	High	Mid	Low	Very low

Table 3: Life skills categories

Life skill types	Importance of training at present time	Importance of training in future
Proactive life skills	-	+
Urgent life skills	+	-
Null life skills	-	-
Continuous life skills	+	+

Table 4: Urgent life skills

Urgent life skills	Importance of training of present time					Importance of training futures				
	Final value	LD	t	SD	M	Final value	LD	t	SD	M
Knowledge and observation of social laws and regulations	+	0/01	9/89	0/78	3/52	—	—	0/23	0/64	3/01
Recognition of self and other citizen rights	+	0/01	15/22	0/78	3/78	—	—	1/25	0/83	3/07
Ability to show good social behavior in public view	+	0/01	14/27	0/53	3/51	—	—	-0/62	0/72	2/97
Ability to control anger and sensations	+	0/01	11/98	0/52	3/42	—	—	-0/60	0/74	2/97
Ability to resolve conflicts and tensions	+	0/01	4/28	1/11	3/32	—	—	1/68	0/97	3/11
Knowledge of unhealthy behavior and their solutions	+	0/01	11/79	0/78	3/62	—	—	1/18	0/63	3/05
Knowledge of pollution types	+	0/01	32/90	0/32	3/71	—	—	-0/37	0/81	2/98

Tables 5: Proactive life skills

Proactive life skill	Importance of training at present time					Importance of training in future				
	Final value	LD	t	SD	M	Final value	LD	t	SD	M
Suitable decision making for different life Issues	—	—	-0/77	0/96	2/95	+	0/01	11/53	0/72	3/56
Inter-personal communication skills improvement	—	—	-1/46	1/12	2/89	+	0/01	18/70	0/69	3/87
Recognition and acceptance of ones responsibilities	—	—	-1/33	0/78	2/93	+	0/01	11/26	0/83	3/63
Environment health	—	—	-0/78	0/76	2/96	+	0/01	12/09	0/92	3/75
Health	—	—	-0/50	0/89	2/97	+	0/01	11/76	0/87	3/69
Establishing order and discipline	—	—	1/19	0/75	3/06	+	0/01	15/61	0/76	3/80
Revealing one's ideas ,beliefs and emotions to others	—	—	1/29	0/92	3/08	+	0/01	16/57	0/85	3/95
Critical thinking	—	—	1/40	0/74	3/07	+	0/01	12/29	0/76	3/63
Self esteem	—	—	-0/36	0/83	2/98	+	0/01	11/74	0/96	3/76
Civic understanding and comprehension	—	—	-1/14	0/78	2/94	+	0/01	9/89	0/75	3/50

Table 6: Continuous life skills

Continuous life skills	Importance of training at present time					Importance of training in future				
	Final value	LD	t	SD	M	Final value	LD	t	SD	M
Problem solving (personal and social)	+	0/01	16/64	0/82	3/92	+	0/01	13/77	0/84	3/78
Life planning	+	0/01	26/75	0/56	4/01	+	0/01	17/92	0/72	3/87
Acceptance of change	+	0/01	17/53	0/66	3/78	+	0/01	13/30	0/68	3/61
Ability to apply reason and logic	+	0/01	16/68	0/72	3/81	+	0/01	13/69	0/78	3/72
Self - confidence	+	0/01	11/44	0/83	3/64	+	0/01	10/13	1/01	3/69
Interest and quest for knowledge	+	0/01	11/12	0/84	3/63	+	0/01	12/86	0/83	3/72
Citizenship rights and responsibilities	+	0/01	17/10	0/72	3/83	+	0/01	21/45	0/56	3/81
primary aids	+	0/01	16/23	0/74	3/81	+	0/01	11/38	0/99	3/76
Dealing with crisis	+	0/01	14/44	0/76	3/74	+	0/01	12/43	0/74	3/62
Getting familiar with adolescent and child hood concerns and problems	+	0/01	15/21	0/79	3/81	+	0/01	15/04	0/72	3/73
Independence in activities	+	0/01	13/55	0/81	3/74	+	0/01	14/66	0/87	3/86

Table 7: T- one sample for curriculum design

VariablesQuestion	Experiment mean	Standard deviation (S.D)	Freedom level F.D	Single group t value	Level to significant
How much attention is paid to life skill training in the development of curriculum objectives	2/74	0/98	211	-2/30	0/05
How much attention is paid to life skill training in the design of school textbooks content	2/66	1/01	212	-4/76	0/01
How much attention is paid to life skill education in designing supplementary materials	2/65	0/99	212	5/09	0/01

Table 8: T- one sample for curriculum implementation

VariablesQuestion	Experiment mean	Standard deviation (S.d)	Freedom degree F.d	Sigil group t value	Level to significant
Will the teachers' treatment with students lead to suitable opportunities for life skill training?	2/86	1/05	213	-1/88	—
Will the students' interaction lead to suitable opportunities for life skill training?	2/88	1	213	-2/80	0/01
Are Schools teachers, Administrators, and other staff, practically, committed to life skills training in school?	3/13	1/22	211	1/56	—

Table 8: Continue

Is schools atmosphere suitable for life skills training?	2/69	1/13	212	-4/4	0/01
Do the schools present rules and regulations pave the way for life skills training?	2/75	1/11	211	-3/21	0/01
Do the schools extra - curricula activities pave the way for life school training?	2/74	1/15	209	-3/27	0/01
Do schools provide opportunities to the student and life skills roles?	2/69	1/17	213	-3/85	0/01
Do teachers employ the cooperative methods in the process of teaching/	2/58	1/11	213	-3/56	0/01
Do any reciprocal and effective interaction between schools and other institutions [family, organizations) improve life skills?	2/61	1/21	212	-4/56	0/01

Table 9: T-one sample for curriculum evaluation

VariablesQuestion	Mean	Standarddeviation	Degrees freeform	T value	Level to significant
Employment of active evaluation methods such as research and project to cultivate skills	2/81	1/08	211	-2/60	0/01
Attention to high levels learning i.e., analysis, synthesis	2/80	1/11	211	-2/62	0/01
Degree of attention to life skills in class evaluation	2/92	1/14	212	-1/08	—

**The Degree of Attention to Life Skill Education at Primary School Curriculum:** In the second section of research, samples have been required to evaluate the degree of school’s curriculum adaptation with life skills.

In this respect, there were three questions posed in relation to the adaptive degree of curriculum design curriculum implementation and curriculum evaluation.

**The Degree of Attention to Life Skill Education in Curriculum Design:** Three questions were listed in the questionnaire to study respondents' perceptions on degree of attention to life skill training in current Iranian curriculum design. The following Table shows research findings in this respect.

As it is drawn from the above Table, in all of the factors related to curriculum design, the degree of attention to life skills is evaluated unsuitable.

**The Degree of Attention to Life Skills Education in Curriculum Implementation Stage:** Nine questions were listed in questionnaire to study respondents' perceptions in relation to the degree of attention to life skills education in curriculum implementation stage. The following Table shows the related findings:

As Table 8 indicates, respondents perceive the degree of attention paid to life skills in curriculum implementation is not adequate. In the other word most of the life skills components at curriculum implementation stage have been evaluated negatively.

**The Degree of Attention to Life Skills Training in Curriculum Evaluation Stage:** Three questions were listed in questionnaire to show sample perception in relation to the degree of attention to life skills in curriculum evaluation stage. The related basic findings are as follow As it is draw from Table 9 most of the life skills components in curriculum evaluation stage were not evaluated positively

## DISCUSSION

As it is said, the educational system of Iran is centralized and, all curriculum decisions are made at the central level and then sent to schools for fidelity implementation. Under such circumstances, despite the great importance of life skills training in forming current schools, there is no specific curriculum for teaching such skills in primary schools. Nowadays it has become an important issue which should be accentuated fastidiously to get students adapt life habits Yet [2, 29], in Iran teaching these skills are included in some curricula such, as; social sciences, natural sciences and etc.

Current study shows that the degree of attention to life skills at different curriculum stages (design, implementation and evaluation) is not in an appropriate and it is essential for Iranian curriculum decision makers to rethink and revise curricula and integrate some related life skills concepts in primary school curricula. Moreover, findings show that there are various categories of life skills for teaching at Iranian primary school which rank

different importance. Some of these skills must be included in school curricula urgently as a means of reducing some of current problems (urgent life skills) some other must be considered in national curriculum revises which take place every 5 years (proactive life skills). The rest of life skills must be included in both urgent procedures and cyclical revises [continuous life skills].

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