

Awareness about Life Skills Among Engineering Students



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Abstract

Life skills have been defined by World Health Organisation (WHO) as "the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life". The current paper aims to investigate the level of awareness among male and female (N=40) students pursuing Engineering courses about the ten life skills laid down by WHO. The current paper aimed to promote awareness about life skills among the sample. A closed-ended questionnaire comprising of 20 statements was employed followed by debriefing session to promote awareness among the students. Mean and S.D was computed and the findings of this study revealed that awareness about life skills is average and female students are less aware about life skills as compared to the male students. Thus, indicating the need for including life skills education as a part of our curriculum to enhance psychosocial competence among the Engineering students.

Keywords: Life Skills, Mental Health, Positive Behaviour, Psychological Competence

Introduction

The current era of 21st century has witnessed an increased urbanization, rampant globalization which has created tremendous influence in individual's lifestyle, cognition, inter-personal relationship, emotions. Even, our education system is not left untouched by the changes occurring around us. We have students with different reading habits, techno-friendly, and google oriented. When asked to do a project, current student's first preference is "internet" as internet serves as the storehouse of knowledge at just one click of the button in less time. We all know, internet is a boon and also at the same time curse for the present era with its lot of negative effects which will not be discussed in the current paper. But, in the process of making our students and children gear up with the fast pace of the world what we forget now- a days is that we are producing students who lack self-control, psycho-social competence leading to a large number of students committing suicide, suffering from depression. As educators and parents we are complaining of our students and children not showing enough respect, love, care, affection and lacking ability to take enough responsibility. But here the question that arises is: Is our education system providing or training students with the core "life skills" ??? . These skills are the requisite element for the development of values, skills and knowledge in the learner, which assists young people to protect themselves and others in a range of risk situations.

The answer here is "NO" and the genesis of this problem probably dates back to the time of the British rule in the country. The present educational system of India was an implantation of British rulers. Wood's Dispatch of 1854 laid the foundation of the current system of Education in India. Thus, the need here is of a paradigm shift in the education philosophy of India which promotes behaviouristic approach to learning as against humanistic approach. According to behaviouristic theory, cause and effect are what control behaviour and not mind and reason. Thereby rote learning is given more importance as against creative thinking and reasoning. On the other hand, the humanistic approach emphasizes the personal growth of the individual. It argues that human beings are capable of thought and reason. They have a free will and are capable of making choices and taking decisions. The education system needs to harp on this belief that each child has the innate drive to achieve his maximum potential. The system needs to believe in the individuality of each child and to help the child deal with the vicissitudes of life. The education system needs to enable a child to deal effectively with the

environment, discern available opportunities and deal with the challenges of society.

In the current paper an attempt is made to understand the concept of life skills primarily among students who are pursuing courses from various branches of engineering. But, one problem observed is that although students are theoretically sound in engineering knowledge but still rate of employability and success rate of these students who are bright, talented, creative are very less. Here, again as educators we need to introspect as to the reason behind this. Again the problem of the current education system where they are given less knowledge about life skills promotion.

Life skills can be defined as “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour, that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.” (World Health Organization, 1997a, p.1).

The purpose of life skills education is to:

1. Reinforce existing: Knowledge, positive attitudes and values, pro-social and healthy skills and behaviour.
2. Prevent or reduce: Myths and misinformation, negative attitudes, risky behaviours

The ten basic life skills as laid down by WHO are as follows:

Self Awareness

Recognition of 'self', our character, our strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes.

Empathy

Ability to imagine what life is like for another person.

Critical Thinking

Ability to analyze information and experiences in an objective manner.

Creative Thinking

A novel way of seeing or doing things that is characteristic of four components – fluency (generating new ideas), flexibility (shifting perspective easily), originality (conceiving of something new), and elaboration (building on other ideas).

Decision Making

Dealing constructively with decisions about our lives.

Problem Solving

Dealing constructively with problems in our lives.

Interpersonal Relationship

Relating in positive ways with the people we interact with.

Effective Communication

Ability to express ourselves, both verbally and non-verbally, in ways that are appropriate to our cultures and situations.

Coping with Stress

Recognizing the sources of stress in our lives, recognizing how this affects us, and acting in ways that help us control our levels of stress, by changing our environment or lifestyle and learning how to relax.

Coping with Emotions

Involving recognizing emotions within us and others, being aware of how emotions influence

behaviour and being able to respond to emotions appropriately.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the level of awareness among students pursuing Engineering courses about life skills.
2. To find out the difference between the male and female students pursuing Engineering courses regarding awareness about life skills.
3. To promote awareness among the students pursuing Engineering courses regarding life skills.

Research Method

Sample

The total number of the sample selected for the current study was forty students (N=40) pursuing Engineering courses in two colleges of Guwahati, Assam. The age of the participants ranges from 20-25 years. Criterion based sampling popularly known as purposive sampling was employed in selecting the sample. Equal number of male and female students were chosen for the study (Male=20, Female=20).

Measures/ Tools and Procedure

1. A closed-ended questionnaire based on the ten core life skills laid down by WHO was developed for the purpose of measuring awareness about life skills. The questionnaire comprised of 20 statements i.e. two statements enquiring into each of the ten core life skills. Each item responses were recorded as follows: (Y) indicating Presence of awareness, (N) indicating Lack of awareness and (D) indicating Don't Know. The responses were scored as follows: item no- 6,9,11,13,18,19 if answered 'No' respondent gets a score of 1 and the rest of the items if answered 'Yes' then respondent gets a score of 1. Sum total of both the obtained scores is done where low scores (0-5) indicating lack of awareness about life skills, scores in the range of (6-9) indicates very low amount of awareness, scores in the range of (10-15) indicating partial awareness, high scores in the range of (16-20) indicates presence of high awareness about life skills.
2. Debriefing: Students were debriefed about the purpose of the study after the scores were obtained and explained about the concept of life skills and its relevance to promote awareness which is another objective of the current research.

The study was conducted on students pursuing Engineering degree in two different colleges of Guwahati city. The minimum age of the participants was 20 years and maximum was 25 years. The students were invited in small groups of five individuals and rapport was established. Following this they were handed over the questionnaire with a request to complete the same by reading the printed instructions. In this manner entire data was collected and scored. They were further divided into group of ten students each and debriefing was done to promote awareness about life skills and its relevance in our day to day life

Result & Discussion

The data were collected and properly scrutinised. The scoring was done with the help of the above mentioned scoring system. The responses were scored as follows: item no-6,9,11,13,18,19 if answered as 'No' respondent gets a score of 1 and the rest of the items if answered 'Yes' then respondent gets a score of 1. Then the sum total was worked out. The obtained scores were interpreted as follows

Table 1: Interpretation of scores

Scores	Interpretation
1-5	Lack of awareness
6-9	Very low awareness
10-15	Partially aware
16-20	Highly aware

In the present study, the scores obtained by the participants indicating the level of awareness about life skills are tabulated as follows:

Table 2: Scores obtained by male Engineering students (N=20)

Level of awareness	No. of male Students	Percentage	Interpretation of scores
1-5	2	10 %	Lack of awareness
6-9	2	10%	Very low
10-15	11	55%	Partially aware
16-20	5	25%	Highly aware

The data in Table 2 revealed that among the twenty male Engineering students only five students i.e. (25%) had high level of awareness about life skills, eleven students (55%) revealed partial awareness about life skills, two students (10%) revealed very low amount of awareness about life skills and two student (10%) revealed complete lack of awareness about life skill

Table 3: Scores obtained by female Engineering students (N=20)

Level of awareness	No. of female students	Percentage	Interpretation of scores
1-5	1	5%	Lack of awareness
6-9	12	60%	Very low
10-15	7	35%	Partially aware
16-20	0	0%	Highly aware

Similarly, the data in Table 3 indicated the scores obtained by the twenty female students and it was found that female students awareness level was very poor. Not a single female scored on the highly aware range, only seven (35%) had partial awareness about life skills, twelve students (60%) had very low/negligible amount of awareness and one student (5%) completely lacked awareness about life skills.

The obtained scores by both male and female engineering students indicates that there is an average level of awareness about life skills amongst the sample of the current study. But, as compared to female students male engineering students scores obtained maximum scores in the score range of 10-15 which indicates that male students are much more aware about life skills an

essential element for achieving psycho-social competence which will enhance their way of leading a stress free life. Female engineering students score range falls in the range of 6-10 which indicates very low level of awareness about life skills.

During the debriefing session in groups it was observed that few of the females did not even know what exactly life skill meant. The reason attributing to the cause of lack of awareness about life skills is the schooling background and the misunderstanding among educators between values and morality. The trend of nuclear family system has also affected interpersonal relationship style, emotion regulation system among the students. The level of competition, parental pressure to top the exams, choosing of career etc. which is prevalent right now is unprecedented. In the process of being a part of this competitive world as parents, educators we tend to forget that not everyone is a born Einstein or a Newton. Thus, ignoring individual potentiality and unique quality of a student/ a child is not desirable.

After debriefing sample reported that there is a very essential need for providing training on life skills to the students . For this educational institution is the best place to impart training on life skills and promote environment towards positive thinking.

The mean and Standard deviation was calculated for the data collected and is presented in the table given below.

Table 4: Table indicating Mean and Standard Deviation

Gender	No. of Students	Mean	Standard deviation
Male	20	12.45	3.80
Female	20	9.25	2.93
Combined Score	40	10.85	3.75

When comparison was made between the mean and the standard deviation scores of the two groups (male and female) it indicates that the scores of male are more as compared to female. The mean score for male is 12.45 and for female students it was found to be 9.25 whereas the combined mean score for the total sample (N=40) is 10.85.

The standard deviation (S.D) score for male student is 3.80 and female is 2.93 whereas the combined standard deviation for the total sample is 3.75 indicating the level of variability in the scores obtained by both the group.

Thus, the study revealed that there is moderate level of awareness among male engineering students as compared to the female engineering students. Gender disparity between the two group was significantly observed in the scores obtained .

Overall, the scores obtained by both group indicate that the level of awareness about the ten core life skills laid down by WHO are very less which is an issue that needs to be paid attention to by educators, parents, authorities responsible for implementing changes in the education system.

In most of the respondents questionnaire the response assessing self- awareness, coping with emotions, coping with stress indicates very poor level of awareness. In order to promote awareness

amongst the sample debriefing was done where the relevance of life skills was provided to them. They were informed that the acquisition and application of life skills can influence the way we feel about ourselves and others, and equally will influence the way we are perceived by others. Life skills contribute to individual's perceptions of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem and thereby contributing towards promotion of mental well-being. It helps in strengthening and developing friendly, good and healthy relationship. The promotion of mental well-being contributes to our motivation to look after ourselves and others, the prevention of mental disorders, and the prevention of health, behavioural and social problems; e.g. smoking, drug abuse, suicide among adolescents and young adults, violent behaviours, emerging psychiatric and social-psychological problems, HIV prevalence, loss and decreased academic performance. Researches confirmed the positive effect of life skills in reducing drug abuse, using the cognitive and IQ capacities and capabilities, preventing violent behaviours, increasing self-reliance and self-esteem. The training of these skills has also been emphasized as a general preventive way from personal and social damages.

Limitations of the Study

No researcher is flawless and thus even the current research is not free of limitations. The study was conducted on a small sample size thereby the result of the study cannot be generalised. The tool used for the current study was self developed by the researcher and thus it requires standardisation.

Conclusion

Researcher feels that there is need to promote awareness about life skills amongst the engineering students so that they can lead a well adjusted, empathetic, stress free life. These life skills can play an important role in understanding human rights and upholding these rights. There is a strong need felt by the researcher to include life skills education as a part of curriculum along with the theoretical courses. The inculcation of life skills among these students, can act as the agents of change towards a just society as the informed and rightly motivated individuals can influence their household members, peer groups and the community in the positive direction, thereby breaking the cycle of exclusion, exploitation, poverty and violence. Researcher feels that life skills education is essential in order to create a paradigm shift of education

system towards humanistic approach of learning. A blend of feelings with knowledge is essential to make the learning process enjoyable and fulfilling for the students. Thereby, it is hoped that the current education system with its oppressive rigidity would open up and make life skills education a part of its mainstream curriculum.

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