

Relevance of Life Skills for Adolescent Girls

Mr. Niranjana Mahakul

Lecturer in Education
PG Department of Education
Govt. DAV College, Koraput, Odisha
niranjana00319@gmail.com

Abstract

The stage of adolescence is a significant phase of human life. This is the stage when they take decisions regarding their education, career and captivating dreams of future life. Particularly adolescence plays a dominant role in the life of girls. Along with changes in appearance, a lot of challenges surround them and compel them to visualize different possibilities. Hence, life skills will enable them to make meaningful choices, build their self-confidence and positive attitude towards their surrounding world. In this context, integration of core life skills should be part and parcel of our education system to strengthen the talents, capacities of adolescent girls and to shape their individual and social life vibrant and successful.

Key words: Adolescence, life skills, core life skills, life skills approach.

1. Introduction

Girls, the most beautiful creation of God live in a world of innocence and joy in the heavenly abode of their family. They enjoy their childhood with toys, with decorated dreams and delightful experiences. The echo of their sweet voices reverberates in the environment surrounding them. But the moment they step into the period of adolescence, life becomes difficult. Unknowingly they are entrapped by the complexities of the society and face a number of challenges. Rapid physiological changes compel them to behave in a very different way and sometimes without proper guidance they become vulnerable to risky situations. Some of them suffer from drug abuse, early age pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, suicide and various psychological disorders. Moreover, they become suffocated with academic pressure, examination and insecurity of job. Instances are many where without using their natural potential, they are engaged in various non-productive activities, thereby leading a miserable life and causing a great damage to the treasure of human resources. Life skills can enable the adolescent girls to develop the skills they need to succeed in future and can develop their ability to choose the right choice. This can make the girls aware, motivate and empower them to have a better vision and mission of life.

2. Importance of Adolescence

The adolescent populations of a country constitute an important segment as the future developments depend on them. As per 2011 census, adolescent population (10-19 years) is 253.2

million, constituting 21% of the total population. Though critical it is the most important period of life. It is the period of transition from childhood to adulthood and is sometimes called the period of stress and strain. The word adolescence comes from a Greek word 'adolescere' which means 'to grow to maturity'. It is the period of rapid changes in the individual's physical, mental, moral, spiritual and social outlook. It is the period of learning, motivation, achieving great ideals, attitudes, skills and also period of problems and challenges to face the realities of life and to adjust effectively with the changing scenario of the society.

Chronologically, adolescence comes roughly in between the years from 12 to 19 or the early 20's. In girls, adolescence may begin a year or two earlier than in boys. World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescence both in terms of spanning the ages between (10 and 19 years) and in terms of a phase of life marked by special attributes like:

- Rapid physical growth and development.
- Sexual maturity and the onset of sexual activity.
- Development of adult mental processes and adult identity.
- Transition from socio-economic dependence to a search for relative independence.

However, the period of adolescence may vary from person to person and from culture to culture depending upon the socio-economic condition of the country. In Indian scenario in 1999, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) identified three main stages of adolescence:

- Early Adolescence (9-13 years):-** Characterized by a period of rapid social development and the development of secondary sexual characteristics.
- Mid Adolescence (14-15 years):-** Recognized by rapid physical, emotional and intellectual capacities distinguished by the development of a separate identity from parents, of new relationships with peer groups and the opposite sex.
- Later Adolescence (16-19 years):-** At this stage adolescents have fully developed physical characteristics just like the adults and have formed a distinct identity and place in the society and have well-formed opinion and ideas.

Thus, adolescence is marked by a number of behavioural changes and psychological ramification, which leave an imprint upon the minds of the adolescents. Due to the rapid physical changes exhibited in the body, they display an attitude clouded with self-consciousness. They become hesitant and indifferent towards the suggestions and advice of the elders. Their interest grows in identifying themselves in fashion, stylish look, way of talking, group loyalties, hero worship, desiring for status and developing a peculiar philosophy of life. Emotions play a greater role in their life. Adolescents get their inspiration and if it is not properly balanced, they grow up to be abnormal and inhibited persons. Infatuation dominates the course of their life. They are far removed from the reality and live in an unreal dream world. However, they are curious to acquire new language, often get pleasure in speaking variety of languages and rendering contributions in the fields of those. This is the phase when the seed for future decisions, occupations, dreams and aspirations blossom in the mind and heart of them which decorates their future. But some time hard realities of life shatter their dream like a life of cards and raises a

mountain of obstacles before them and torments them in to a state of stress, anger and frustration. In this connection, proper guidance is necessary to shape their attitude towards a competent and effective personality.

3. Girls in the critical phase of Adolescence

In comparison to boys, girls face a critical time during adolescence. It is described as the spring time which transforms them in to a distinctly different and quite attractive personality. However, in this transitional phase of ‘gudia rani’ (baby doll) to ‘badi shayani’ (matured girls) they come across various challenges in their day to day life. An intense striving for freedom, peer group belongingness and a craving for self- identity often makes them go out of the direct control of their parents. Frequent mood changing, active sexual life, drug addiction, depression and other psycho-social issues make their life troublesome. Many of them become misguided by the influence of friends and the outer world and delve into a world of different dimensions and fall victim of dreadful consequences. At this critical juncture, an educational intervention is highly desired to guide them in the right direction. Life skill programme will help the adolescents to understand and play their role in the changing social perspective by inculcating various psycho-social life skills, thereby improving their standard of life.

4. Meaning of Life Skills

Life skills as defined by World Health Organization (WHO) are “the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. They are abilities that facilitate the physical, mental and emotional well being of an individual.” Thus, life skills built the capacity of the individuals to cope with various circumstances and make them flexible in approach. Moreover these skills also enhance positive attitude of the children and adolescents in each and every walk of life. So, development of life skills is a value based programme which activates the hidden potentialities of the individuals to go for suitable choices in order to lead a worthy and meaningful life.

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) recognizes the importance of life skills as “a behaviour change or behaviour development approach designed to address balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills.” Thus, life skills enhance the capacity of adolescents by weaving a harmony between thought and bahaviour which ultimately transforms their attitude towards work ethics i.e. what to do and how to do it and attitude towards life in general. This framework makes them responsible citizens by making them conscious about their rights and duties, generates the spirit of healthy intention towards forming a positive self-concept to face the outer world embedded with value based life skills.

Since a long time education based on life skills has been playing a significant role in the context of emerging health issues and development of children and adolescents around the world. In 1986, the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion recognized life skills in terms of making better health choices. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the child linked life skills to education by stating that education should be directed towards the development of the child’s fullest potential. The 1990 Jomtien Declaration on ‘Education for all’ included life skills among essential learning tools for survival, capacity development and quality of life. The 2000 Dakar World Education Conference states that

young people have the human right to benefit from education that includes “learning to know, to do, to live together and to be” and included life skills.

In Indian Scenario, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF-2005) emphasized on the importance of life skills. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in 2005, introduced life skills education as an integral part of the curriculum through continuous comprehensive evaluation for classes 6 to 10. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan(SSA) also, has under its agenda life skills training for girls in upper primary classes.

5. Core Life Skills

Life skills are a set of human skills used appropriately for the management of personal affairs. Life skills are different from person to person and culture to culture. However the World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized ten core life skills. They are-

- i) Self – awareness
- ii) Empathy
- iii) Critical thinking
- iv) Creative thinking
- v) Decision making
- vi) Problem solving
- vii) Effective communication
- viii) Interpersonal relationship
- ix) Coping with stress
- x) Coping with emotion

Integration of Core Life Skills in the Life of Adolescent Girls

Girls have multifarious roles to perform in nation building, starting from an efficient housewife to a teacher, a doctor, a space scientist and a pilot, flying the aeroplane in the blue sky. Teaching life skills in relation to everyday life could form the foundation for future life of girls by promoting their mental well-being and healthy outlook. Inculcation and integration of core life skills will event an exert everlasting imprint in the life of adolescent girls and prepare them to be the torch-bearers of a brighter and happier world.

i) Self-awareness

Developing self-awareness leads to recognizing one’s capacities. It makes the girls conscious about their inner selves which reflect their confidence, enthusiasm, talents and also drawbacks. Self is the store-house of immense strength that never exhausts. Girls can be efficient and intelligent when this awareness is illumined inside them. They can explain their views daringly to prevent negative impact of the outer world. This also identifies with self-respect of one-self as a human-being, a part and parcel of the human race.

ii) Empathy

Empathy is the ability to feel and understand other's emotions, feelings and experiences. It is the tendency to feel love for human beings as well as animals, trees and other substances in the environment. By this positive attitude, the girls can be able to recognize, respect and respond to the various emotions of the persons before them and will reduce the animosity that exists among individuals.

iii) Critical thinking

Critical thinking is the ability to analyze and decipher the proper perspective of particular information or situation. This skill allow girls not to be influenced by the views of others nor take any hasty decisions regarding their career, peer relationship or choosing their life-partners. Thus, critical thinking will enkindle girls more rational and accurate in evaluating situations while taking decisions for their life.

iv) Creative thinking

Creative thinking ability is rising above the boundary of common thinking, which is key to success. Lack of confidence prevents individuals from choosing a new dimension or direction of life. On the other hand, girls can work wonder the moment the fear of conventions and restrictions are removed from their mental atmosphere. They can prove their ability at home, in the workplace and in the society fearlessly with the development of the skill of creative thinking.

v) Decision making

Decision making is a major skill to select the best possible solution depending upon one's values and goals and adhere to it. This will make life of girls happy and peaceful. They should analyze their previous mistakes and learn to rectify them in future. Because the future success and failure of adolescent girls depend categorically on their logical decision taking attitude.

vi) Problem solving

Life is full of problems. When one problem is solved, another crop up and creates stress and strain in the mind of the adolescent girls. Problem solving skill will enable the girls to be mentally prepared to face challenges so that they can easily handled situations arising ahead of them, whatever they may be.

vii) Inter-personal relationship

Social well-being depends on the skill of inter-personal relationship which enables the adolescent girls to behave with people in a positive way. Girls can keep good relationship with others in the society being aware about their own limitations. A stable atmosphere in the mental plane is possible only when they would value human relationship as the essence of their life.

viii) **Effective communication**

Effective communication is the ability to express one's own self, both verbally and non-verbally in a manner that is appropriate to one's culture. This skill will enable girls capable of expressing their feelings, opinions in a lucid manner, so that they can get help and advice at the time of necessity. Most of the girls hesitate to express their emotions before others, when they are compelled by situation. They are afraid to utter their reactions when being exploited in any manner. Thus, with proper interest and effort, the skill of effective communication should be developed within the adolescent girls.

ix) **Coping with stress**

It means the ability to recognize our stress level and to think over ways and means to get proper solutions of their situations. Girls are susceptible to a number of stress patterns relating to their life style and surrounding environment. When they realize the cause of stress they would try to find out the ways of getting rid of it. They can change their friend circle, or change the inappropriate situations to maintain a mental equilibrium, to lead a praiseworthy life.

x) **Coping with emotions**

Coping with emotions is an essential life skill to know and manage one's personal emotions like love, anger, hatred, sorrow etc. in different circumstances of life. Girls can be free from negative emotions in order to lead a healthy life as because our health is also affected by such emotions. They can better deal with others when realize the importance of emotions in the life of their near and dear ones.

Approaches for Facilitating Life Skills

Preaching and practising of life skills needs to be developed as part of a support of healthy behaviour and mental well-being of the children and adolescents belonging to 10-18 years. Moreover, they are more valuable to behaviour related problems. The teaching of life skills should be associated with the teaching of health information and development of attitudes and values. To accumulate particular life skills involves active support of the teachers, friends and a positive and supportive classroom climate. Moreover the methods and strategies are based on a social learning process which further includes learning an explanation about any skill, observing how others behave and what consequences arise from that particular behaviour, practising of the skill in a planned yet friendly learning situation and feedback about individual and group performance of skills. Moreover, they should be encouraged to practice those skills in realize situations in their home and in the society. This provides a deep insight into the various approaches which can be used for facilitating life skills to the adolescent girls. Further, life skills learning may be both active learning and experiential learning. Active learning engages the adolescents in a dynamic and evolving process of learning by using approaches like group discussion, brainstorming, quiz content debates and case studies. Experimental learning is the actual practice of what is being taught which involves games and role play.

i) **Group discussion**

Through the process of group discussion, adolescent girls can get an opportunity to express their views freely and fluently. The critical feeling can also be activated and they would learn not to

hesitate or show inhibition while trying to express. Topics concerning problem of young girls relating to their career, job, and exploitation at work place or consequences of vulnerable diseases like HIV/AIDS etc. can be discussed which will increase the sphere of their knowledge and will built confidence among them to face those challenges of life.

ii) **Brainstorming**

Brainstorming implies gathering of various ideas regarding a particular topic or problem related to the adolescent girls. It enhances the capability of the girls to think freely and express quickly. It is highly essential to analyze the merits and demerits of any idea in the light of discovering a plausible solution of a particular problem. After brainstorming the girls should be encouraged to reflect their ideas which ultimately bring them nearer to the appropriate conclusion.

iii) **Quiz contest**

It is a very interesting activity both within and outside the classroom, which inspires the adolescent girls to acquire knowledge vividly regarding a topic or a selected theme. They acquire thorough and accurate knowledge which enhances their power to think critically and communicate courageously with the values of perseverance and concentration.

iv) **Debate**

Debate spreads the interest and inquisitiveness of the girls to think deeply regarding any topic. When a particular problem or issue is presented to the class, adolescents must take a position on resolving that problem or issue with their exhaustive knowledge in a creative way. Some girls will be asked to speak in favour and others against a real life problem to find better solutions, by observing the different reasons of that issue.

v) **Case studies**

Adolescent girls can learn better through case studies as an effective way of accumulating in-depth data about a case, mainly from their complexities and ambiguities. Thus, case studies are significant medium of learning by identifying a particular problem and its parameters, and will try to find out the possible solutions to overcome that problem. These approaches develop the skill of empathy, problem solving, communication and decision making ability of girls.

vi) **Games**

There is an important role of games in the life of adolescent girls, it is rightly said that, “a healthy mind lives in a healthy body.” Thus, games always enrich the abilities and skills of adolescents and develop their sportive spirits. The adolescent girls actively participate in different kinds of games, where the whole class is divided into certain small group which facilitates in building their inner capabilities. Games enable them to recognize other’s feeling and make them capable enough to establish a healthy social life.

vii) Role play

Role play provides an opportunity to the adolescent girls to have an useful experience of applying life skills in an organized real life situation. A number of girls and boys can participate to play certain roles through an imaginary situation. Skill of assertiveness, inter-personal relationship, and effective communication ability of the girls can be developed through role playing.

viii) Audio-visual approach

Apart from these approaches, different audio-visual programmes should be encouraged to inculcate life skills among the adolescent girls. In this context, ‘Sara’ programme and ‘Meena’ programme initiated by UNICEF can orient the school going and college going girls to continue their education irrespective of all obstacles and inculcate life skills for their future life. ‘Sara’ and ‘Meena’ are the two cartoon role models for the adolescents throughout the world. These two world wide programmes create awareness through radio programme, comic books, story-books and posters for educating the adolescent girls and their parents about effective life skills.

6. Conclusion

Adolescence though beautiful, enchanting and alluring in the life of girls also brings forward a number of inhibitions and anxieties, disappointments and frustrations which can be successfully overcome by integrating life skills as a part and parcel of their education. It will develop a sound mind-set and adaptive social efficiency among the girls to lead a healthy and desirable social life. In this context, role of parents and teachers play a significant role in shaping and chiseling their personality in such a manner which would enlighten not only the society but also the whole world.

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