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LIFE SKILLS THROUGH ESL ACTIVITIES IN RURAL GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS OF  
TELANGANA

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ABSTRACT

Life Skills are very important for everyone particularly, students studying in schools. Today, English language has become the most indispensable component of everyone's mode of communication and also a means of survival. Though most of the textbooks/ course book including curriculum emphasizing on life skills in the content but teachers are not well trained to teach life skills and always it is neglected in English classroom which are necessary for student and this can cause a bigger problem in the future.

English and Life Skills are very important to excel in ones career. These skills have to be taught very early during school days. Teaching English and Life Skills in schools have to have an entirely different approach than our traditional language teaching methods, which are strong in some sense but too rigid to meet the needs of today's fast growing world.

This paper primarily addresses the need of life skills in students and how effectively English and Life Skills can be taught with variety of ESL activities along with teaching suitable methods in rural classroom setup. Secondly, it talks about how Life Skills can be incorporated in English language teaching and how the English teachers can implement in classroom with no difficulty. And finally, this paper suggests guidelines for implementing Life Skills in English language teaching.

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Life Skills

The phrase '*Life Skills*' itself refers that the skills we require to make the most out of life. Life skills are generally connected with managing and living a better quality of life. They help out us to achieve our objectives and live to our full potential. Any skill that is useful in your life can be considered a life skill such as tying tie, swimming, driving a car, using a computer and many other skills which we as individuals have to do in everyday life and those are very useful life skills in life.

Generally, Life Skills can be defined as a set of skills gained either from classroom or society which helps individuals or groups successfully to handle problems and questions commonly encountered in their

daily life. Life skills help people to encounter their life situation at home, school, work, and any other context in which they find themselves (Manglallan and Raskauskas, 2003; UNESCO, 2010).

Life Skills according to W.H.O., every learner must be self reliant and skills such as Communication skills, Interpersonal skills, Life- long learning skills , Problem Solving skills, Creative Thinking, Leadership, and Empathy.( WHO, 1997). Development of Life Skills is closely linked to pedagogy of active learning. It is “through participative teaching methods, such as role play, debates, situation analysis, and one-on-one problem-solving, life skills programs can actively engage young people in their own development process” (Mangrulkar, 2001, p.6). In the words of Mangrulkar, Whitman and Posner, Develops skills in adolescents, both to build the needed competencies for human development and to adopt positive behaviors that enable them to deal effectively with the challenges of everyday life.(2001, p.5). The World Health Organization (1997) reports that a skills requires where a person should have capacity to sustain a condition of mental well-being and to exhibit it in adaptive and optimistic behaviour while interacting with others in his /her or others’ cultural environment.

The UNICEF has expanded the concept and defines life skills as a large group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills, which can help young people, make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills (Maclang-Vicencio: World Scientific Conference p. 3).

According to UNESCO (2008) a Life Skills Based Education (LSBE) is distinguished from other education strategies in that it is designed to enhance efforts to positively develop or change behaviours through a balance of knowledge, attitudes and skills. The approach uses a wide variety of participatory and interactive techniques (small group discussions, role playing, debating, community partnerships and projects, and other exploratory learning techniques) to archive a key goal of attitudinal and behavioural change in learners. (UNESCO, p.2).

Similarly as UNESCO, the UNICEF too emphasizes on Life Skills and strongly suggests that a learner need to be taught in a participatory learning mode where he/she can engage the whole learner in an experiential learning environment. Learners require attitudinal and behavioral changes to adopt themselves in an experiential learning environment and there would be a change in the learners’ previously obtained behavior and conduct and the institutions make divergent changes in them.

#### **Need for Life Skills Education in Government Schools**

An academic institution in which life skills education is well taught, developed and practiced, it certainly improves the well being of a society and encourage optimistic viewpoint and healthy behavior. In particular, an academic institution enables the individual to translate knowledge, attitude, skills and values into action. It helps in behaving responsibly and this leads to healthy living. It also develops a positive attitude towards oneself and with others. It also makes an individual a full potential and promote the state of mental well being. The very important skills are risk free behavior, communicate effectively, negotiation skills, self perception, self confidence, self esteem, and self worth those are require for everyone and to impart all these skills schools acts as prime source. Since all academic institutions, especially schools are the agents of change in learners and also act as a key role in elevating and nurturing young people's emotional and social health, learner get a platform where he/she can go through a drastic changes in thinking and actions.

As schools are the important spaces for the learner to learn and practice skills, teachers also are key representatives in bringing up the following required qualities in learners:

- Prepare learners for self dependency.
- Prepare a child to become self confident.
- Promote skills based learning for overall development of children.
- Training is an effective means for empowering the students to take steps correctly to tackle everyday changes, challenges, problems efficiently.

**Problem of teachers in teaching life skills in classrooms**

Today, majority of the teacher of English do not have knowledge and understanding of the life skills. In fact, they do not know what life skills are and how it should be integrated in language teaching. Apart from this, the teachers are not aware what methods they need to use in building up life skills among the students. And, many difficulties face by teachers in integrating life skills in ESL activities particularly in government schools of Telangana district.

**Integrating Life Skills in English Classroom**

Integration means combining (parts) into a whole or completing (something that is imperfect or incomplete) by adding parts (Hornby, 1988: 444). Referring to the definition, integration means adding components to them. In the context of ELT curriculum, the integration of life skills tends to develop communicative competence on the part of English language learners. The acquisition of analyzed life skills occurs simultaneously with that of language skills.

English language has to be intrinsically woven with Life Skills teaching because learning a language is a life skill and Life and they are very important for everyone. Isolating English from life skills can pose a bigger problem in the future of a student. A student who can read and write English well should also possess the confidence to speak his mind to different audience be it at home, friends or in a large auditorium. Many students who graduate do not get jobs because they lack English communication and Life Skills to prove it language teaching is to help learners in any way that motivates them to work with language.(Richard & Rodgers, 2001:157).

**Student Centric Classroom**

Generally people believe that teacher is the most important person in a classroom. It is not true, teacher has an important role, but students are important in a classroom; because it is students' success that measures the effectiveness of the class. In an English class what can be more important than that the pupil start to speak, read and write English effectively with respect to their age and context.

What is a student centric classroom? Student centric class has a bigger objective than just learning grammar. A student centric classroom gives the students a lot of freedom to participate and learning by experiential methods rather than a learning that is based on lectures. Student centric class needs skilled teachers who themselves are liberated and not bound by tradition.

*Here is an example of a student centric class to teach present continuous tense.*

Activity: Live Report.

Objective: Present Continuous Tense.

Skills Focus: Teamwork, Presentation Skills, Creative thinking, Confidence

Age: 12 to 16 years

**Process**

- Children are divided into groups by the facilitator
- Children get different topics to cover such as (1) 5 minutes after earthquake in Nepal (2) A bomb scare in a railway station
- Children get 10 minutes to discuss and brainstorm on the topic given. Here students relate to their past experiences and discuss how to present.
- Students are instructed to focus more on talking about what is happening around them in the situations given in the topic.
- Students brainstorm and plan for their presentation and present it in front of the class.

**In this activity students learn**

- Teamwork: because every student is a part of a group and they have a deadline to meet.
- Confidence: Every student presents his/her ideas in front of the class that will boost his self confidence and presentation skills.
- Presentations skills: Each group comes with the presentation on the topics given.

Facilitators Job

- Facilitator manages the time.
- Only helps students when necessary or asked.
- Facilitator encourages and welcomes every idea as unique and great.
- Facilitator makes notes of common errors and gives feedback on the areas that need to be improved.
- Facilitator encourages peer feedback.

**Result of this activity**

- Students learn to work in team, which is a very important life skill to learn as it helps them in their career.
- Students learn to give accurate and right feedback which helps their critical thinking.
- Students improve their confidence and grow their self respect as they all get equal and responsible roles to play in the team.
- Students improve their stage presence and presentation skills.
- Students improve their body language with the help of facilitator and peer feedbacks.

**Methods Used in ESL in Activities**

Every English grammar activity should be designed to bring first a thorough grammar concept; with it life skills such as, decision making, critical thinking, body language, confidence, public speaking, presentation skills, teamwork etc. An activity based learning method is the best way to improve life skills in students. When designing an activity teacher can look at adding: drawing, songs, games, presentations, dramas etc. Adding dramas, songs and games make class joyful and hence very attractive to students. All these increase students focus and interest. Reflection on learning also becomes easier since it is practical. Here is a table that gives some clues in bringing these ideas in to practice

Drawing	Teachers can ask children to draw their locality and talk about it. Here teachers can teach simple present tense, prepositions in grammar and in life skills teachers can teach teamwork, presentation skills etc
Songs	Teacher can introduce songs in classroom to teach difficult words, accent of a native speaker. In life skills teacher can teach confidence and body language.
Games	Games are the best ways to start a language class as they act as energizers. But there are many games which can be adopted to teach language for example, Dumb Charades to teach tenses etc. Games help students improve their behaviour and psychomotor skills
Presentation skills	Presentations skills involve a lot of drawing and creativity too. But teacher can use presentation to bring teamwork and confidence in the students.

Dramas	Language teachers can use dramas to help students to improve their writing skills, theatrical skills, conversational skills, Teamwork skills etc. Dramas also help students to think crucially on the issues they face in everyday life. Hence it prepares them to be responsible citizens of the world.
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**From Teacher to a Facilitator**

Traditional teaching methods require teachers to be more interactive to the board than the students. But being a facilitator is very important in English and Life Skills training. In a language and life skills class, students learn by experience, participation and trial and error methods. Here a facilitator has to be

- Patient and optimistic to see repeated failures of students as useful experience that makes them strong and independent
- Innovative and Creative
- Open to change his/her beliefs when proven wrong

- Student friendly
- Mentor rather than a teacher
- Well informed about current affairs and Update

### Conclusion

There is a need to equip children with life skills to make them successful in their life and career. The life skills can be taught in ESL classroom effectively since language learning is one of the major life skills and the teacher's role is immense in teaching life skills. When a teacher of language could have broad idea and understanding of life skills, then there would be no difficulty in imparting life skills in students. Life Skills Education has long term benefits to the society which include educational, social, health, cultural and economic for the learner and make learner the best citizen as product to the nation.

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