

# Life Skills Education for Children and Some Associated Factors

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## Abstract

Social development and the diversity and complexity of life have been posing many challenges. If children are to be in charge of their own lives—lives that are safe and peaceful—it is necessary to teach them life skills (essential and contemporary skills suitable to their environment). Life skills education should be paid adequate attention and provided from the preschool level. Children are likely to face danger from their surroundings. However, questioning teachers and parents on life skills can help overcome such risks. We study the importance of life skills education—life skills that one should be equipped with—teaching methods, and some associated factors.

**Key words:** Life skills education, life skills, preschool children

## Introduction

Vietnam's economic revival has been accompanied by extensive changes: it has improved living standards but has also posed many difficulties and challenges. To deal with this, people need life skills to adapt to a modern industrialized lifestyle. With life skills, they can be in charge of their lives and be safe and healthy in a modern society that has a diversified culture and a developing economy.

Learning life skills is not easy; it involves a long process of education and training. Life skills education plays an important role: it helps people apply knowledge in developing a healthy behavior and environment. These skills contribute to social development, prevention of social problems, and maintenance of human rights. Furthermore, they motivate positive social behavior, improve living standards, and decrease existing social problems. They also satisfy human and civil rights laws as per Vietnamese and international standards.

Life skills are necessary for the development and well-being of not just adults but also for that of people across all age groups. Thus, children should be taught life skills from an early age. This education provides them with abilities such as self-care and self-protection. Moreover, with this knowledge, they can quickly integrate into their surroundings, develop interpersonal relations, relate to the nature, and rely on their learning to improve their knowledge, experiences, and skills. If they lack the

essential life skills, they might land in embarrassing situations, make mistakes, or even be at a risk of being unable to solve problems in daily life. If they are equipped with the required knowledge, they will have opportunities to develop their personalities suitably and to the fullest potential.

Current preschool programs on life skills lack systematic planning. Certain curriculums include instructions for developing physical, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and social skills and senses. While life skills manuals aimed at adults for providing guidance on being successful can be found in many bookstores, manuals for children are practically nonexistent. The few available ones provide instructions only in the development of certain skills (mainly cognition and language). In preschools, life skills education is dependent on the teachers' experiences. As these are theoretical instructions, children tend to forget them soon. Moreover, as these theories have no practical value, remembering them is futile, because children are unaware how to apply them in real situations.

From the above analysis, we conclude that it is necessary to study and propose methods to teach life skills to children from an early age.

## Life Skills Education for Children

Necessary life skills for children include cognitive, responsiveness, interpersonal communication, self-protection, emotion-control, decision-making, problem-

solving, support-seeking, cooperation, evaluation, and environment-protection skills.

To develop any responsiveness skills, systematic training is required. The different phases of the skill-formation process are mentioned below:

- Children need to have knowledge about the following: goals, objects, methods, and activity conditions.
- Adults with the required knowledge and skills should instruct children (through suggestions and models); moreover, children need to actively learn from and observe such adults.
- Children now apply knowledge, skills, and strategies learned in and experiences gained from training to develop skills and apply them depending on the situation.

Activities are transformed into skills through a process. Children respond without clearly understanding the reasons behind their actions, either because they are asked by adults to respond or because they develop a sudden desire to do so. However, when their activities are influenced by cognition and knowledge, they become skills. Firstly, children need to be given essential knowledge; theoretical knowledge has no practical value. Many children are comfortable with culturally defined behavior such as greeting adults and throwing garbage in dustbins but are awkward in some real situations and shy, run away, or hide behind their mothers, refusing interaction. Life skills education is associated with specific situations, wherein children observe other people's actions and carry out these actions themselves. Such practical experiences help children realize the real meaning of situations and actively apply the necessary skills in specific situations in their daily lives. The following methods should be applied for practically instructing children in routine situations:

- Children enjoy playing and it gives them a chance to apply diverse knowledge. They play different roles and develop their imagination, creativity, knowledge, and cooperativeness with their friends. For example, when they play "family" games, children need to regulate two different relationships: the relationship with their friends (real relationship) and that with the characters in the game (fake relationship). Thus, during the game, each child attempts to fulfill its roles, share, and cooperate with other friends.
- Daily activities are mostly repetitive in nature, and children find training and practicing these activities easy, as they are simply a matter of habit. Moreover, dealing with situations in daily life provides them with an opportunity to develop new skills.
- Films and stories with appropriate content suggest that the children behave appropriately and solve problems effectively.
- Playing roles in vicarious situations help children easily train in life skills. For example, a child's reaction to being lost in a supermarket, a stranger offering candy, or

he/she breaking a toy can be shaped by playing these games.

### **Factors Affecting the Life Skills Education of Children**

The family is the basic social unit for children; it is the cradle that nurtures children's physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional development. The familial culture has a deep influence on them and helps in the formation of their distinct characteristics. The attitude of responsible members plays an important role in children's education. Complete awareness of life skills will influence attitudes and produce an apparent effect. In families, the jobs of the adults have an effect on the children's views on education, and this may naturally affect the children's opportunity to communicate and train to form new skills. Children with parents working in husbandry have many opportunities to be acquainted with farming, cattle, and plants, and they gradually learn the skills in these areas better than urban children with parents working in offices do.

Age and the number of children in a family also influence children's education. Many couples have children late because of late marriage or fertility problems; therefore, when they finally have a child, he/she becomes the centre of the family and is protected from problems. Consequently, the child does not solve daily problems by himself/herself, thus limiting his/her chances to develop life skills.

Because most of their early childhood is spent in preschool, children are influenced by the education provided therein. Not only does the school education affect children and compensate for the lack of education provided by their families but it also propagandizes educational ideas, programs, and methods aimed to bridge the school education and the education provided by their families. Teachers need to clearly understand life skills education and work closely with students to know their abilities and characters and to share this knowledge with their parents.

Living environments greatly affect the origination of life skills. These skills vary, and they originate and develop according to the demands of life. While some skills appear at early childhood, some develop late, and some never develop at all. Many activities demand the use of skills and knowledge. If we do not use skills and knowledge depending on the situations, we will fail or endanger ourselves. Many learn from failure and get a good idea of their weaknesses. To ensure their safety, children's need to gain experience should be supported by adults. In the absence of guidance and support of adults possessing knowledge and skills, the danger and failure to learn from experiences affect children negatively, sometimes to such an extent that the

likelihood of recovering is improbable.

The influence of education, material conditions, or support from other people will fail to show good results unless children are interested in meaningful activities.

The above-mentioned factors encourage responsiveness in children and develop their abilities. However, if physical and physiological maturity affect life skills education continues to remain a question. Nevertheless, ordinary as well as disabled people need to develop life skills. People with disabilities need to acquire suitable skills to overcome their difficulties and to play an appropriate role in the society.

### Conclusion

Life skills education from early childhood is necessary and has to be practical. We need to teach these skills in a systemic manner, because life skills relate to the knowledge and attitude of individuals. To educate children in life skills effectively, educators need to take into account influencing factors such as family, school, and living environment. For providing education, the patience, flexibility, and creativity of educators and parents are essential. Owing to life skills education, children are now aware of how to gain knowledge from their surroundings, establish a relationship with nature and people, and live a safe and peaceful life. For all the people close to children, this may be the ultimate goal.

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