



Life Skills Education in India

An Overview of Evidence and Current Practices

Background Note

16 December 2015

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LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION IN INDIA

I. Introduction

The goals of education, and of a school, indisputably include building cognitive abilities such as reading and Maths. Increasingly, however, it also implies that children should be equipped with other abilities that prepare them for success and meaningful contribution to the society they live in. We will broadly call such traits—such as communication, critical thinking, creativity, self-management, decision-making, perseverance - life skills.

This note aims to synthesise and contribute to the growing discussion around the development of life skills education in India. We propose that life skills should be explicitly woven into school education by exploring evidence on why such skills matter and which skills are important for learning and future outcomes. The following sections then review how these skills are typically nurtured in or out of schools and how feasible these interventions may be. We conclude by analysing present opportunities for building the scope of life skills education in policy and practice in India.

I.1. Defining Life Skills

Life skills may be viewed as a range of psycho-social and cognitive abilities that equip children to make informed decisions and choices, manage their emotional well-being, and communicate effectively.

Efforts to address the achievement gap have typically focused on core subjects such as Maths and English. A common belief is that life skills are optional and secondary to achieving basic literacy and numeracy, only if resources are available. Research, however, unequivocally shows that students who develop social-emotional skills and academic mindsets are better equipped to succeed in school and are able to transfer theoretical concepts to real-life situations early on.¹ We will explore evidence on this need for life skills education in more detail in Section 2.

I.2. Categorising Life Skills

Life skills encompass a wide-ranging and often unstructured set of skills and attitudes that is difficult to rigidly define and that has not been officially codified or categorised.² A number of related terms are used in this context; some of these include:

- Life skills
- 21st century skills
- Non-cognitive skills
- Non-academic skills
- Character skills
- Soft skills
- Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

¹ Carneiro, Crawford and Goodman, *The Impact of Early Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills on Later Outcomes* (2007).

² Ben-Arieh, and Fronese, *Indicators of Children's Well-being: What should be Measured and Why* (2007).

While these terms are not synonymous, they do typically encompass these skills, mindsets and abilities that are considered critical.

Table 1 takes a look at how life skills have been defined and categorised in different contexts. The comprehensive Hilton Pellegrino framework has categorised 21st century competencies into three domains, with the hypothesis that these three areas are essential for youth to be successful in education, the workplace, in health and in civic participation.³

Table 1: Life skills as defined by different organisations

Hilton-Pellegrino framework	World Health Organisation (WHO) ⁴	Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) ⁵	Character Lab	Partnership for 21 st Century Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive Competencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive Processes • Knowledge • Creativity and Innovation • Intra-personal Competencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work Ethic • Positive Self-Evaluation • Intellectual Openness • Inter-personal Competencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teamwork and Collaboration • Leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision-making • Problem-solving • Creative thinking • Critical thinking • Communication • Interpersonal skills • Self-awareness • Empathy • Coping with emotions • Coping with stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness: Accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, values and strengths • Self-management: Regulating one's emotions to handle stress, and controlling impulses • Social awareness: Being able to take the perspective of and empathise with others • Relationship skills: Establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships, resisting inappropriate social pressure, resolving conflict • Responsible decision-making: Making decisions, respect for others, applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curiosity • Gratitude • Zest • Optimism • Social Intelligence • Self-Control • Grit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Thinking • Creative Thinking • Collaborating • Communicating • Literacy Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information Literacy • Media Literacy • Technology Literacy • Life Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility • Initiative • Social Skills • Productivity • Leadership

³ James W. Pellegrino and Margaret L. Hilton, (Editors), *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century*, (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2012).

⁴ Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) follows the same set of skills in its Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) curriculum.

⁵ The Ministry of Education, Singapore also follows the same set of core competencies defined by CASEL.

2. The Case for Life Skills Education in India

Discourse around education quality has typically been limited to educational attainment and improvements in test scores. A critical question relates to the learning outcomes that are truly relevant for children to succeed in the 21st century. In this section, we outline the case for emphasising on competencies additional to reading, Maths and subject knowledge.

- **Academic achievement:** That learning outcomes in India remain abysmally low is no longer a debate, with the rate of progress over the years appearing to be negative.⁶ Student learning, however, is now commendably beginning to move to the forefront of the government's agenda. **Cognitive achievement and life skills are strongly interdependent, with academic achievement relying heavily on abilities like self-discipline and motivation.**⁷ Whether self-esteem and sense of agency (Krishnan et al, 2009), self-control or diligence (Duckworth, Seligman, 2005), academic tenacity (Dweck, 2012), there are several behaviours, skills, attitudes, and strategies - beyond content knowledge and academic skill - necessary for sustained and significant improvements in learning outcomes.⁸ The role of non-cognitive factors in improving school performance remains a critical and relatively unexplored area in India.
- **Employment outcomes:** There is also preliminary evidence that differences in such skills explain variation in education and employment outcomes that are not explained by cognitive skill differences.⁹ **Research has consistently found that cognitive abilities explain only a fraction of variance in wages**, finding that other, **non-academic skills play a complimentary role in shaping longer-term outcomes.**¹⁰ Evidence from the GED testing programme in the U.S. is significant where, on the surface, the programme appears successful in terms of test scores, yet in terms of later life outcomes including labour market success, GED recipients lag far behind.
- **Workforce readiness:** We face a growing abilities gap – the youth segment of our population (15-34 years) is projected to peak at 484.86 million in 2030. This has important implications for the labour market. **Functional literacy does not translate into being work ready, with nearly 75% of youth entering the workforce every year considered unemployable or not job-ready.**¹¹ Job skill demands have undergone major changes over the last few decades - tasks demanding routine manual input and routine cognitive input have declined steadily between 1960 and 2000, while those requiring non-routine analytic and non-routine

⁶ ASER, *Annual Status of Learning Report* (2014).

⁷ Angela L. Duckworth and Martin E.P. Seligman, *Self-Discipline Outdoes IQ in Predicting Academic Performance of Adolescents* (2005); Giorgio Brunello, Martin Schlotter, *Non Cognitive Skills and Personality Traits: Labour Market Relevance and their Development in Education and Training Systems* (2011).

⁸ Camille Farrington et al, *Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance* (University of Chicago, 2011).

⁹ Heckman, Stixrud and Urzua, *The Effects of Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Abilities on Labor Market Outcomes and Social Behavior* (2006); Christopher Jencks, *Who Gets Ahead: The Determinants of Economic Success in America* (1979).

¹⁰ Carneiro, Heckman and Vytlačil, *Estimating Marginal Returns to Education* (2010); Heckman and Rubinstein, *The Importance of Non-Cognitive Skills: Lessons from the GED Testing Programme* (2001).

¹¹ CII, *India Skills Report 2015* (November, 2014).

interactive skills have grown significantly.¹² Employment potential today depends upon not only technical skills, but also the social ability to work effectively, and interpersonal, cooperation, communication and creative skills.

- **Adulthood outcomes:** Social and emotional competencies do not just raise academic achievement and educational attainment, but have also demonstrated strong correlations with personal satisfaction and growth, citizenship, and reduced risky behaviours like violence and drug use.¹³ Literature on character skills makes it clear that such skills are a vital determinant of future outcomes, not only in terms of employment. Such mindsets and abilities have direct effects on crime, smoking, teenage pregnancy, and an individual's capacity to lead a responsible and productive life in society.
- **Return on investment:** Predictive power of life skill development has been found to be equivalent to or exceeding that of cognitive skills.¹⁴ Research has highlighted that interventions focusing on social and emotional learning show measurable benefits that exceed its costs, often by significant amounts. A recent evaluation of such interventions found a positive return on investments for all with a return of eleven dollars on average, for every dollar invested equally across six SEL interventions, a substantial economic gain.¹⁵

Addressing tangible learning outcomes is often seen as a greater need than investing in life skills education for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, there is a strong evidence base demonstrating that cognitive skills and life skills are complementary in affecting socio-economic outcomes, and that building character skills can be life-changing for children from such backgrounds.¹⁶ It is evident that psycho-social competencies, such as resilience, self-esteem and problem solving are vital in helping children move up and out of poverty.

¹² R. Autor, F. Levy, R. Murnane, *The Skill Content of Recent Technical Change: An Empirical Exploration* (2003), (updated by R. Murnane in 2010); Casner-Lotto and L. Barrington, *Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce* (2006).

¹³ Currie, *Early Childhood Intervention Programmes: What Do We Know?* (2001); Borghans et al. 2008; Bowles, Gintis, and Osborne 2001a; Duckworth and Seligman 2005; 2006

¹⁴ Kautz, Heckman, Diris, TirWeel, Borghans, *Fostering and Measuring Skills: Improving Cognitive and Non-cognitive Skills to Promote Lifetime Success*, 2014.

¹⁵ Belfield et al., *The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning* (Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2015).

¹⁶ Flavio Cunha, James Heckman, Susanne Schennach, *Estimating the Technology of Cognitive and Noncognitive Skill Formation* (2010); Pramila Krishnan and SofyaKrutikova, *Non-cognitive Skill Formation in Poor Neighbourhoods of Urban India* (2009).

3. Life Skills Education Policies in India

An effective life skills approach is driven by multiple aspects:

- **Programme content:** Developing relevant information, attitudes, and skills
- **Mechanisms:** Implementing participatory teaching practices, modeling of skills and reinforcement
- **Teacher training:** Building teachers' belief in the potential of and capacity in delivery of life skills education
- **Commitment:** Advocating for the integration of life skills education in school curriculum

Table 2 below applies UNICEF's framework for national life skills delivery, allowing us to analyse the status of life skills education policy and practice in India.

Table 2: UNICEF analytical framework for national life skills delivery

Question	How to Know	What to do
Are life skills included in the curriculum (formal, informal)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum documents clearly articulate life skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design curriculum emphasis with life skills
Is life skills education delivered as a whole-school approach?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of head teachers • Combination of classroom & extra-curricular activities • School based assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration with school environment and culture strategies (at a district level, if feasible) • Enhancing support and training for head teachers • Identifying and developing tools for school-based assessments
Does the life skills programme/curriculum include relevant assessment strategies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formative and summative • Classroom and school-based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to the integration of life skills education into supervision and inspection systems • Support relevant forms of assessment for knowledge
Is there publically available data about the relevant behaviours (national/regional data)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National data sets • Baseline data sets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a baseline
Are there criteria for selecting life skills teachers / facilitators?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified qualities and professional needs and experience for life skills education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with partners to identify characteristics required and develop job descriptions where appropriate
Do teachers have adequate support?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems for mentoring, supervision, etc. • In-service training • School head teachers have a role in support • School head teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the integration of life skills education into supervision and inspection systems • Integrate life skills education into career structures and support systems

	have a role in support + systems for mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the effectiveness of existing in-service and pre-service training provision against the needs of life skills education teachers
Are resources needed in place?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools have materials to teach life skills education Factual references Activity modules, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop capacity of national partners in life skills education material development Support resource budgets for life skills education
Does it address pre-service teacher education for all teachers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any life skills education in pre-service teacher training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with providers and pre-service curriculum

Source: Indicative questions adapted from UNICEF, *Global Evaluation of Life Skills Education Programmes* (2012)

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 has emphasised on constructive learning experiences, and on the development of an inquiry-based approach, work-related knowledge and broader life skills. Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), in 2005, introduced life skills education as an integral part of the curriculum through Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) for classes 6 to 10 and developed life skills manuals for teachers teaching classes 6, 7 and 8. These manuals provide teachers broad guidelines for each of the ten core life skills identified by WHO. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) also has, under its agenda, life skills training for girls in on upper primary classes.

While there have been dispersed efforts around life skills¹⁷, focus on curriculum integration and teacher development remains poor.¹⁸ Many of these efforts take a general approach to ‘life skills information delivery’ (sometimes more as moral/values education) without a particular context.

There are certain difficulties in successfully integrating life skills in Indian school education without systemic reform:

- Moving life skills from the margins (i.e. extracurricular or as passive ‘values education’) to the centre of schooling and creating multiple learning opportunities or reinforcement within schools
- Introducing a learner-centric pedagogy, not solely reliant on rote learning or exam-based assessment
- Building a school culture toward life-skills based education
- Improving the capacity and motivation of teachers to develop and integrate such life skills into their classroom practice

Life skills education in schools clearly needs to take place in the context of broader education system reforms. To be effective, life skills ultimately need to be age-aligned, and inculcated in

¹⁷ For example, in 2013, as part of the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), UNFPA partnered with the MHRD to launch teacher training videos for the integration of life skills education into the curriculum.

¹⁸ Teacher Education, Department of School Education and Literacy, MHRD India, “Non-Cognitive Areas of Learning”, <http://www.teindia.nic.in/mhrd/50yrsedu/r/2S/99/2S990601.htm> (accessed June 16, 2015).

schools that are inclusive, with trained and motivated teachers who can employ participatory and experiential teaching practices.

Table 3: Current Status of Life Skills Education in India

#	Enabling Context/System Alignment	Absent (no or limited progress)	Emerging (on way to meeting minimum standard)	Established (acceptable minimum standard)	Advanced
1	Policies (System-level documents that provide guidelines for life skills education)				
2	Curriculum (Curricular modules designed and developed for teacher/teacher educator/student use)				
3	Learning/Quality Goals (Mechanisms in place to ensure the quality of life skills delivery)				
4	Contextual Evidence Body (Evidence base on impact of life skills education interventions in the Indian context)				
5	Funding (Funding allocated for life skills purposes as part of education policy)				
6	Pre-service + In-service Teacher Training (Provision of preparatory and on-going professional development to teachers to ensure that teachers develop skills and expertise in inculcating such skills)				

Source: Adapted from World Bank: SABER and UNICEF

4. Mechanisms to Build Life Skills

Various channels have been employed to inculcate life skills or 21st century skills such as sport, drama and fine arts, storytelling, experiential workshops, mentoring initiatives, interactive classroom learning and discussion. There have been multiple innovations in the delivery of life skills in recent times, through games and simulations, experiential activities, and technology.

Box 1: Examples

Global

Stanford PERTS

Stanford University's Project for Education Research That Scales (PERTS) has focused on mindset interventions, with programmes targeting academic tenacity or growth mindsets, and measuring how they affect academic performance. In addition to developing resources and practices for educators and parents to foster learning mindsets, PERTS has undertaken a study on online learning environments with Khan Academy to gauge whether developing a growth mindset in children with fixed perceptions would help them perform better.

Global

Socialdrome

In Singapore, researchers from National Institute of Education and Nanyang Technological University recently developed a computer game to build students' social problem-solving skills. The game, *Socialdrome*, targets 9-12 year olds and has been rolled out in some schools. Learning objectives include recognising and managing emotions, cooperating with others, and handling difficult situations.

Global

Studio Schools

A Studio School is a type of secondary school in the United Kingdom offering both academic and vocational qualifications, created with the goal of actively equipping 14-19 year old students with skills needed to succeed in life and work. 21st century skills are embedded throughout all school activities using the CREATE employability skills framework.

In India and globally, many approaches to deliver life skills education have also been incorporated within other skill development activities. A collaborative approach of this nature can often secure greater buy-in from different stakeholders, from policy makers to funders, as it may be viewed as producing more tangible outcomes. Some of these include:

- **Life skills and employment:** Life skills are imparted as part of training programmes building secondary school students' employability skills. Along with investing in technical skills, such programmes address skills and mindsets such as taking responsibility, adaptability, entrepreneurship, effective communication, decision-making, leadership and teamwork. The aim is to equip children with technical knowledge as well as the soft skills required to succeed in the workplace, thereby directly translating their education into a source of livelihood. Examples in India include InOpen (life skills education as part of computer literacy programmes), IGNIS Careers (English language learning), Medha (soft skills for the workplace), and Lend A Hand India (vocational education).
- **Life skills and values education:** Existing policy in India, by a large measure, tends to focus on inculcating such skills through values-based education. However, unless well implemented, such approaches may be very prescriptive in nature and seen as an add-on to

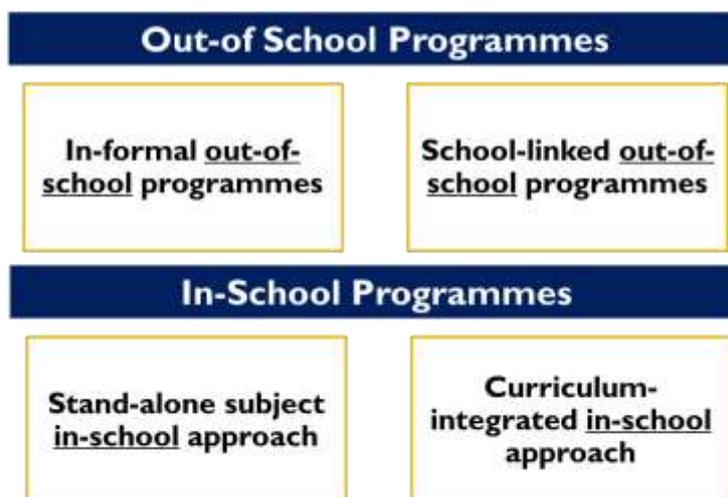
existing syllabus pressure. Examples of schools that have integrated holistic development as part of their pedagogy include the Don Bosco school network.

- **Early childhood education:** Early childhood interventions lay strong foundations for children during the most critical development phase of their lives, i.e. from ages 3-6 years. Such interventions explicitly target a wide range of cognitive, language, emotional and social skills, from communication, self-regulation, conflict resolution skills, etc. Examples include Sesame Workshop India and Bodh Shiksha Samiti.
- **Life skills and child rights:** Within India, there are several interventions that work on building life skills as part of a larger programme of child rights and empowerment. Such organisations address target mindsets and abilities such as self-awareness, leadership, and social influence, through their broader goals of tackling gender disparity, violence, health, etc. Examples in India include Educate Girls, Sanlaap, Ibtada and Shaishav.
- **Higher order thinking skills:** Many life skills programmes (of which a large number are for-profit providers) are increasingly catering to imparting 21st century skills. Such programmes, which have accelerated in light of increasing advocacy for a shift from rote learning, support inquiry-based learning by building critical thinking and creative problem solving skills. Examples in India include Creya and THOTS Labs.

5. Intervention Models

Life skills programmes for children have adopted different intervention models as seen in figure 1. Such interventions may often move from an out-of-school approach to an approach integrated into whole-school practice, though this path need not be linear.

Figure 1: Different Life Skills Intervention Models



5.1. Out-of-School Programmes

A majority of life skills intervention models provide students with hands-on, after-school experiences focusing on social and emotional skill development. While this is distinct from school learning, there are growing attempts to align such programmes with curriculum to ensure that such skills are reinforced for children. A recent convening of life skills researchers and educators by Bridgespan emphasised the potential in aligning such out-of-school efforts with in-school initiatives to achieve effective learning at greater scale.¹⁹ These after-school programmes may be school-linked or delivered informally by NGOs.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides for development of knowledge, skills and attitudes beyond classrooms • Learning experiences in such programmes may be more multi-dimensional and also allow for reinforcement of learning • Facilitator quality and motivation is typically higher • Class usually comprises of a diverse set of children in terms of experiences and age • Such programmes may also reach potentially out-of-school children/ youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the programme is distinct from what is taught in school, there may be a disconnect in learning and a lack of reinforcement • Attrition in such programmes tends to be high • Such programmes are often very hands-on and resource-intensive, facing challenges of scaling up

¹⁹ Lija Farnham, Gihani Fernando, Mike Perigo, & Colleen Brosman, with Paul Tough “Rethinking how Children Succeed”, *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (February, 2015) http://www.ssireview.org/up_for_debate/article/rethinking_how_students_succeed (accessed June 21, 2015).

5.1.1. Informal Programmes

The informal life skills model is characterised by programmes that are implemented by NGOs within community settings. These typically adopt a variety of delivery mechanisms (such as mentoring, theatre, sports, discussions), and are led by dedicated and trained facilitators.

5.1.2. School-linked Programmes

School-linked programmes are extra-curricular life skills activities that may be affiliated with schools but not necessarily delivered in or by schools. Here children participating may be reached through schools, and school resources and facilities are often used for conducting such programmes. Such programmes are typically facilitated by somebody trained in content and delivery of such skills.

Box 2: Examples

Global

WINGS For Kids

WINGS For Kids is an after-school programme in the U.S. imparting social and emotional learning skills to K-6 students. Each session involves direct SEL instruction by facilitators, followed by reinforcement with teachable moments. WINGS focuses on 30 SEL skills, which fall under the five core competencies of CASEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The programme also attempts to link students' in-school and out-of-school learning by collaborating with school principals and teachers. WINGS also assesses students' growth through a series of behavioural assessment scales.

India

Khel Planet

Khel Planet is an out-of-school programme focusing on life skills through play, i.e., through contextualised games and activities. Incubated at Harvard Innovation Lab, the six core life skills sets targeted are emotional skills, leadership skills, collaboration skills, creativity skills, cognitive skills, and social and civic engagement skills. Workshops and products designed around these skill sets are currently being piloted in low-income private schools in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh and Mumbai, Maharashtra.

5.2. Formal In-school Models

The formal model of teaching life skills is characterised by a school-based programme with an explicit curriculum that is designed to be delivered as a stand-alone subject or integrated into a core subject.

5.2.1. Stand-Alone Subject

In this curriculum model, life skills are taught as a separate scheduled subject in a week. Here, content to be taught may be selected according to pre-determined objectives, as well as teaching methods to meet the needs of learners and the capabilities of teachers. This is a model that has been widely used in India, with time designated in the schedule for 'life skills' education and may or may not be assessed.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As a stand-alone subject in the curriculum, this is a systematic and transparent approach of teaching life skills.• Likely to have teachers who are focused on the issues, and more likely to be specifically trained (but not guaranteed).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No reinforcement of skills/attitudes: May result in an overly prescriptive attitude towards the learning outcomes; i.e., more towards 'moral education' rather than the development of actual skills and abilities.• The subject may be given very low priority and not seen by teachers as important, especially if teachers choose to focus only on 'exam content'• Requires additional time to be found in an already overloaded curriculum.

Box 3: Examples

Global

Educate! Uganda

Educate! is a Uganda-based organisation working on building entrepreneurship abilities, critical thinking, team work, citizenship in secondary school students, a year before students give their A-levels. The programme aims to address the gap between what skills students possess and what skills they require in a workplace or to have a livelihood. Youth entrepreneurs (alumni) facilitate workshops; the programme consists of 80-minute sessions over the course of the 15 months. The course comprises of different interactive activities and also includes a practical skill building component. Students are expected to form small businesses, and the 15-month programme ends with a business competition.

India

Going To School

Going To School uses design-driven stories with relatable heroes to develop entrepreneurship skills in children. GTS partners with state governments to train government school teachers in delivering their content alongside the existing curriculum in class 9. Books are printed and distributed in the schools, one book per child; 10 books are taught in each school year. Every Saturday, teachers conduct a two-hour lesson, in which they read one skill book and play a skills game, based on which children then create a skills action project in their community. GTS collects the projects, grades and returns them to the schools; an online monitoring system is used to track learning outcomes.

5.2.2. Curriculum-Integrated

An integrated approach infuses life skills across the curriculum or teaches specific skills and abilities through subjects, such as science, civics, physical education. This approach blends academic knowledge (e.g. geography) with life skills (e.g. problem-solving, negotiation, advocacy), thereby allowing children to practically apply knowledge and develop abilities necessary for real life.

This approach is, of course, far more aligned with the aims of life skills education, however in terms of curriculum design and delivery it is challenging, especially in developing countries with limited resources and professional capacity of teachers and school leaders. As an example, after years of promoting the integration of social and emotional learning and soft skills into core subjects, UNICEF found that many teachers were still not using manuals in classrooms as they were too complex for the average teacher to use.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A whole-school approach can be taken. ● High potential for reinforcement and actual building of student abilities. ● Utilises school structures that are already in place. ● Ensures involvement of many teachers—even those not normally involved in the issue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teachers may not have the capacity and know-how to integrate life skills into their subject lesson plans. ● Accessing all teachers and influencing entire curriculum can be resource-intensive and time consuming. ● Some teachers may not see the relevance of the issue to their subject.

Source: UNICEF, Life Skills Implementation

Box 4: Examples

Global

[Character Lab](#)

Founded by Angela Duckworth, Dominic Randolph and Dave Levin, Character Lab is a team of researchers, designers and educators developing research-based character development activities (teaching tools and practices) for teachers and schools. Character Lab aims to help teachers systematically integrate such practices into their lesson plans and daily interactions with students. An example of this is the Character Growth Card, which teachers can use to help students reflect on their own strengths and areas for growth, and to have a formative, rather than summative, conversation with the student about areas they can focus on. In India, Report Bee has recently collaborated with Character Lab to begin piloting the Character Growth Card in some schools in Chennai.

India

[The Akanksha Foundation](#)

The Akanksha Foundation has focused on life skills (including self-esteem, sense of agency, aspirations) integrated into core curriculum subjects and by supporting teachers and school leaders across their 15 schools in Mumbai and Pune. Akanksha works to support teachers and school leaders in making the teaching of such skills into daily practice. The aim is to ensure the integration of such skills in school environment, class culture, teacher practice and curriculum. Akanksha has also initiated a Service Learning Programme (SLP) to empower students to develop leadership skills and understand how they can contribute to the community they live in.

6. Teacher Development

The efficacy of a life skills intervention depends heavily on the capabilities and attitudes of the teachers implementing it and their ability to impart such skills. Ensuring adequate training for teachers and other educators is, therefore, a key factor contributing to the success of life skills education.

Certain factors must be considered in the design of training programmes that help teachers incorporate soft skills into practice. Such capacity-building should explicitly provide opportunities for teachers to self-assess their own attitudes, values, and life skills proficiency, which strongly influence how they teach such skills to children. Teacher development has to allow for the practice and internalisation of these skills, without which there will be a natural tendency to fall back upon familiar information-delivery teaching methods. In addition to content knowledge, training must help build confidence and allow teachers to become more comfortable with life skills and build better relationships with their students.

Given several challenges in our education system, it is still worth noting that teachers may be trained faster than systems can be reformed. A trained teacher can still play a positive role and embed soft skills into their daily teaching practice, particularly when education systems are weak. Addressing teacher capacity can involve the development of life skills courses or modules in pre-service teacher training, on-going and sustained block- or district-level in-service support systems, and teacher self-assessment tools.

Box 5: Examples

Global

[UChicago 8/9 Teacher Network](#)

In 2015, a paper published by Camille Farrington at the University of Chicago highlighted the significance of non-cognitive factors and the role of mindsets, perseverance, social skills and learning strategies in academic performance. The 8/9 Teacher Network (89TN) was a consequential 'research/practice project' to support a number of public school teachers apply the findings and strategies from the paper into their teaching, thereby creating replicable professional development model to help teachers teach students how to become effective learners. 89TN focused on building teachers' mindsets and sense of self-efficacy, and incorporating such practices into their teaching.

India

[Dream a Dream](#)

Dream a Dream's Teacher Development Programme has evolved from its life skills intervention with children through the organisation's own staff and volunteers. Aiming to reach a larger number of children, the programme aims to train a wide range of teachers and community workers to facilitate the development of life skills among children in their own schools. The approach has been adapted from the Creative Community Model developed by Partners for Youth Empowerment (PYE Global). Today, the Dream Teacher Development Programme is delivered through a series of four life skills facilitation workshops spread over half a year, and uses experiential methods and play to develop various skills in teachers, such as expanding their own creativity, listening and validation skills, and learning tools to meaningfully engage children.

7. Measuring Life Skills

While programmes targeting life skills have evolved significantly in India, such skills remain abstract and difficult to measure. The measurement of outcomes from life skills programmes may be seen as three-fold:

- **Measurement of immediate-term outcomes:** Understanding the immediate benefit of an intervention, perhaps occurring while the intervention is taking place, on students' behaviour, mindsets and abilities, typically through a self-report questionnaire or sometimes through observational tools used by facilitators.
- **Measurement of short-term outcomes:** Understanding the short-term outcomes of an intervention, which may occur post the intervention but while children are still in school. Examples of these include behavioural measures as well as academic performance, school dropouts.
- **Measurement of long-term adulthood outcomes:** Understanding the impact of a life skills intervention on students' longer-term life outcomes. These may include educational attainment through school and college, earnings, juvenile crime rate, other risk behaviours such as smoking, etc.

Given that momentum among life skills practitioners is still building, the measurement of immediate-term outcomes from such programmes should be a key area of focus. Knowledge of measuring these skills, however, is still under-developed, and approaches are characterised by a lack of consistency and comparability.

Life skills measurement tools typically include three broad categories:

- **Self-rating scales:** These are the most commonly used means of tracking progress, with students self-reporting on a range of their behavioural characteristics and attitudes. For instance, in the well-established Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the statements refer to one's beliefs about being able to influence outcomes, cope with stress, and attain goals as well as pride in oneself, one's achievements and background; the responses indicate the degree of agreement with the statements. Other scales employed for the assessment of specific mindsets and abilities include Rotter's Locus of Control Questionnaire, Cantril's Self-Anchoring Scale. Labour market research relies heavily on the Rosenberg and Rotter scales.²⁰ A clear limitation, however, is that these are subject to social desirability bias (i.e. the potential for students to fake or exaggerate answers) and even memory recall limitations.²¹ This issue could become more significant if measures of students' non-academic ability are incorporated into teacher and school accountability, and evaluation systems.
- **Teacher rating reports:** Here, the teacher or facilitators rate students on target skills, competencies and attitudes based on observations during the programme. For instance, Dream a Dream has developed a simple observational tool with the support of clinical psychologists to allow facilitators to measure development of five critical life skills (interaction, problem solving, taking initiative, managing conflict, understanding and following instructions) on a Likert scale. While these may also be cheap and easy to

²⁰ Belfield et al., *The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning* (Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2015).

²¹ Martin R. West, *The Limitations of Self-Report Measures of Non-Cognitive Skills* (2014).

administer, they also involve the possibility that the way teachers rate may be confounded by student-specific factors such as demographic characteristics.²²

- **Behavioural measure activities:** These are research-based experiential activities designed to gauge students' target skills. While behavioural tasks may be slower and more resource-intensive to administer, they are often relatively more reliable and unbiased than teacher ratings or self-rating scales particularly when students are unwilling or unable to accurately report or rate some things. For instance, a typical measure of perseverance is an unsolvable anagram measure. There are similar examples of simulated activities designed for delayed gratification (Delayed Payment Choice Task²³) and diligence (Academic Diligence Task²⁴).

Another major factor to consider, in addition to the limitations outlined above, is reference bias, i.e. respondents (e.g., a teacher rating a student, a student rating self) will compare the target rating to some implicit standard, and standards may vary from respondent to respondent. For instance, two students answering the statement "I think of myself as a hard worker" may have different standards of hard work. An interesting example is recent research that found students in 'no-excuses' charter schools in the United States, rating themselves lower on diligence, grit and self-control, compared students in public schools.²⁵ This was attributed to reference bias from differences in school climate between district and charter schools as perceived by the students.

Moving forward, more research is clearly needed to develop and test new measures of life skills ability so that practitioners can access an entire toolbox of measures.²⁶ Furthermore, outcomes from life skills interventions are rarely measured consistently or in a comparable manner, with variation in how many domains are measured and what scales are used for measurement. Evaluation designs and measurements (if and when implemented) are also, very often, not of consistent quality. The challenge is to assess skills that are important to and for children, in a way as authentic as possible.

²² Ronald Ehrenberg et al, *Do Teachers' Race, Gender, and Ethnicity matter? Evidence from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988* (1995); Amine Ouazad, *Assessed by a Teacher Like Me: Race and Teacher Assessments* (2014).

²³ Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999; Vohs et al., 2008

²⁴ Galla, Plummer, White, Mello, Meketer, Duckworth, *The Academic Diligence Task (ADT): Assessing Individual Differences in Effort on Tedious but Important Schoolwork* (2014).

²⁵ Martin R. West, *The Limitations of Self-Report Measures of Non-cognitive Skills* (December, 2014).

²⁶ Patrick C. Kyllonen, *The Case for Non-Cognitive Assessments* (ETS, 2005).

Box 6: Examples

Global

Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

In order to inform policy and practice around social and emotional learning in the U.S., CASEL has developed a systematic framework used for identifying and evaluating the quality of classroom-based social and emotional learning interventions. CASEL reviews SEL programs annually to identify effective SEL programmes that promote student self-awareness, self-control, social awareness, relationship building, and problem solving. The criteria for the review are that the programmes are well-designed and classroom based, must provide repeated opportunities for students to practice new skills and behaviors, must offer training and implementation support, and must be evidence-based. These indicators have been widely used to inform educators and policymakers on how to select and implement life skills programmes, with CASEL advocating for every state to develop and implement high-quality standards for K-12 SEL programmes.

India

The Teacher Foundation

While CBSE has identified core life skills as a part of CCE and has produced life skills manuals, there are no learning standards for social and emotional development nor are teachers equipped to teach per such standards. The Teacher Foundation (TTF) is currently undertaking a 2.5 year study to understand the status of social and emotional learning in Indian schools and its global prevalence. The study looks to ultimately design and develop age-appropriate SEL standards for children in the area of social and emotional learning, define performance indicators for each of these skills, and help establish a framework to enable teachers to assess outcomes against pre-defined standards.

8. Challenges

- **Definition and understanding of life skills:** A more effective approach towards life skills first requires understanding and articulating them better. Life skills, as a concept, can be broad and multifaceted, and life skills initiatives can therefore include a wide range of goals, content and approaches. Life skills, as defined by WHO, are “innumerable, and the nature and definition of life skills are likely to differ across cultures and settings”. This broad definition is, however, insufficient for practical applications or for effective policy-making.

To our knowledge, a list of life skills that is age-level appropriate and practically applicable has not been developed. This ambiguity hinders both the effective design of life skills interventions, and the development of metrics to measure them. It is challenging for a life skills intervention to identify which skills to target, which age group to target and which activities/delivery models might be optimal.

- **Limited life skills evidence in developing countries' context:** While there is plenty of evidence on the effectiveness of interventions aiming to improve school-based academic skills, there is much less documentation and research on sustained life skills interventions, especially in India and other developing countries.
- **Evaluation of impact:** The assessment of life skills remains a huge challenge. Even globally, there is little clear guidance on whether and how life skills assessments can be integrated systematically into national assessment systems (including school-based assessments), in line with the increasing integration of life skills education into national curriculum frameworks and education systems. This absence of a common language to gauge success makes it difficult to develop applicable classroom life skills practices, attract funders, and understand which interventions are relatively more effective.
- **Prescriptive approach:** Life skills education in India is often confused with values education. Most schools have values education as part of the curriculum, being one of the requirements of the NCF. This approach, however, is typically very prescriptive and information-driven instead of practical building of targeted skills, attitudes and knowledge in children.
- **Teacher mindset and professional development:** Given the traditional approach to teaching and learning in the country, the pedagogy required for effective life skills education (integrated into regular curriculum) is difficult for individual teachers to develop and apply in their practice. In the teaching of life skills, there is a risk that teachers in the country are inadequately equipped in their own knowledge, attitudes and skills to teach effectively and with confidence. Today, teacher training does not place adequate emphasis on non-academic factors, and supportive professional development opportunities are limited.²⁷ A clearer and more focused pedagogical framework for life skills can therefore be the starting point, with

²⁷ Lija Farnham, Gihani Fernando, Mike Perigo, & Colleen Brosman, with Paul Tough “Rethinking how Children Succeed”, *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (February, 2015)
http://www.ssireview.org/up_for_debate/article/rethinking_how_students_succeed (accessed June 21, 2015).

clarity about which skills should be taught as life skills, why these skills are chosen, and how they should be taught.²⁸

- **Scale and quality dilution:** Given the importance of the teacher or facilitator in any effective life skills education intervention, any attempt to scale such a programme can result in a dilution of quality in the absence of effectively trained teachers. Moreover, most life skills models we have analysed in India are very hands-on and resource-intensive (e.g. with mentors and in group sizes of around 25 children for activities and games) and typically reach smaller numbers of children. Effectively taking such models to more children will prove challenging.

²⁸ Robin Alexander, *Education For All, the Quality Imperative and the Problem of Pedagogy* (2008).

9. Potential Opportunities

- **Identifying and funding innovations:** With life skills education in India gaining traction, numerous entrepreneurs are innovating and developing their own approaches to life skills delivery. This provides funders an opportunity to understand development of an effective life skills approach and support the implementation and scale-up informal after-school programmes to school-linked out-of-school programme, to a formal in-school model and teacher training.
- **Promote development of an evidence base for life skills education in India:** Evidence on the effectiveness of life skills approaches in India and their future impact is minimal. A few studies in India include evaluations undertaken of Going To School, Akanksha Foundation, Dream a Dream and Expressions India programmes. Further research is needed to build the case for life skills education and teacher training in the country.
- **Convene entrepreneurs and practitioners:** Bringing together innovators, researchers and policy-makers can help develop a common language and discuss best practices with respect to intervention models, delivery mechanisms (such as technology-enabled delivery), etc. For example, stakeholders can work towards defining a more focused pedagogical framework for life skills, with clarity about which skills should be taught as life skills, why these skills are chosen, and how they should be taught.
- **Promote research on the measurement of life skills:** There is a lack of consensus on common metrics used to evaluate life skills. Outcomes from such interventions, if at all measured, are rarely measured consistently or in a comparable manner. A sharper definition of life skills and the use of more reliable assessment tools to measure such skills would help inform policy and practice in India.

Annexure

CASEL Guide for Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs²⁹

- **Grade-by-grade sequence:** Every student should receive planned, ongoing, systematic SEL education every year from preschool through elementary school.
- **Average number of sessions per year:** Programs vary in terms of the amount of class time they provide or require, ranging from 8 to 140 sessions annually. Some programs do not have a defined set of lessons, and instead enhance teacher practices and methods generally. For those approaches, number of sessions or length is not applicable, since the program is designed to change the overall climate and culture through ongoing classroom instruction. These programs receive a “not applicable” (n/a) rating for this element.
- **Classroom approaches to teaching SEL**
 - **Explicit Skills Instruction:** Some programs provide explicit lesson plans with content and instruction designed specifically to promote social and emotional skills. A program was considered an “explicit skills instruction” approach when it contained lesson plans and when coders could identify specific examples of where and how social and emotional competencies were explicitly taught
 - **Integration with Academic Curriculum Areas:** A program was considered “integrating with academics” when it had lessons that covered core academic content while also developing social and emotional competencies. For these, the core academic subject area is noted.
 - **Teacher Instructional Practices:** A program was considered to promote “teacher instructional practices” when it focused primarily on creating a positive classroom experience through pedagogical methods or classroom routines. These practices (e.g., authentic praise, involving students in decision making) support positive relationships among teachers and students and foster conditions for learning.
 - **Opportunities to Practice Social and Emotional Skills:** Practice beyond the program lessons includes applications of social and emotional skills to real-life situations, such as using self-calming or problem-solving skills during classroom or playground conflicts.
- **Contexts that Promote and Reinforce SEL**
 - **Classroom-wide:** Examples of practices that extend program concepts beyond the lessons include morning meetings, peace centres, and daily check-ins. These routines support SEL throughout the day in the classroom, particularly for those programs that contain explicit lessons conducted only at specific times in the day. Examples of practices that extend program concepts
 - **School-wide:** Examples of school-wide practices include creating a process that promotes collaboration among and between different classrooms, grade levels, or through engaging nonteaching personnel in activities to promote students’ social and emotional competencies throughout the day.
 - **Family:** A program received credit for extending into the family if it provided routine “homework” assignments to be completed with family members, offered SEL workshops

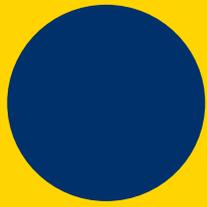
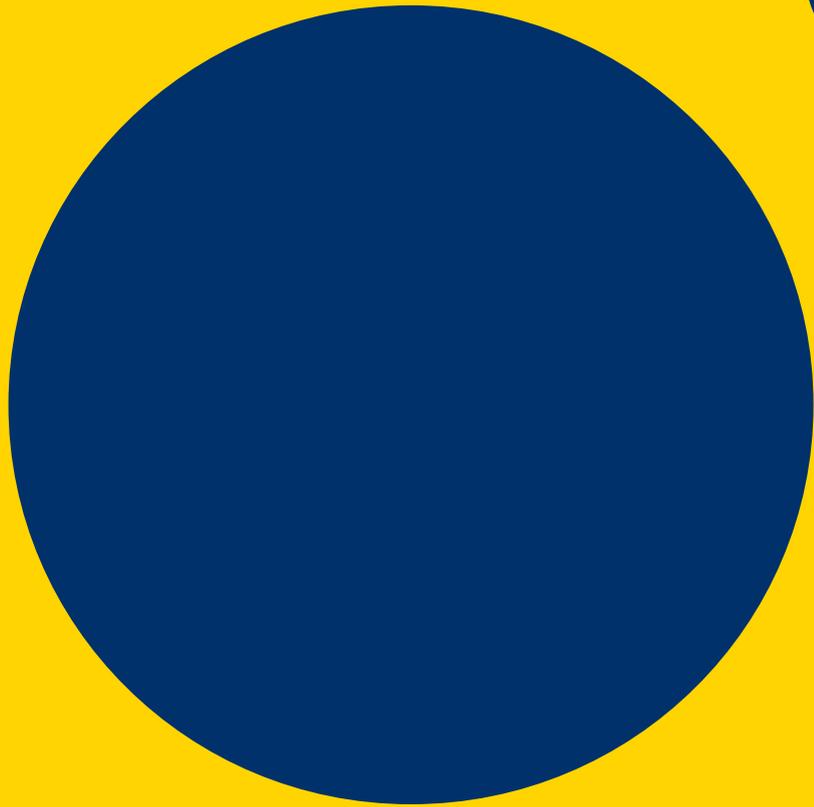
²⁹ The CASEL Guide: Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs, <http://www.casel.org/library/2013-casel-guide> (accessed July 2, 2015).

with training for parents about social and emotional learning, or other activities designed to involve families

- **Community:** A program received credit for promoting SEL in the community if it provided opportunities for personal contacts, on-going relationships, or interactive involvement of students and community members.
- **Assessment Tools for Monitoring Implementation:** Programs sometimes offer tools to monitor implementation, either through teacher self-report measures or assessments completed by observers. There may also be tools that can be used to assess the program's impact on student behaviour.

UNICEF Quality Standards for Life Skills Education

Quality Standards for Life Skills Education	
Standard 1: Outcomes	Life skills education is needs-based (that is, child-centred)
Standard 2: Assessment	Life skills learning is results-based
Standard 3: Activities	Life skills learning is knowledge, attitudes and skills-based
Standard 4: Teaching	Teachers are trained on methods and psychosocial support
Standard 5: Learning Environment	Life skills education is provided in protective and enabling environments with access to community services



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December 2015

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