

Infusing and Internalizing Life Skills for Personal Transformation Among Students in The Process of Teaching and Learning English Language and Literature

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to impart life skills for personal transformation among students in the process of teaching and learning English language and literature. In today's competitive work scenario, an arts / science / professional student with only subject or technical knowledge is not likely to sustain and grow professionally. Success demands many skills and to be an asset to an organization, society and nation, one has to work on self improvement by imbibing certain life skills. For this, the student community has to be sensitized on the importance of life skills. Life skills, also known as 21st century skills allow the students to excel at primary, secondary, tertiary level of education, workplace, socially and personally. Students who are able to use 21st century life skills or soft skills are able to understand and use their skills, along with their educational qualifications, and will be better placed to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities. English being the global language of communication or the 'lingua franca' of the world has gained the status of a very powerful influential factor causing transformation in the society. In a multi-cultural and multi-lingual country like India, English becomes a vital element in India's continued progress and in the life of an Indian student.

Keywords: Life skills / soft skills global language lingua franca

English as a Global Language

Due to globalization, the whole world has become a global village and hardly students possess certain life skills / soft skills which are required by the industry. The contemporary job market and society demand skilled manpower. It is the need of the hour to inculcate certain skills among the young minds at academic institutions only. In the current educational methods in most of the Indian institutions, concepts from textbooks and case studies are taught but little or no attention is paid to real life skill sets (Agarwal, 2009). Employment opportunities are abundant in many streams like Information Technology, Telecommunications, Tourism, Banking, Research and Development and so on. Researchers and teachers found that learning and teaching English language at secondary, primary and tertiary level of education is of paramount importance. The students acquire enough linguistic competence at primary and secondary level but when it comes to professional level, it is found that students lack certain core and life skills to reach employability goals.

There is a widening gap between classroom education and skills crucial for employment which threatens to intimidate India's growth. Employability skills or soft skills are a relatively new and often talked about term by the academicians, industry or government. These skills include communication skills, self management skills and personal attributes such as self-confidence, self-control, inter and intra personal skills, honesty, integrity, reliability, adaptability, flexibility, willingness to learn, stress tolerance, time management, and many other skills like team building, leadership, problem solving skills, initiative etc. Communication skills cover basic communication skills which include the verbal and non verbal communication skills like reading, listening, writing, speaking effectively and body language. Higher order communication skills include oral skills for public presentations, conversations, negotiations, conflict resolutions, knowledge-sharing, discussions, debates etc. World Health Organization defines life skills as 'abilities for adaptive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life'.

The Importance of Life Skills

In a constantly changing environment, possessing certain life skills is an essential part of being able to meet the challenges of everyday life. The dramatic changes in global economies over the past few years have been matched with the transformation in technology and all these are having its influence on education, the workplace and home life. To cope with the increasing pace and change of modern life, students need new life skills such as the ability to deal with stress and frustration. Today's students will have many new jobs over the course of their lives, with associated pressures and the need for flexibility.

Teaching Life Skills Matters in ELT and Literature

Enhancing Life Skills through ELT

Life skills are something of a buzz word not only in education; it is also the focus of discussion across a range of industries around the world. ELT is a great way to help the students to develop the necessary skills and to navigate various aspects of their personal and professional lives. The aim of English Language teachers should be to develop the students' communication skills, beyond teaching them just the rules of grammar. Students need to learn the specific ways in which certain functions are performed in English. There are particular forms of expression in English that ought to be learned. For instance, to learn the skill "how to be assertive" students need to learn how to say 'no' politely but firmly without hurting the other person. The language teachers from all over the world are racking their brain to promote the LSRW skills among the students.

Teachers need to realize how important these skills are. They need to integrate work on life skills into their teaching. They should activate the students language in ways that develop those skills and to help the students get ready for the constantly changing world that awaits them. If we can help our students develop a range of life skills in English, then they'll come to see that language is indeed a life skill. Teachers need to identify the relevant life skills that are vital for personal and professional development of the students. They should integrate life skills into lesson objectives. For example, if they are teaching on "how to perform in a group discussion?", teachers can aim to develop students' communication skills, critical thinking skills, listening skills, leadership quality, problem solving

skills and how to be a good team player. To develop these skills, students should be given real life scenarios. Students should be encouraged to reflect on their learning and assess their own progress which helps to promote self-awareness and self-development. These are some of the targeted life skills.

The Responsibility of English Teachers: Technology in Language Classrooms

With new technological tools continuing to emerge and impact the teaching-learning methods, language teachers worldwide face the question of how best to utilize the vast array of technological tools available in the language classrooms while keeping abreast of the rapid changes in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) world (Chapelle, 2003; Chapelle & Douglas, 2006). In recent times, rapidly changing circumstances at work and in society are putting a premium on adaptability, collaborative learning and learning through experience. So, the learners are assigned tasks driven by technology and at the same time it should be cultivating their life skills. The focus in education should be on "learning with technology" rather than "learning from technology," (Kingsley, 2006). Learning with technology fosters creativity in the learner as he or she is empowered to design individual representations of content using technology.

Enhancing Life Skills through the Teaching of English Literature

The need of the hour is to instill life skills is teaching of Literature. In the present scenario, the student is not aware what sacrifice is, what decorum is, and what self-esteem is. Atrocities on women continue to plague society. Reading literature facilitates not only to gain knowledge but also helps to shape one's life into a better human being. Handful of values is uncovered from literature especially for the present generation who are struggling to cope up with life in a cyber era and talk about stress, depression at a very early stage of their life.

The use of literature is a beneficial technique for mastering not only linguistic system but also life in relation to the target language i.e. English language. It offers real life situations. It gives students the opportunity to make use of their creativity. It improves critical thinking skills. It paves

way for the students to go beyond what is written and dive into what is meant. Researchers have also found that teaching language through literature not only develops LSRW skills of a student but it also improves the core and life skills. It is found in literature that “the resources of the language are mostly fully and skillfully used” (Sage, 1987, p.6). Literature helps learners not only to perceive the richness and diversity of the language, but also understand a variety of cultures and their ideologies. To quote a few, literature promotes core skills and life skills like empathy, emotional quotient, self-motivation etc. By reading stories and novels, a student understands what empathy is which will help him in the job environment. Reading a Shakespearean drama will make him aware of what interpersonal skill and its importance. This is a vital skill which the contemporary students should master to impress the employers. Self-motivation is the basic seed to achieve a goal in life and this can be done, to begin with by reading literary texts of Indian Literature. Literature explores universal themes and human experiences; It provides insights into different cultures, historical periods, social issues fostering cultural understanding and global awareness. Many literary characters exhibit resilience and perseverance in the face of adversity inspiring the readers to develop these qualities in their own lives. For example in the novel, “The Grapes of Wrath” by John Steinback, the Joad family faces numerous challenges and hardships including poverty, discrimination and exploitation. However, they demonstrate remarkable resilience and perseverance in their determination to survive and find a better future. This kind of literary work serves as a powerful example of how resilience and perseverance can help individuals and families navigate through hardship and maintain hope for a better future.

Conclusion

To infuse and internalize life skills for personal transformation among students in the process of teaching and learning English language and literature is an innovative approach. In an increasingly competitive and globalised world it is the skills a student possess that will take him to greater altitude in life. Along with other core and life skills, what will the students' life both personal and professional, will be their ability to adapt to various adverse situations. Here, life-skills education comes into picture. Education is a process that enables the students to take their place in society as effective learners, as effective professionals and as effective citizens. The education which is received through English language Teaching and English Literature enables the students to imbibe certain life skills that can benefit the students in their personal and professional lives.

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