

Life Skills as Determining Factors for Academic Benefits among Adolescents

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Article History:	ABSTRACT
Received: 13 Dec, 2019	This study was objectified to investigate the impact of life skills on academic benefits; academic self-efficacy, academic resilience and academic achievement of adolescents. For this purpose, a sample of 360 school students were randomly selected from six schools provided data on Life Skills Scale (Vranda, 2009), Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (Gafoor & Ashraf, 2007), and Academic Resilience Scale (Martin & Marsh, 2006) along with demographic information and percentages of class test scores (Academic Achievement). The collected data were analyzed through SPSS (24.0) and findings from multivariate analysis showed the significant impact of life skills on academic outcomes. The results demonstrated the significant effects of following seven life skills; decision making, problem solving, self-awareness, interpersonal skills, communication skills, creative thinking and critical thinking had significant impact on academic self-efficacy, academic resilience and academic achievement of adolescents. The findings of current study have the implications for teachers and psychologists who can increase the academic benefits among adolescents by exerting these generic life skills.
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	Key Words: Life Skills, Academic Benefits, Academic Self-Efficacy, Academic Resilience and Academic Achievement

Introduction

Development of youth in positive manner generally addressed in researches is primarily focused on promoting required life competencies and gaining desired outcomes in youth. These competencies are vast in their scope, they may include becoming a caring and ethical person, developing sense of worth, having positive orientation about the future and having good adaptive life skills in educational environment or later at workplace (Gould & Carson, 2008). There are many methods to improve the psychosocial competencies and resilience in the adolescences by such activities which promote the academic outcomes of students and then therefore must be added in the curriculum of schools (Srikala & Kishore, 2010). Life skills are combinations of skills

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possessed by a person, knowledge and attitudes within the individuals. They collectively create and enable any one to adapt skills, start functioning and thriving within the society. They also enable individual to convert their knowledge, skills and attitudes into specific kind of behaviors in order to cope up and navigate with the challenges in their life (Kwauk & Braga, 2017).

Powell (1995) explains the nature of life skills in terms of life coping skills that are accordant to the human development. WHO (1993) presented a core set of life skills for healthy and productive life and according to that life skills refers to the abilities that are positive and adaptive in nature and makes people to cope successfully with the expectations and pressures of everyday life. Life skills are numerous; most of them are generic while some are very specific to certain situations in nature. Derived from many theoretical perspectives, training modules, and interventions, there is a final composite list of ten generic life skills. These skills are common in every culture and are considered for enhancement of psychosocial competencies in children and adolescents. The ten life skills are decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, communication, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions and coping with stress (Sulfikar, 2016; Vranda, 2009). Life skills education encourage the learning of skills that help to promote positive healthy behavior and benefits in the academic outcomes of individuals (Kaur, 2011). These ten life skills explained above are essential for adolescents to learn. These life skills can be taught to children and adolescents during class learning in a supportive environment. Students acquire abilities through learning and practice in and out the class room and show promising success in their academics.

Academic benefits are related to several academic components, among which academic self-efficacy, academic resilience and academic achievement are considered as quite important and related to the psychosocial competencies of individuals. Academic self-efficacy is defined as the belief within the students to develop their academic capabilities with the help to determine what they do with the knowledge and skills they have (Pajares & Valiante, 1997). Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl, and McDougall (1996) also suggested the students' life skills and adaptive abilities also increase their participation and involvement in the schools. They also contribute to the perception of autonomy and relatedness which influence the academic self-efficacy and provides more academic benefits to the students (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Whereas, academic resilience is defined as the ability of students to deal effectively with academic pressures, setbacks and stressors (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado & Cortes, 2009). Apart from the individual characteristic of resilient children, more attention is given to the fact that how schools or educational institutes affect the academic resilience of students. Many resilience researches have also pointed that school environments may provide additional stressors and could place students for having greater risk of academic failure.

Adolescents who lack academic resilience have risk factors for academic outcomes (Fuller, 2001; Martin, 2002). Henderson and Milstein (1996) and Benard (1991) have also focused that general life skills taught in schools increase the likelihood of academic resilience in students. Academic achievement can be defined as the outcome of the student in various domains of learning. It can also be considered in terms of learning and obtaining information. The achievement can be judged and decided on the basis of achievement test and their achieved progress (Abdi & Davoudi, 2015). There are many studies done regarding the relationship between life skills and academic achievement. Sahaghi, Joharina, Mohammadi, & Nia (2016) proposed that students' academic achievement and motivating progress is significantly influenced by teaching life skills. The findings of Khayyer and Seif (2004) also indicated that unable to use appropriate life skills can cause the emotional exhaustion and fatigues which results in academic failure. Prajina and Prem Singh (2015) found that the children who have possessed less life skills have less percentages in academic scores.

In past few years, various fields of psychology such as counseling, positive and developmental have been concerned for promoting and enhancing the competence and skills within the individuals. The interest of veterans in strength-based approaches have focused on Life Development Interventions (LDI) and Basic Needs Theory (BNT), which advocates that adolescent have psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence. All these three components are strongly linked with the life skills development. Adolescents needs to experience positive psychological development and optimal psychological well-being which is considered as the main outcome of life skills programs (Hodge, Danish & Martin, 2013). The integration of BNT and LDL are possible through developing and promoting life skills in adolescents which would emphasis on self-directed change, goal directing behavior and focusing on future (Danish, D'Augelli, & Ginsberg, 1984). Theses theoretical approaches leads towards an intervention based on psychoeducation approach, which is skills-based teaching format to promote positive development in adolescents. With respect of these approaches, the theoretical foundation of this study signifies the integration of life skills within the adolescents for their social, developmental, psychological and academic well-being.

The rapid rate of social change has witnessed many changes in the lifestyles of young people. There is need to work with adolescents to enhance their certain life skills so that they could prosper in their academics and later life successfully. The present study emphasized not only life skills but also promoted the effects of each life skill component on the academic related outcomes such as academic self-efficacy, academic achievement and academic resilience. With reference to the Pakistani culture, this significant area of research into life skills and academic benefits are yet to be explored and quantified, therefore building on and extending previous research, the present study aimed to assess the effect of life skills on the academic benefits of adolescents in Pakistan.

Method

Participants

In total, 360 students with age range between 13-17 years (Mean = 15.54, SD = 1.015) from class 8th, 9th and 10th were selected through multistage random sampling technique from six schools of three cities; Multan, Bahawalpur and Bahawalnagar. Students from both genders participated equally (180= male, 180=female).

Instruments

For data collected, following measurement tools were used:

Life Skills Scale (Vranda, 2009). It is a 115-items scale responding on a 5-point Likert scale that measures the adolescents' degree of life skills in ten different domains including decision making (10 items), problem solving (13 items), empathy (12 items), self-awareness (10 items), interpersonal relationship skills (18 items), communication skills (10 items), coping with stress (9 items), coping with emotions (9 items), creative thinking (14 items) and critical thinking (10 items). The reliability coefficient of the original scale was reported as 0.96 and Cronbach alpha for the present study data was found 0.71.

The Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (Gafoor & Ashraf, 2007). It is a 40-items questionnaire with 5-point Likert scale to measure the academic self-efficacy of students. The original scale has the internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.85 and for present study Cronbach alpha reliability was 0.71.

Academic Resilience Scale (Martin & Marsh, 2006). This scale was used to measure academic resilience which assesses adaptive cognitive-affective and behavioral responses based on student responses to academic adversity. It consisted of 6-items rated on a 7-point Likert type scale. The original scale has internal consistency reliability of 0.89 whereas for this study it was 0.72.

Academic Achievement. For measuring academic achievement of students, percentages obtained in last exams were used.

Procedure

Using cross sectional research design, the sample was selected in two stages through multistage sampling technique. Initially, male and female schools were selected with help of randomization. Six schools, three for each gender were selected. The students were approached during their class time after obtaining permission from

institutional heads. The students were provided with the booklet containing all the measurement tools, demographic information sheet and informed consent. The class teacher facilitated the students in responding the questionnaires.

Results

After the successful collection of data, analysis was performed through multivariate analysis for assessing the effect of life skills on academic benefits (academic self-efficacy, academic resilience and academic achievement) of students. In Table 1, descriptive statistics are presented in terms of mean and SD for all dimensions of life skills and academic benefits. Table 2 shows the fitness of model analyzed through multivariate test. Further, the partial eta squared (effect sizes) demonstrated the main analysis in Table 3.

Table I: Descriptive Statistics for Life Skills and Academic Benefits (N = 360)

	Subscales	M	SD
Life Skills	Decision Making	35.77	5.16
	Problem Solving	46.48	6.76
	Empathy	44.19	7.07
	Self-Awareness	36.17	4.43
	Communication Skills	37.70	4.88
	Interpersonal Relationship Skills	70.90	7.53
	Coping with Emotions	32.76	2.57
	Coping with Stress	34.59	3.09
	Creative Thinking	55.55	4.79
	Critical Thinking	35.61	4.88
Academic Benefits	Academic Self-Efficacy	141.40	11.77
	Academic Resilience	26.28	5.07
	Academic Achievement	62.05	4.83

Table 1 shows the mean and SD for the scores on ten life skills and three academic benefits (academic self-efficacy, academic resilience and academic achievement). Findings reveal the higher mean scores on life skills on problem solving, self-awareness, communication skills, interpersonal relations, coping with emotions and stress, and creative thinking, academic self-efficacy and academic achievement.

Table 2: Multivariate Tests for Effects of Life Skills

Life Skills	Wilks' Λ	F	Sig	Partial eta Squared
Intercept	.712	46.84	.000	.288
Decision Making	.925	9.35	.000	.075
Problem Solving	.873	16.87	.000	.127
Empathy	.994	.665	.574	.006
Self-Awareness	.856	19.40	.000	.144
Communication Skills	.898	13.11	.000	.102
Interpersonal Relationship Skills	.859	18.92	.000	.141
Coping with Emotions	.994	.699	.553	.006
Coping with Stress	.990	1.15	.327	.010
Creative Thinking	.946	6.64	.000	.054
Critical Thinking	.963	4.49	.004	.037

df =4, $p < 0.05$,

Multivariate analyses (Table 2) present the significant Wilks' Λ for life skills of decision making (.925), problem solving (.873), self-awareness (.856), communication skills (.898), interpersonal relationship skills (0.859), creative thinking (.946) and critical thinking (0.963). Values of partial eta depict the significant effect sizes of these seven skills. However, values of Wilks' lambda and partial eta for life skills of empathy and coping with emotion and coping with stress are not found significant.

Table 3: Multivariate Analysis of Variance

Life Skills	Academic Benefits	Mean Square	F	Sig	Partial eta
Decision Making	AS	1221.36	10.73	.001	.030
	AR	183.49	15.79	.000	.043
	AA	64.13	4.16	.042	.012
Problem Solving	AS	1363.28	11.97	.001	.033
	AR	355.52	30.59	.000	.081
	AA	87.47	5.68	.018	.016
Empathy	AS	93.26	.819	.366	.002
	AR	.451	.039	.844	.000
	AA	18.49	1.20	.274	.003
Self-Awareness	AS	729.85	6.41	.012	.018
	AR	226.09	19.45	.000	.053
	AA	477.40	31.00	.000	.082
Communication Skills	AS	600.19	5.27	.022	.015
	AR	405.15	34.86	.000	.091
	AA	7.87	.511	.475	.001
Interpersonal Skills	AS	515.21	4.52	.034	.013
	AR	571.98	49.22	.000	.124
	AA	22.44	1.45	.228	.004
Coping with Emotions	AS	107.04	.940	.333	.003
	AR	1.30	.112	.738	.000
	AA	14.41	.936	.334	.003
Coping with Stress	AS	22.00	.193	.660	.001
	AR	17.81	1.53	.216	.004
	AA	30.14	1.95	.163	.006

Creative Thinking	AS	87.64	.770	.381	.002
	AR	45.48	3.91	.049	.011
	AA	227.85	14.79	.000	.041
Critical Thinking	AS	30.80	.271	.603	.001
	AR	2.50	.216	.643	.001
	AA	204.99	13.31	.000	.037

Note: AS=Academic Self-Efficacy, AR = Academic Resilience, AA = Academic Achievement df=1, $p < 0.05$, R-squared: (a) .202 (b).561 (c) .360

Table 3 presents the statistics for the partial eta to demonstrate the effect sizes of each life skill on every component of academic benefits individually. Findings show that life skills of decision making, problem solving, self-awareness, interpersonal skills, communication skills, critical thinking and creative thinking have significant partial eta squares which indicate the significant impacts on academic self-efficacy, academic resilience and academic achievement.

Discussion

Young people significantly contribute towards the population of any country and according to UNICEF (2014), young people of age 10-18 years cover almost 23% of the population in a country. These adolescents are highly vulnerable towards several risks such as social, psychological and educational problems. Life skills helps the individuals to adapt healthy behaviors. Keeping the scope and need of life skills under consideration, the current study was conducted to quantify the effect of ten life skills on the various components of academic benefits among the adolescents.

A core set of ten life skills introduced by WHO (1993) were studied in the present research among adolescents who were approached in schools. Life skills were found at different levels among adolescents. Findings of mean scores in Table 1 revealed that decision making, problem solving, self-awareness, communication skills, interpersonal relationship skills, creative thinking and critical thinking were higher in adolescents. However, adolescents did not report the skills of empathy, coping with emotions and coping with stress. Values of partial eta depict the significant effect sizes of these seven skills. However, values of wilks' lambda and partials eta for life skills of empathy, coping with emotion and coping with stress were not found significant.

Multivariate analysis of variance (Table 3) was performed on three dependent variables: academic self-efficacy, academic resilience and academic achievement. Independent variables were the ten dimensions of skills such as decision making, problem solving, empathy, self-awareness, and communication skills, interpersonal skills, and coping with emotions, coping with stress, critical thinking, and creative thinking. Results of evaluation of assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variance–covariance matrices, linearity, and multicollinearity were satisfactory. With the use of Wilks’s criterion, the three DVs were found significantly affected by decision making, problem solving, self-awareness, interpersonal skills, communication skills, creative thinking and critical thinking impacted the academic self-efficacy, academic resilience and academic achievement. Findings of the present study also reported that empathy coping with emotions and coping with stress didn’t have significant impact on academic benefits (academic self-efficacy, academic resilience and academic achievement) of the adolescents.

The findings of this research indicated that presence of life skills and psychosocial competencies within the adolescence leads the better academic outcomes of the students. The results of this study are supported by the previous literature, for example as proposed by Schunk and Pajares (2002) that learning the life skills and enhancing psychosocial competencies and promotes the academic self-efficacy of the adolescents. Similarly, the findings are also in line with the previous findings of Perez et al. (2009) who reported that enhanced life skills lead towards the better academic resilience of individuals. Further, researchers have admitted that the education of life skills and coping mechanisms helps in the academic related tasks of students (Longaretti, 2001; Martin, 2002). Moreover, supportive findings have been provided by Sahaghi et al. (2016) that teaching life skills in schools helps in improving the academic achievement of the students. The findings of study conducted by Prajina and Preamsingh (2015) provided adequate evidence for the impact of life skills on academic achievement of students and reported that the lack of life skill in adolescents will effect on the academic resilience and academic scores of the adolescents.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the finding of this study showed significant effects of adolescent’s life skills on their academic benefits. This study has been an addition to literature investigating the importance of life skills in improving academic self-efficacy, academic resilience and academic achievement because previous researches were addressing the academic outcomes in terms of academic scores only but not for the academic self-efficacy and academic resilience. Thus, the findings have proposed that life skills are very crucial for an adolescent during school life for academic related benefits.

Teaching of life skills would improve the psychosocial competencies of adolescents and would also help to improve their academic outcomes. The utilization of life skills intervention modules will help the educationist to enhance the various psychological, social and educational aspects of adolescents in schools.

Limitations and Suggestions

The current study contributed in presenting major findings but in spite of that, there are few limitations which should be considered as the future avenue. To generalize the presenting findings, larger sample size is required. Further, the sample was taken from the public-sector schools only, but private schools also cover major area of adolescents and they might have different tendencies of life skills and psychosocial competencies. There might be difference in impact of life skills on the academic benefits of adolescents from private school. So, there is need to conduct a comparative study on the life skills among the adolescents from government and private schools. Self-reported measures have been used to collect the data on life skills and academic benefits while ignoring the qualitative aspects of these variables. A mix-method utilizing both quantitative and qualitative tools would help more in exploring the impact of life skills on academic benefits of adolescents. Moreover, the present study suggested that a comprehensive life skills education should be introduced by teachers that will also facilitate better teaching executing core life skills because the life skills will then further support children's positive educational outcomes. It will be helping in providing a safety net to our youth through life skills learning that will protect them from hazards, which affect their education, developmental and psychosocial well-being.

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