

Life Skills Implication for Community Development

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Abstract

There are dramatic changes in the global world which causes stress and untold hardships on individual. These dramatic changes which are felt economically are attached to technologies which are impacting on education home life and workplace with various challenges. These challenges calls for ability to cope which can be achieved through the teaching of life skills, which will enable people to cope with stress and frustration being brought about by these challenges. Life skills are psychosocial in nature and intercultural. They cut across every phase of human life. They are interplay of skills which eventually produce powerful behavioural outcomes. This paper globally examines what life skills are, why taught and by who and the importance of life skills to both young and old, in schools, work places and in the community in general. This is with a view to make individuals in societies active, informed and responsible citizens who are bold and are ready to take responsibilities for their actions while contributing to the economic, political and social processes of their communities. The skills of individuals within Nigerian Communities must, therefore, be built through life skill education so as to be able to overcome daily individual challenges as well as societal ones.

Keywords: Life Challenges, Self Fulfillment, Parenting, Life Skill Activities, Life Skills Education

INTRODUCTION

Life skills have being viewed by various authors mainly as having abilities to be able to meet with daily challenges. Life skills has been described as the skills that will make individuals function well in their environment, make them active and productive members of their communities. Functionality in communities requires an interplay of skills, this implies synthesizing various skills to give a person confidence and a sense of control over situations around them. There is no doubt that conditions that are appalling and controlling are very much around in places of work, home and school. These conditions pose serious threat to living when not taken care of in good time. Such threatening situations include fear of the unknown, anger, stress and environmental challenges all of which can create threat to qualitative living, it is therefore, better for individuals to be equipped with skills that will enable them to cope with life threatening challenges than embarking on preventive measures. **It is on this basis that this paper is put up to discuss the importance of life skills in the life of an average Nigerian in building capacities to cope with daily challenges. The study sought to answer the question, are life skills important for capacity building to face life and societal challenges with a resultant effect on community development?

This position paper is significant to the extent that it would expose individuals and societies to the importance of life skills in coping with series of life's problems and would possibly make life skills education to be emphasized in the curriculum at all

levels of education while at the same time would encourage, teachers and parents in playing their roles in instilling the right type of education that would make them cope with stress and frustration, thus, making them better persons who are able to cope with life individually and corporately.

The study is delimited to examining views of authors and organizations on what life skills are, the importance and those who are expected to instill life skills in children and youth and implication for building capacity of community members

Life skills according to World Health Organization (WHO) (1993) are cross cultural as they cut across feelings emotions and other coping capacities.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (1999) identified the cross cultural areas of life skills and which are very germane to living qualitative life in any community. They include:

- Decision making and problem solving: This area of life skill is core to community living. Every member of the community must be enabled to participate in decision making that affects their lives. Giving other people the prerogative to make decisions for them amount to slavery in thought and actions and this will neither augur well for community development nor individual development. Every individual in the societies of the world must be capacitated in the area of problem solving. This is because problems arise daily and non should wait for others to solve their problems for them.

- Creative and critical thinking: In this fast world of technology the capacity of everyone must be built in this area. In Nigeria of today, the skill of critical thinking and creativeness is germane to individuality for self-reliance.
- Communication and interpersonal skills: Ensuring success in life depends on adequate communication and building capacity for interpersonal skills as the saying goes that “no one is an island” and that a tree does not make a forest. Children must be trained in the act of effective communication and interdependence to make up for their areas of lapses in work life and daily living.
- WHO also identifies self-awareness and empathy as one of the cultural life skill. Self-awareness will enable one to realize who he/she is, his/her weaknesses and how to make up for these identified weaknesses. Realizing who others are would also make for peaceful co-existence in the world communities.
- The next is assertiveness and equanimity. Young and old should be assertive in expressing their opinions on issues strongly and with confidence when expressing truth even in the face of threats and intimidation. Truth should be expressed in a calm state of mind not being upset or angry in difficult situations. This life skill will make for interpersonal relationships in the course of engaging in community activities.
- Resilience and coping with emotions and stress is another cultural skills to be exuded by both young and old to overcome challenges without hindrance to one’s health and in order to be very functional at home, school and community. Children and adult in building themselves and communities should be taught to feel better quickly after any shock and unpleasant situation so as to keep themselves stabilized and move on making progress.
- Apart from the above highlighted cultural life skills by WHO, other life skills should be imparted to people. Life skills are not necessarily meant for adults but also for young ones right from the time they are toddlers so that they become grown into them as they become adults. There are others of such important skills highlighted, such as
- Focus and self control. To be successful in life endeavors, one needs to be focused and not distracted. This can be achieved by paying attention ,thinking reflectively and exercising control.
- Perspective taking: this involves figuring what others feel and think. This will help people understand everyone around them – teachers, parents and friends, thus helping to respect the opinions of others. And thereby doing the right thing at the right time (Mind in the making 2019)
- The importance of communication is also highlighted in Mind in the making (2019); that individuals should communicate in ways that others will understand him/her.
- Critical thinking: This is described as that effort made to search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, discussions and actions. The document also states that making connection is core to learning and it is also at the core of creativity as it is a skill that helps one to use whatever information is at one’s disposal very well.
- Taking on challenges: Every individual must be brought up to be willing to take on challenges instead of trying to avoid them and each person must be taught to be self-directed as through this, potentials are realized, thus, leading to self-growth.

Concepts/Terms Associated with Life Skills

There are some terms used in relation to life skills in order to explain the scope of life skills better. Such include:

- a. Attitude: The term attitude is used in the context of life skills education to encompass the broad domain of social norms, ethics, morals, values, rights, culture, traditions, spirituality, religion and teaching about self and others (UNICEF 2019).
- b. Life Skills as a concept is defined as psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the challenges of everyday life (WHO,1993). They are grouped into three: cognitive skills for analyzing and using information, personal skills for developing self and managing oneself and interpersonal skills for communicating and interacting effectively with others. It is of importance to note that cognitive skills is the most emphasized in schools and at home now that parents do not have enough time for their children to nurture them in the acceptable ways. All parents care for, now, is academic success.
- c. Life skill education is another concept. This concept addresses specific contents put in place to achieve specific goals such as life skills based HIV/AIDS education. A life skill approach will be used to teach the subject matter and this involves participatory teaching/learning methods being put up to make learners develop knowledge and psychosocial skills that they may need to use knowledge to inform and carry out behavior in these respects.
- d. Skills based health Education: This is used to describe life skills education that aims to prepare individuals to make decisions and take positive actions to change behaviors and environment to promote health and safety to prevent diseases.

These concepts are pointers to the incredibility of life skills education for individuals and the community in general.

The above are closely associated to the idea of life skills as expressed by British Council Greece (2019) British Council Greece (2019) perceives life skills as a set of basic skills acquired through learning or

through direct life experience that enable individuals and groups to effectively handle issues and problems commonly encountered in daily life. The Council concludes that creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, the ability to communicate and collaborate with personal and social responsibility that contribute to good citizenship are all essential skills for healthy societies and for successful employable individuals.

Life skills could revolve around issues that affect people's lives. This means they are real, topical and sensitive issues which may affect people on personal level when friends, associates or family members are involved. These life skills to British Council can also be controversial. This happens in cases of disagreement and with differing opinions about their views. In such a situation any individual that has been armed with life skills exercise patience and respect the opinions of others. The implication is that life skills are moralistic, hence people are able to relate with what they think is right or wrong, good or bad, important and unimportant things in the society. Therefore, building active, informed and responsible citizens who are confident and ready to take responsibilities for their actions in a bid to contribute to political and economic processes of their communities, life skills become important. This implies that life skill make a wholesome and healthy citizens; citizens that are informed about social and political issues and those that are concerned not only about their welfare but those of others around them and are able to articulate the opinions and arguments of others. These skills will make individuals capable of having an influence in the world, active in their communities and responsible in how they act as citizens.

Macmillan English (2019) is of the strong opinion that life skills are important to both young and old and it should be taught at all levels of education because they have positive effect to individuals and societies. These life skills will help to tackle environmental and also security challenges which affect individual and communities. There are new dramatic changes in economic and politics globally and many of which are impacting on education the workplace and the home life. Stresses and frustrations are encountered everywhere at school home and work to surmount these challenges, individuals and communities should be inbuilt with various and important life skills. This is because people, irrespective of their ages will meet many challenges over the course of their lives which call for dynamism and flexibility, viewing the importance of life skills in this direction; these is need to carry adult, youth and children along in the scheme of life skills to give them capacity to cope with these changes so that they are not static and remain frustrated.

Macmillan English also emphasizes finding new ways of thinking and solving emerging problems, recognizing the importance of their actions, taking responsibilities for them while not heaping the blames of resultant actions on others. A good example of this is that of Edufe Okporo in one of the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) programmes "Straight Talk" which was broadcast on June 23, 2019; who through the skills he possessed quickly used his confidence and critical thinking abilities to make decision as to whether to continue living in Nigeria under pressure and stress or should do otherwise. He took the decision to seek asylum in USA when he taught his life was no longer safe in Nigeria because he was a gay. He weighted the options of having his parents, friends and his good job in Nigeria and his having rotten in detention without being given free trial to seeking asylum in the United States of America. He understood why he had to make his choice of staying away from Nigeria and he took responsibilities for his actions. In USA, he is doing fine, using his potentials to serve in his new place of work. (NTA, 2019).

Building confidence in spoken skills and for group collaboration and cooperation would help individuals anywhere and this means giving individuals voices against situations that they resent. Having voices, an important life skill attached to communication, self-direction and awareness and assertiveness will make people whether young or old to make positive contributions to issues at hand by developing the expertise and the experience they need to assert their rights and understand their responsibilities anywhere in the world.

Teaching children and young people life skills at home, school and society prepares them for life and support their growth as they are given opportunities to act wisely in every challenge faced instead of trying to avoid them which may lead to grievous consequences later in life.

Many people have also carried out studies on life skills in many dimensions. Vicary (2018) perceives life skills as traditionally based soft skills or people skills. To him these skills are ideally taught in the traditional society by parents and grandparents but now neither are they taught in schools nor at homes. This statement might be true as parents no longer take conscious efforts to train children to cope with daily challenges because they are also stressed up with money making ventures. In schools too, the term life skills may sound unheard of, to some teachers hence, they could not make conscious efforts to impart the skills to students as they are only concerned with saddling them with academic knowledge which is not adequate to carry them through life challenges after school. Vicary is the opinion that there is "needs gap" thus, the need for

adult and youth to learn and understand the importance of life skills. He states that research conducted at Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research Center concluded that 85% of jobs success comes from having well developed life skills which implies that only 15% of job success comes from technical knowledge. This implies that academic success does not make for all round success in societies of the world.

He also stated as reported by the Wall Street Journal that out of the 900 business executives surveyed, 93% were of the opinion that character skills were more important than technical skills and that 89% reported difficulties in finding employees with life skills. The implication of these findings is that life skills which form foundation for success is quite missing and, therefore, the gaps must be filled by equipping individuals with needed life skills right from home through school so that success can be achieved in individual and corporate life.

Medium Corporation (US) (2019) also states the importance of life skills not only for the able bodied individuals in societies but also the physically challenged people. Life skills to the Corporation should be inclusive in orientation. They should be accessed by the physically challenged so as to help them to make necessary adjustments in dealing with daily challenges of life thus making them emerge as confident and positive individuals in their communities. Life skills activities help in adding values to the lives of the physically challenged making them confident, self-aware and stress free. These activities as could be given to them include sporting, dancing, singing, speaking, group discussion and motivational speeches; putting them through these will help them to become more confident and independent thinkers, help them to interact and work as a team and help them to perceive life in positive outlook.

Building the capacity of the differently able people psychosocially will make them have abilities for adaptive and positive behavior which will enable them to cope with their challenges. (WHO 1993). These psychosocial skills which include reflective skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, personal skills such as self-esteem, sociability and tolerance, competencies to take actions and generate change and the capability to have the freedom to decide on what to do and who to be. These skills bring confidence to the life of all including the physically challenged, motivating all, bringing positivity and happiness to all. (Medium Corporation, 2016).

Botvin and Griffin (2004) researched into the problem of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use as important problems which is associated with the start

of adolescence. They submit that life skills training programme is an effective programme for adolescence drug abuse. In such training it was reported that skill associated with resistance are taught. They reported that earlier studies have proved the efficiency of life skills training on addicts of smoking drugs. The implication is that apart from initial training at homes and school, further training should be provided by all stake holders in life skills on every area of human endeavor to ensure valued and moral behaviors in societies in order to arrest acts of criminalities and insecurities pervading the global society in order to ensure peace.

Dhingra and Chauhan (2017) whose research was on assessment of life skills of adolescents in relation to selected variables confirmed in their study that life skills are abilities for positive and adaptive behavior which enable individuals to deal effectively with day to day needs and challenges, using thinking skills, social skills and emotional skills as bases of their study. They studied life skill in the lives of adolescent in line with education of parents and they found that the adolescent sampled had average level of life skills and that they scored least in the dimension of coping with stress. This implies that more need be done to enable adolescents cope with the demanding requirements of everyday living. They also found that there was a significant correlation between parental education and level of life skills of adolescents. They summed their findings up that education is germane to the awareness of needs of children. They also expressed the notion that life skills was basically to make mankind live a happy and fulfilling life in adaptation to the environment.

Chhadva and Kacker (2013) in Dhingra and Chauhan (2017) state that because adolescents are in a state of confusion, stress and uncertainly about coping with their lives due to mood changes brought about by hormones and the immaturity of the impulse control which centres in their brain cells, there is need for imbuing in them necessary skills that will make them cope with life during this stage of life.

Teaching of Life Skills

Life skills can be acquired by direct expenses or by teaching. Teaching of life skills in traditional society was done by parents and grandparents as expressed by Vicary (2018). This is, however, far from being the case and as parents and the grandparents of today emphasize academic success at the expense of building life skills into academic achievements.

Implications of Life Skills for Community Development

Life skills as a concept for facing challenges are of great importance to individuals, communities and the nation at large. In this wise, all stakeholders- parents,

teachers, and government at all levels must ensure that life skills are taught at the home, school and community levels. Prinz (2009) states that parenting could be a venue for nourishing life skills as they may be taught through the domain of parenting and this can be indirectly through observation and experience garnered by the child or directly with the purpose of teaching specific skills. This implies that parenting is itself a set of life skills and such that parents must impart on children from youth so that they would grow into responsible adults and parents. Vicary (2018) opines that parents are traditionally relenting their efforts in equipping children with life skills. This is not unconnected with the hustling and bustling of money making ventures of parents of today. For communities to retain its values and high moral standards, parents must play their roles in teaching life skills at home.

Training on life skills from parents could be on how to deal with pregnancy and this can lead to other skills as children grow into adults. Such training could be for prevention of bad behavior but focusing on positive youth development as individuals trained in life skills by positive development model (Prinz, 2009) would have a greater sense of confidence, usefulness, be sensitive to issues and would be more open than those trained through preventive model. Training on positive behaviour would make children develop peaceful attitudes and face challenges in a positive way.

The school which is a subset of the community has roles to play in teaching life skills to pupils and students at all levels of education. In the study carried out by Kalanda (2010) in Malawi, he identified, early school dropout, drug abuse and contacting sexually transmitted diseases as major issues facing the youths in Malawi. To solve these problems, the Government of Malawi, resorted to empowering pupils in primary and secondary schools through life skills and sexual reproductive education. Through this though met with challenges, students, teachers and parents were equipped with sex and sexuality education and life skills for HIV prevention. This type of education would lead to people's health being improved and thereby being able to contribute to the socio-economic and political processes of the nation because a healthy people would build a wealthy nation. Kalanda recommended that life skills and sexual reproductive health education, while being introduced to schools should be made examinable so that every individual would take such education seriously.

Okech and Role (2015) who examined in their study, the implications of life skills education on character building submit that life skills and its education become a serious intervention in a world that is bedeviled with varying acts of indiscipline and

criminality not only in schools but in the world over where there are cases of civil strife, insecurity, political violence and social deprivations. They found that there was a significant correlation between teaching of Life skills and development of character. To them, life skills are variants of value or character education because psychosocial competencies are desirable attributes that any progressive community would value and so they must be encouraged through teaching life skills at all levels of living.

Okech and Role (2010), identify "myself, relationship, community and environment" as core to life skills. Examining the Caribbean Curriculum framework for Health and Family Life education, they highlighted the main themes as being: "self and interpersonal relations, sexuality and sexual health, healthy eating and fitness and managing the environment". They submit that if these are taught, they see them as social norms that could lead to positive behavior in individuals, encourage the development of self esteem and informed decision making. As found by Kalanda (2010), Life skills education also increases knowledge levels which leads to behavioural change among teachers and pupils. Okech and Role believe that teachers and by extension parents should serve as role models from who children will acquire the habit of good character, abilities for leadership, social skills, interpersonal relationships which would make for peace and progress in communities, respect for other's opinions and good communication.

WH Magazine (2019) emphasizes the importance of teaching life skills in the society in the following way:

"As a society, it is our responsibility that our children are prepared for adult life...by teaching them life skills. Many adults learn these skills through trial and error; often resulting in very costly mistakes. It is important that we do all we can to prevent these mistakes from becoming barriers to our children's success" (n.p).

Life skills education emphasizes the same principles as emphasized in community development if communities are to be developed. These principles include, principle of need identification, self help, citizen participation, self direction, self growth and communication among others. Adedokun (2011). All these identified principles are core to life skills education. All these principles taken together with what life skills education should impart will help community members to become more confident, independent thinkers, build high self esteem of self, communicate effectively and build relationships which will aid team work in communities. These skills will aid individuals to become active members of their communities who are able to manage and live a better quality of life. Such skills help individuals in

societies to accomplish their ambitions and live life to the fullest potentials. When life skills increases, independent functioning, social competence and quality of life increases. Standards of living are raised and each individual is able to help himself to the best of his ability and contribute to the growth of his community.

CONCLUSION

This paper had done an overview of life skills and what implications they have on individuals in communities and the communities in general. The paper showed that life skills should not be taught as a preventive measure but should be taken seriously right from the time when children are toddlers so that they would grow into the skills as they get to adulthood. It is also reflected that the teaching should be done by all-parents, teachers and the community so that its effectiveness would be felt in all areas of life. Life skills are shown to be of benefit to individuals, places of work in terms of ability to manage self, solve problems and understand business environment and they are useful as they give abilities to adapt to different roles and flexible working environment. Life skills build diligent persons and transform them into making a society a better place to live in.

From the reviewed authors on life skills, it is evident that they are not consciously taught in schools and at home. There is that gap between identifying life skills and teaching them to children from when they are young. It is, therefore, important that life skills must be consciously taught at home and schools

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Life skills education should be included in the curriculum of every level of education in Nigeria in order to build active, informed, responsible citizens who are bold and are ready to take responsibilities for their actions. There should also be life skills and job programmes planned for the Nigerian curriculum.
- Parents should be encouraged to catch their children young at home by teaching them necessary daily skills as teachers in schools cannot teach all they need to know.
- Local companies who would hire the skills of the young ones after school should participate in the issue of life skill education in schools.
- Students should be taught the practical application of life skills while in school and home before getting to work in the community.
- Youth should be exposed to experiences that would enable them to become citizens that are aware of their rights, informed about economic, social and political issues around them and be exposed to experiences that would make them have the capacity to fight environmental

problems, stress and frustrations which are faced daily in the course of living.

- Community elders should make avenue for life skill training to be available to young ones so that they will be concerned about the welfare of others, articulate the opinions and arguments of others as this will make for peace in the world communities.

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