Developing Life Skills through Constructivist Approach to Teaching[1]

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ABSTRACT

A knowledge economy and information age are the era in which we currently live. Competition is essential in the knowledge economy, and nowadays students need various skills in addition to general knowledge to compete in every field. Therefore, developing essential skills among students is most important. Life skills are the properties that help the persons to adapt according to the demands of the changing world and prepare themselves to face the challenges of practical life. Life skills are determined by the psychological and social competency of the individual. Students can better understand their behavior, complete tasks properly, and understand the responsibility for their actions and consequences with the help of life skills. Critical thinking, creativity, decision-making, problem-solving, interpersonal relationships, and effective communication are some of the essential life skills that need to be developed among students. In the present time, to develop the required skills among students, teachers need to apply certain innovative and effective approaches to teaching in the classroom. In this regard, the constructivist approach is the best choice to inculcate essential life skills, because this philosophy of learning is founded on the assumption which is reflected by our experiences. In this approach available resources are used by them; students actively participate in developing their knowledge and skills by connecting new concepts and skills to previous experiences. The constructivist approach is very helpful in inculcating life skills among secondary school students because this approach draws a range of active learning processes like inquiry-based learning, cooperative learning, project-based learning, learning activities with active participation, games, etc. Given the teaching-learning process in the future, what should be the strategies in the development of life skills with "constructivist-based teaching" to make skill acquisition easier and more efficient? The present paper critically analyses these aspects of the development of life skills through the constructivist approach to teaching among secondary school students in detail.

Keywords: *Life Skills; Constructivist Approach; Learning Activities; Constructivist teaching*

INTRODUCTION

Students have rights to appropriate education, skills, ideal role models, a safe and supportive environment, counseling, etc. They need these to change themselves into productive and responsible citizens. Well-educated and skilled students are likely to make the best decisions concerning not only their profession, relationships, habits, and physical and mental health, but they will be an asset to society. The students of secondary schools have energy, courage, hope, and joyousness, but they undergo many physical, mental, and psychological changes. These changes are so extreme and dominant that students confront many types of challenges and conflicts that are not shared with their teachers and parents. This phase generates anger, stress, low self-esteem, role diffusion or negative identity, self-doubt, disappointment, etc. which affects their behavior, actions, and academic achievement too. To face these challenges, it is necessary to train students in those basic life skills which are helpful to learn better ways to develop their self-esteem, to take responsibility for their actions, to communicate with others, and to make the right decisions. A structured teaching approach is required for developing skill-based education which will focus on the needs of essential life skills and outcome-based learning. Which aims to increase adaptive and positive behavior in the context

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of the digital world by guiding students. But sometimes it seems difficult that all the effort to develop essential skills among students is made less effective through the contemporary teaching-learning process. Thus, in this context, teachers should adopt innovative and effective approaches like the constructivist approach of teaching, because this approach places a strong focus on learners developing personal understanding through reflection, analysis, and the gradual building of layers or depths of knowledge and skills through conscious mental processing and practices. Given the teaching-learning process in the future, what should be the strategies in the development of life skills among secondary school students with "constructivist-based teaching" to make acquiring skills simpler and more effective? This is the aspect that would be given certain strategies to develop life skills through the constructivist approach of teaching as content for this contributory paper.

LIFE SKILLS

Life skills are those attributes that help students to adapt and behave positively so that they can handle effectively the challenges inside the school and survive outside the school. Life skills are generic skills, essential for many diverse experiences throughout life, and should be taught as such, to gain significant impact. Life skills focus on individual or interpersonal acts as well as changes to the surrounding environment that make a happy and healthy way of life. In this context, World Health Organization (1997) defines life skills as "Psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life". Generally, life skills are categorized into three main categories of skills cognitive skills for analyzing and using knowledge, personal skills for managing oneself and personal action, and interpersonal skills for interacting and communicating effectively with others. Life skills are personal abilities that each one possesses and yet, require to enhance to face the challenges of life. In addition, life skills are the capability for adaptive and positive behavior that enables individuals to deal efficiently with the demands and challenges of daily life. In particular, Life skills are psycho-social competencies and interpersonal skills that help persons to make decisions, communicate effectively, and develop self-management skills, and critical thinking skills, and only such individuals will contribute to the building of a quality society that leads to a developed nation.

In the secondary school period, early adolescence and later childhood are the critical duration of opportunity for developing good habits and skills. During this time, students build the ability to understand various situations, think abstractly, solve problems as they experience more independently, and develop more control over their own lives. In the wider social context duration of early and middle adolescence provides many situations in which students practice new skills and develop positive attitudes. WHO has identified ten important life skills which are critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, interpersonal relationships, effective communication, creative thinking, coping with stress, coping with feelings, self-awareness, and empathy. Some of the important life skills are described below:

- ❖ **Group dynamics**: This is the social interaction ability to build positive relationships, to work effectively with family, the surrounding community, and co-workers. This skill is very crucial among individuals who either live together or work towards a common goal share a common approach and deal with tasks. To achieve more productive results, interpersonal relationships must be healthy.
- ❖ **Self-management**: Self-management is the capability to regulate thoughts, behaviors, and emotions productively. This means an individual with the ability to develop into self-sufficient for their effectiveness and achieving success in both personal and professional responsibilities for the benefit of themselves and their team.
- ❖ **Professional Development**: This ability among individuals is especially essential for making a career that fits present personal needs and the constantly changing environment of the workplace.
- ❖ **Stress management**: Stress management in an appropriate way is a basic requirement of all individuals because, at each moment of life, students face lots of challenges that create anxiety for them. This skill helps to cope with the stress of academic and personal life.
- ❖ **Time management**: This skill among all the skills is very important for any individual. For an individual who wants to be a successful person in his/her life organization of activities to accomplish desired tasks in the available period is very necessary.
- ❖ **Self-Concept:** It is one of the abilities that help individuals evaluate their sense of self in terms of their values, interests, strengths, and weaknesses. An individual can utilize their internal potential effectively when they are aware of their abilities.

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- ❖ **Critical thinking**: Critical thinking is a mental ability that helps the individual to consider everything from both positive and negative perspectives. It has historically been a valued ability like constructive interdependence in society and today, every person requires it.
- ❖ **Problem-solving**: It is a very essential skill in which individuals use logical reasoning and rational ability with concepts of science and mathematics knowledge and analyze the problems to make effective decisions and solve complex problems.
- ❖ **Communication**: Education always emphasizes fluent reading, correct speech, and expressing thoughts clearly, but there is evidence that students are not proficient in these fundamental skills. In such a competitive era there are global teams that work together in the workplace. To successfully contribute to these teams, effective communication is required.
- ❖ **Collaboration**: Collaboration skill is essential in our lives because it not only helps to create knowledge for a large number of people but also builds more holistic results than individual efforts. As a result of this when individuals work together, the group can achieve more success, thus making collaboration a key ingredient to success in today's global world.
- ❖ **Decision making**: A person's ability to make choices in his/her life is referred to as decision-making skills. Identifying the aim, coming up with alternatives to achieve the goal, ordering the alternatives according to importance, and selecting the best alternative are all components of the decision-making process. Students with good decision-making abilities can evaluate the pros and cons of several alternatives to achieve their goals.
- ❖ **Creative thinking**: Creative thinking is a skill that makes an individual able to think divergently. Creative individuals can recognize a problem, have confidence in their capacity to solve it, think logically, synthesize novel ideas, and develop new ideas. Currently, creativity and innovation are major forces in a global society. If students do not know how to create and innovate during school life, they will not be equipped for the problems of the workforce and society.

CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH

In **National Curriculum Framework - 2005,** section 2.4.1 (p. 110) mentioned that according to the constructivist view, learning is the process of the construction of knowledge. Using the materials and activities that are provided to them, students actively develop their knowledge by connecting new concepts to previously held ideas (experience). Constructivism is a theory about knowledge and learning. It is an epistemological view or philosophy which considers that the nature of reality is subjective, not objective. Thus, Constructivism is a philosophy of learning grounded in the assumption that is reflected by our experiences. Students construct their understanding of the world where they live. Each individual develops his/her own 'rules' and 'mental modes' which they use to make sense of their experiences. This approach is based on observation which describes how individuals learn through observation and scientific study. This approach views learning as an active process in which the learner is not merely a passive recipient of knowledge. The learner, on the other hand, actively engages in the learning process and constructs his/her understanding through a variety of activities like explanation, observation, experimentation, reflection, etc.

CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH AND LIFE SKILLS

In psychology, constructivism is found as a learning theory that explains how an individual acquires knowledge and skills. According to this philosophy, each individual builds his/her concepts and knowledge based on previous experiences. Therefore, the constructivist approach has a direct application in acquiring skills while learning school subjects. The central idea of constructivism is that acquiring knowledge and skills is constructive and that learners construct upon the foundation of prior learning and experiences. This approach has implications for instructors in terms of how to impart knowledge and foster the positive and adaptive behaviors that enable individuals to effectively deal with the demands and challenges of daily life. Focus on student-centered learning is the most important contribution of constructivism. In the global era innovation in teaching is very necessary and the constructivist approach is one of them which is very influential. This approach focuses on the process rather than the product so the learner can easily learn important life skills with the help of this approach. Life skills education is more important for school-going students. Life skills are concerned with the social and psychological competency of students and the constructivist approach is also based on social and psychological aspects of learning. This approach enables them to understand their behavior, to perform their task, and their consequences, and to comprehend the responsibility of their acts. The constructivist approach identifies and validates the student's style of performance, so that rather than being

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"wrong" or "right," the student reevaluates and readjusts their knowledge and skills. Such type of emphasis generates self-esteem and confidence which, in turn, motivates the students to tackle very complex tasks.

Life skills can be developed among secondary school students through the constructivist approach of teaching school subjects like mathematics and science in a variety of ways. The effect of that improvement can be seen in both terms of subject-specific and general life skills with immediate or long-term results. specifically, mathematics and science learning at the secondary school level need to be taught through the constructivist approach to teaching. Building on effective prior learning of mathematics and science concepts in particular often develops earlier life skills. Mastery of mathematical skills through innovative teaching sets the stage to interrelate the knowledge as theory and expand into the process as skills. Similarly, depth learning of science and mathematics through the constructivist approach not only contributes to life skills but also helps to build capacity across the curriculum. Skills like observing, describing, investigating, predicting, and experimenting aren't just vital to scientific thinking, but they contribute broadly to academic achievement and skills as a long-term achievement. The self-construction of knowledge in the classroom by learners provides an opportunity to analyze the situation and have its impact on developing life skills. Constructivist-based learning activities help the students to develop an exact concept, related skills, and inference conclusions. Besides, the above discussion, the author also suggests some of the following strategies to develop life skills through the constructivist approach to teaching:

CONSTRUCTIVIST TEACHING TECHNIQUES FOR FOSTERING THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE SKILLS

- ❖ **Through Project-based learning:** The constructivist approach provides an opportunity to solve problems, do experiments, and explore new things. The constructivist approach develops creativity and curiosity which helps to sustain attention, and persistence to attend to the problem and work on the solutions. The concept of constructivism "learning by doing" relates the theory with practice and also reinforces practical applications that help in developing essential skills.
- ❖ **By providing Research-based work:** New knowledge is being explored and shared at a very high speed. Thus, students need to know not only how to seek accurate information, but also how to critically analyze its usefulness and reliability. Developing research-based learning and projects in teaching can provide a foundation to develop the necessary 21st-century skillset for practical life.
- ❖ **Organizing educational events and trips:** To develop communication skills, students need opportunities for open discussion and experiences that will help students feel comfortable in communicating with others. The nature of the constructivist classroom is very positive, flexible, and conducive. So, debating sessions, school trips visits to the workplace, or providing a discourse platform are the teaching ways of the constructivist approach which can develop an open mindset and communication skills.
- ❖ **By focusing on their strengths:** Students are born with various strengths, and to develop these strengths teachers should identify those strengths of the learners. The implementation of the constructivist approach at the forefront of the teaching approach will help to bring out students' natural curiosity and innate potential, which leads to developing particular career skills.
- ❖ **Importance of cooperation:** Adolescent students need teamwork skills for the present and future workplace that can prepare them to collaborate with others, not only in their classroom but also encourage students to work together outside the classroom. The concepts of the constructivist approach reflect the cooperative method of learning, which is very helpful and can develop leadership skills among students.
- ❖ **By various personal ways:** Through repetition and various interactive ways in the constructivist approach, students can find a much easier path to retain and retrieve what they learned and skills acquired in the classroom. In a constructivist classroom, the ability of students to express knowledge and skills in a variety of ways is developed by engaging with their creative instincts. Thus, teachers should try to provide opportunities for students to practice skills in personal ways and transfer classroom practices into real-life situations.
- ❖ **Scientific approach and technique:** Human being needs to solve problems if it arises from curiosity. The constructivist approach provokes curiosity and focuses on the scientific process to find answers and substantiate those answers. The process of inquiry is more emphasized in the principles of the constructivist approach, which directly influences the development of creative thinking skills.
- ❖ **Using discussion method:** Students should learn how to clearly articulate their ideas as well as work together on tasks effectively by sharing the burden of group projects. Since constructivism provides students

ownership of how they acquire divergent thinking skills and can also be developed by providing opportunities for questions and explorations. Students can discuss and exchange their ideas to also develop critical thinking skills and the ability to negotiate with others.

- ❖ **Providing situations of the world:** Students who internalize the cause-and-effect relationship while learning school subjects like science and mathematics can apply the same logic and analytical skills to real-world problems. In the constructivist classroom, students work outside of traditional rules which is beneficial under the right circumstances and helps to develop problem-solving abilities in the real world.

- ❖ **Focusing on flexibility and active participation:** Flexibility develops thinking and reasoning skills, and the constructivist approach represents the picture of an ideal classroom having openness, flexibility, and curriculum negotiation. Students contrast and compare various possibilities to draw their conclusions. They use their prior knowledge and experience as they try to solve the problems. Focusing on flexibility, openness, and active participation helps the student to develop other skills, such as analytical abilities, a higher level of concentration, decision-making skills, and improved thought processes.

- ❖ **Provide genuine compliments freely:** Student learning and development depend significantly on receiving feedback. So, teachers' compliment on a task well done has a great impact on student's performance. There are several ways to provide feedback to students in the classroom, but the method that the teacher uses must suit both teachers' approach to teaching and the needs of the students. In a constructivist classroom school teachers raise confidence among students by being more intentional about when and how to provide feedback, and by structuring conversations around what they observe while teaching-learning rather than in an informal way.

- ❖ **Providing opportunities for self-evaluation:** Constructivism emphasizes developing one's ability to think and understand self-performance. Constructivist assessment involves the efforts and personal investments of the students in their project work and creative representations. Students need to learn how to appraise things correctly on an existing standard and those who can evaluate content, problems, and solutions will be in demand as a professional.

- ❖ **Behaving like a role model:** A teacher can play a significant role in developing life skills among students and in this regard, teachers should play certain professional and personal roles. Since, for this, the role of a constructivist teacher is a guide, facilitator, instructor, and friend. The constructivist approach is not only an appropriate approach for representing teachers' skills but also provides an opportunity to observe and practice life skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Every student is born with a set of certain abilities; gradually they acquire certain abilities and also need something more to be a complete individual. So, the teacher's role is to identify the student's strengths and enable him/her to make the fullest use of them. The constructivist approach is one of the best approaches to developing life skills education. Since this approach draws on a range of active teaching practices including inquiry-based learning, cooperative learning, project-based activities, etc. as well as visits to institutions, and these methods are significant in developing certain life skills for their everyday and future lives. The constructivist approach helps to train the students in their life skills by assigning responsibility, making connections with daily life, and providing challenging situations. Teachers should try to provide informal learning environments like field work, opportunities for frequent communication with experts, assigning research-based activities, and improving their sense of responsibility.

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