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INDIAN ASSOCIATION OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION

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CONTENTS

Philosophical Underpinnings of India's National Education Policy 2020

Dr. A. Radhakrishnan Nair*

Abstract

The new national education policy announced by the Government of India inJuly 2020 is considered one of the comprehensive policies focusing on almost all the educational pursuits of the nation. It is a continuation of India's previous education policy (NPE 1986 as modified in 1992). A lot of discussions have transpired at various levels on the NEP 2020, at national, state,and institutional levels. Perhaps, no other policy has received the attention that NEP 2020 has gotten from the masses, thanks to the initiatives of the Ministry of Education, Government of India. While exploring the studies and discussions on NEP 2020, the author noticed that the discussions all revolved around its various components, like coverage, structures, systems, and resources. There are no discussions or dialogue on the philosophical underpinnings of the policy or on what basis such a policy has been framed. Though the policy is a continuation of the previous policies on education, the present policy has covered education in a holistic perspective, cutting across almost all the aspects of education in India, and has given a clear outlook on human potential development by implementing the policy. Through this conceptual study, the author has proposed to analyze the National Education Policy of India (NEP) 2020 to understand the philosophical underpinning of the policy. The study has concluded that the NEP was built on the educational philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, and Mahatma Gandhi and the values enshrined in the Indian Constitution. While the Indian ethos is considered, it has also tried to incorporate the pillars of education propounded by the UNESCO Education Commission (Delors Commission, 1996), Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (Goal. 4), UNESCO Policy Paper on Education 2015, and the 21st Century skills of OECD. Thus, the NEP 2020 is a blend of Eastern and

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Westernphilosophies of education to provide high-quality education for developing and maximizing the talents and resources of individuals for the benefit of the country and the world.

Introduction

National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) stated, "Education is fundamental for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society, and promoting national development. Providing universal access to quality education is the key to India's continued ascent, and leadership on the global stage in terms of economic growth, social justice and equality, scientific advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation". Keeping this perspective in mind the Government of India has developed the national education policy after a series of consultations and deliberations of committees constituted for the purpose, taking the opinionsofpeople from different walks of life, educationists, administrators, parliamentarians, etc. Before announcing the policy, the draft policy was placed in the public domain for further discussions and suggestions. It was reported that more than 2 lakh comments/suggestions were received in the process and the apex committee constituted under the chairmanship of Dr. Kasturi Rangan has considered the suggestions and the final document was prepared. After the promulgation of the NEP 2020, a series of discussions were conducted at national, regional, and institutional levels. It's one of the policies that has been widely discussed before and after the adoption.

While exploring the studies and discussions on NEP 2020, the author noticed that the discussions all revolved around its various components like coverage, structures, systems, and resources. There are no discussions or dialogue transpired on the philosophical underpinnings of the policy or on what basis such a policy has been framed and declared. Though the NEP 2020 is a continuation of the previous policies on education, the present policy has covered education in a holistic perspective, cutting across almost all the aspects of education in India, and has given a clear outlook on human potential development by implementing the policy. Through this study the author has proposed to explore the philosophical underpinnings of NEP 2020, to understand what are the guiding principles of the policy and the ethos behind them.

Let us see what is a policy. According to Webster's dictionary, Policy[1] is prudence or wisdom in the management of affairs and a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions[2]. It means that policy should reflect the far-sightedness and wisdom of the nation on the particular subject, clear, time-bound action agenda, and be futuristic considering the present. Cambridge Dictionary[3] defines policy as "a set of ideas, or a plan of what to do in particular situations, that has been agreed officially by a group of people, a business organization, a government, or a political party".For them, it is a collection of ideas and action plans for a given situation for an agency including the government. For the Centre for Disease Control (USA),"Policy" is a law, regulation, procedure, administrative action, incentive, or voluntary practice of governments and other institutions[4]. Normally, anypolicy tries to accomplish an objective that is well-thought-out to be in thebest interest of society. A policy is a set of ideas or plans that is used as a basis for making decisions, especially in politics, economics, or business[5]. To UNESCO solid, coherent policies and plans are the bedrock on which to build sustainable education systems, achieve educational development goals, and contribute effectively to life-long learning. A policy is a guide for action, provides outlines on what to be done, assigns roles and responsibilities to various stakeholders, reflects the value system of the society, reflects the ideology of the ruling political ecosystem, and an emphatic statement of the political dispensations and their intentions on what they want to do in that particular sector. A well-thought-out policy is a stock taking of the past, consideration of the present, and the pointers to the future. Largely, the policy of a government is a political statement in administrative phraseology.

In India so far three national education policies have been announced; the first was in 1968 under Smt. Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister, followed by a comprehensive policy during the regime of Sri. Rajiv Gandhi in 1986 and continuation of certain modifications in 1992 by Sri. P. V. Narasimha Rao as Prime Minister. The third comprehensive national policy on education

1   The term policy is derived from the Middle English policie, pollecye "art or practice of government, system of government, commonwealth, organization or conduct of affairs, practical skill, prudence," borrowed from Anglo-French policie, pollecie "governance, system of government" (Middle French also, "a political organization, the state, conduct, behavior"), borrowed from Late Latin politia "citizenship, political organization, government" (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/policy)
2   https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/policyaccessed on 05 06 2021.
3   https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/policy accessed on 05 06 2021.
4   https://www.cdc.gov/policy/analysis/process/docs/policyDefinition.pdfaccessed on 05 06 2021.
5   https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/policy accessed on 10 06 2021.

was declared in July 2020 by Prime Minister Sri. Narendra Modi. Though the NEP 2020 says it is a continuation of the earlier policies, it would be interesting to see what the philosophy driving the objectives of the policy is and is there any deviation from earlier policies.

Hunter Commission (1882) under the chairmanship ofWilliam Hunter, was the first education commission in India constituted during the Britishers' time, which gavewide-ranging recommendations on education in India. Till independence, the recommendations of the Hunter Commission were in vogue.

Though the Indian Republic took 18 years to declare its first education policy, there is no dearth of commissions to study educational reforms to be introduced in the education system in India. The University Education Commission (1948-49) was established under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. The commission has given various recommendations to revamp the university and higher education system in the country. The inclusion of education in the concurrent list of the Constitution, setting up of UGC, the introduction of three-year first-degree courses, the establishment of rural universities, enhanced role of the state in the administration of education, etc. are the result of the recommendations of The Radhakrishnan Commission.

Three years after the Higher Education Commission, the Secondary Education Commission was constituted by Govt of India under the chairmanship of Dr. A. Lakshmana SwamyMudaliar in 1952. The Commission's recommendations were accepted, which were wide-ranging in terms of quality improvement in school education, restructuring the school education systems, examinations, etc., and have been implemented across the country. Indian Education Commission popularly known as the Kothari Commission formed in July 1964 under the chairmanship of Dr. Daulat Singh Kothari is the first education commission appointed in Independent India to look into the education scenario of the nation in its entirety and the Commission submitted its report in 1966 with comprehensive recommendations covering the entire gamut of education in India. Based on the recommendations of the Kothari Education Commission, the first education policy of India was announced in 1968.

The objective of this article is to look into the philosophy of education in India which governs her education policy and its guiding principles. The author has not gone into the details of the policies like their recommendations, proposed structures, or systems. Before venturing to analyze the

philosophy of NEP, it is imperative to see whether India has a philosophy of its own in education. The author understands that it's a debatable issue to look into the philosophy of the Indian education system before independence. Before independence, the geographical boundary of India is not as of today. There are numerous nationalities within the State (Bharat) ruled by different Kingdoms and Kings and later Britishers. Though there is a common thread that governs education in the form of Vedic education in Sanskrit, it's the domain of a few, and the decisive majority are deprived of that education. Parallel to Vedic education, there are traditions of education that prevailed in Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Oriya, Bengali, Malayalam, etc. Hence, for this study, the author has tried to look into the philosophical thoughts of social reformers, spiritual leaders, political leaders, etc. in 20th Century India, whose thoughts and contributions have led to freedom and in framing the Constitution of India. The educational philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Guru Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan was analyzed. Apart from that, the provisions of the Constitution of India also have been considered.

Education Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda

The basic tenets of education suggested by Swami Vivekananda, the greatest Saint of modern India,were that of life-building, man-making, character-making, and assimilation of ideas. Education to Vivekananda is the manifestation of perfection in oneself. Education for him means the process by which the character is formed, the strength of mind is increased, and intellect is sharpened, because of which one can stand on one's own feet. It should be the one that gives people self-confidence, enabling them to develop self-respect, enhance faith, understand, and develop their inner and spiritual selves.

The educational philosophy put forward by Swami Vivekananda is holistic, focusing on the individual self (personality), social self (society),physical self (physical education, exercise, sports, and games), self-reliant (vocational education), and spiritual self (values, culture, and divinity). Swami Vivekananda's focus of education is man-making- physically, intellectually, and spiritually-which means a harmonious development of the body, mind, and soul; character building (strengthening of character); developing the strength of mind; equipping oneself to face challenges; impart the spirit of philanthropy; develop courage; strengthening, enlightening and invigorating knowledge- the knowledge like self-knowledge, political knowledge, secular knowledge, social knowledge, and spiritual knowledge;

expanding the intellect; enhances the power of concentration-degree of concentration and detachment; education for physical development; spirit of renunciation; attaining self-sufficiency; developing a feeling of brotherhood; serving humanity; developing spiritual life; and making people self-reliant and have vocational skills.

Vivekananda believes that if education with its religious core can invigorate man's faith in his divine nature and the infinite potentialities of the human soul, it is sure to help a man become strong, yet tolerant and sympathetic. It will also help man to extend his love and goodwill beyond the communal, national, and racial barriers. The individuality of India lies in her spiritual culture, Vivekananda opined. Hence in his view, for the development of a balanced nation, we have to combine the dynamism and scientific attitude of the West with the spirituality of our country. His philosophy of education is not confined to spirituality or divinity, it has highlighted the importance of vocational education, income generation activities, eradication of poverty, eradication of inequality, and caste differences. He advocated the appropriate blend of materialistic and spiritual elements in education.

Education Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi

The educational philosophy of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi is unique in the fact that it is a harmonious blend of three philosophical thoughts, idealism, naturalism, and pragmatism.By education, Mahatma Gandhi meant"an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man, body, mind, and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education not even the beginning. It is one of the means by whereby men and women can be educated. Literacy in itself is no education" (Harijan,1937).Education went far beyond basic literacy. He considered literacy as only the means for education and not the end. He was a vociferous critic of the knowledge-centric education culture and considered it a colonial system targeted at curbing individual freedom and propagation of enslavement of the mind. For him, the ultimate aim of education is self-realization.

He envisaged education as development in cognitive, emotional, social, physical, and moral domains. He strongly believed in the power of education to help the individual realize his/her complete potential. This required a holistic system of education, catering to the head, hand, and heart of the student. While the foundation of education was character building, the end of education was service to the community.

The two core principles that stand out in Gandhian educational philosophy are vocational education and community service. He also emphasized val-

ues as the core of education and was one of the forerunners in advocating the use of experiential methods in education. Gandhi upheld the dignity of labour and proposed that education needs to inculcate this in the students through the inclusion of manual work in the curriculum.Community service was an integral part of education, according to Gandhi. Education was to be gained through service and was also to be used in service of fellow human beings. He believed that the cultural aspects are more important than the literary aspects. Rooting education in strong cultural traditions of the learners was needed to counter the alienation to one's own culture, experienced through education based on the Western model. Character building, the foundation of education according to Mahatma Gandhi, was to be achieved through the integration of morality and ethics in education.Considering education as an effective weapon against all vices, he advocated religious education (spiritual) for the cultivation of morality and ethics, leading to characterbuilding.

The Gandhian perspective of education, named Nai Talim, involved education not designed only for the development of cognitive skills, but holistic development centred around the learning and practice of a craft and hence is also called craft-centred education. The Wardha Committee report on education in 1937, headed by Dr. Zakir Hussain, was based on a series of articles published by Mahatma Gandhi in Harijan. The basic scheme of education has put forward the foundational principles (Takwale, 2010) viz; education in the mother tongue, alongwith learning of handicraft work; work linked with the most useful vocational needs of the locality; learning linked with vocational work; and work which is socially productive and useful for making a living.

He called craft-centred education for the mind, body, and heart. The physical faculties of the student would be engaged through the development of the psychomotor skill of practicing the handicraft. The underlying reason was also to inculcate a sense of dignity of labour in the students so that they place the same value on manual work as they do on cognitive work. He cautioned that "Every handicraft has to be taught not only mechanically as it is done today, but scientifically, i.e., the child should know the why and whereof every process" (Gandhi, 1953). Hence, the student should be taught various subjects like science, mathematics, geography, etc., linked to handicrafts. Learning and practicinghandicrafts according to him, was not only for the self-sustenance of the students themselves but also as an economic contribution towards their education. It was termed as socially useful productive work, facilitating the student integration of abilities, cog-

nitive, psychosocial as well as psychomotor for self and society.He said, "Thefunction of Nai Talim is not to teach an occupation, but through it to build the whole man", i.e., holistic education as propounded by Swami Vivekananda. Thus,Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy advocated an integrated approach to education for the realization of the potential of the individual.

Education Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore

The education philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore espouses the freedom of mind and spirit as the outcome of education. He advises that education should be based on our traditions and culture. The fundamental principles[6] of Tagore's educational philosophy are naturalism, humanism, internationalism, and idealism. He advocated natural surroundings to provide education and accordingly, he established Shanti Niketan and Viswa Bharathi World University. According to Gurudev, "Education means enabling the mind to find out that ultimate truth which emancipates us from the bondage of dust and gives us wealth, not of things but of inner light, not of power but of love. It is a process of enlightenment. It is divine wealth. It helps in the realization of the truth".

According to Tagore, the aim of education is self-realization, the realization of the universal soul in oneself. Man's aim in life is to achieve this status. It is a process, which cannot be realized without education. Further, he has advocated integral development as the fundamental purpose of education which is not merely to enrich ourselves through the fullness of knowledge, but also to establish the bond of love and friendship between man and man. Education aims to bring about the precision of man by dissipating ignorance and bringing in wisdom. It should enable one to lead a complete life – economic, intellectual, aesthetic, social, and spiritual. Education should lead to self-realization, self-reliant, a spirit of inquiry and creative self-expression, self-critical, intellectual development, physical development, love for humanity, freedom and open-minded, active communication with nature and man, natural growth in nature,neighbourliness, cooperation, material, and spiritual progress, deep rooted Indian culture, ethos, and international understanding.

Education Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

One of the greatest Indian Philosophers, Sri. Aurobindo Ghose was a great Rishi, poet, journalist, freedom fighter, and Indian Nationalist and always

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6   http://bhoomimagazine.org/2018/02/06/rabindranath-tagores-philosophy-on-indian-education/

had his original thoughts on Indian education and how it would have been. The basic aim of education in Sri. Aurobindo's opinion was to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for noble use. According to him, the purpose of education was to achievethe mental development of the child; physical development; the enhancement of all mental faculties namely- memory, thinking, reasoning, imagination, and discrimination, development of conscience, develop spirituality, purity of mind and develop morality, andto train all the senses namely hearing, speaking, listening, touching, smelling and tasting. To him, the values like extreme love, sympathy, and consideration for all living things are re-quiredfor moral development.In the words of Sri. Aurobindo[7], "Education to be true must not be a machine-made fabric but a true building or living evocation of the power of mind and spirit of the human being".

Sri. Aurobindo[8] emphasized that education should follow the needs of our real modern life. In other words, education should create dynamic citizens so that they can meet the needs of modern complex life. According to him, real education is that which provides a free and creative environment to the child, and developing his interest, creativity, mental, moral, and aesthetic sense finally leads to the development of his spiritual powers.

Education Philosophy of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India is considered one of the philosophers and modern thinkers of India who has a clear vision of the future of India and its role in the comity of nations. His ideology on education has influenced the growth and development of the education sector in independent India. Jawaharlal Nehru's theory of knowledge is based on rationalism, empiricism, and positivism. As a ratio-nalist, Nehru kept more faith in science than in religion and intelligence, experience, and reason. In his address to Allahabad University students, he said"A university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for the adventure of ideas and the search for truth" (Nehru JL, Independence and After). According to him, education aims to shorten the gap between communities by uplifting the backward sections. He advocated women's education and believed that educating the nation's women would make them economically independent. His thrust was on English education, and

7   Rani C (2017). A Study of Educational Vision of Aurobindo Ghosh. International Journal of Indian Psychology, Vol. 5, (1), DIP: 18.01.125/20170501, DOI:10.25215/0501.125 https://ijip.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/18.01.125.20170501.pdf
8   Alka Saini.EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH. https://wellpress.in/rrssh/Download/jul-sep-2017/EDUCATIONAL%20PHILOSOPHY%20OF%20SRI%20AUROB-INDO%20GHOSH%20-%20Alka%20Saini.pdf

at the same time promoting teaching in regional languages. He emphasized science education and secular education and considered that cultural education is integral to the development of human personality.

Education Philosophy of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's philosophy on education is vividly explained in his quote, "Education is not only the birth-right of every human beingbut also a weapon of social change"; and in "The education that makes us neither competent nor teaches us lessons of equality and morality is no more education." Education for Dr. Ambedkar is the means to social change, it's a right to learn the values of morality and equality and develop the competency of the people. He was influenced by his Professor, Dr. John Dewy, and the principles of Gautam Buddha. He has imbibed the three principles ofPradnya (Knowledge or Wisdom), Sheel (Character), and Karuna (Compassion) from Buddha and the democratization of education from Prof. Dewy. He gave a lot of importance to these principles and tried to imbibe them in the masses. According to him, education was the key to social progress. He believed thateducation would bring not only a new perceptionamong the miserable classes but also impel them toward practices of self-liberation. The mantra of Dr. Ambedkar for social change of the downtrodden was 'educate, agitate and organize'. Education should inculcate the values of justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, and moral character.

Ambedkar's philosophy of education is aphilosophy of social emancipation that demands equalrights and opportunities for education for all; it stands forself-respect and self-development; and it also means asocial revolution against the evils of social slavery,untouchability, casteism, oppression, etc. along with forremoving economic helplessness and disparities in life (Pradeep D. Waghmare, 2016). He stood for secular education. Universalization of education, women's education, democracy, character building, religion, and culture education with a focus on values and morals, importance to mother tongue, learning a foreign language, and job-oriented skill-based education were emphasized in the education philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar.

Education Philosophy of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

A great educationist, philosopher, thinker, author, administrator, and former President of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has laid the foundation for higher education reforms in independent India by submitting a comprehensive report to the Government of India as Chairman of the University Education Commission in 1948. Education, to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, is not book-

ish knowledge, it is acquiring knowledge beyond what is in the texts and taught by teachers. It is not rote knowledge of facts and figures, testing the memory of students, mere exams, scoring marks and diplomas and degrees for the job. Education is the assimilation of values and ideas for character building and preparing to face life's challenges. It is not only the training of the intellect but for the fine-tuning of the heart and the self-controlled spirit; development of personality and character; preservation, enrichment, and transmission of culture; development of spiritual values, vocational skills, and scientific temper; promotion of national integration and international understanding. Like Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi, he stood for holistic education, and like Jawaharlal Nehru, he wanted modern education which helped in the growth of scientific temper and rational thinking.

The aims of education recommended by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan in the report of the University Education Commission can be considered his cardinal principles on education. They are: to teach that life has a meaning; to awaken the innate ability to live the life of the soul by developing wisdom; to acquaint with the social philosophy that should govern all our institutions—educational, economic, and political; to train for democracy; to train for self-development; to develop certain qualities like fearlessness of mind, the strength of conscience and integrity of purposes; to acquaint with cultural heritage for its regeneration; to enable to know that education is a lifelong process; and to develop an understanding of the present as well as of the past.

As rightly quoted by M S Kurhade (2021) according to Dr. S Radhakrishnan, where scientific knowledge ends, the realm of mystery begins. The world of scientific facts and the world of values is different. If education does not build wisdom and humanity in the hearts and minds of men, all its professional, scientific, and technological triumphs will be meaningless. Education is the enlightenment of the soul that dispels ignorance and illuminates the individual.

Provisions for Education in the Constitution of India

The architects of the Indian Constitution have considered the philosophies propounded by our thinkers and greatest educationists of that time and have given prodigious thrusts on education in the fundamental rights, different articles of the Constitution. The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 inserted Article 21-A in the Constitution of India to provide free and compulsory education for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years

as a Fundamental Right. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, under Article 21-A, means that every child has a right to full-time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school that satisfies certain essential norms and standards.Education of Minorities (Article-30), Language Safeguards (Article 29 (1)), Education for Weaker Sections(Article 15, 17, 46), Secular Education (Article 25(1), 28 (1, 2 &30), Instruction in Mother –Tongue (Article 26 (1) & 350 A), Promotion of Hindi (Article 351), Higher Education and Research (Entries 63, 64, 65, and 66 of Union List), Women's Education (Article 15 (1&3)), Education in the Union Territories (Article 239), Educational and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (Entry 13 of Union list), etc. has ensured various principles propounded by our thinkers and educationists like, free and compulsory education till matriculation, women education, education of the minorities, SC/ST and other vulnerable population, women education, science education, education in mother tongue and at the same time promotion of foreign language education, education in Hindi, quality higher education, promotion of culture, values, constitutional values, quality education with focus on character building and skills and competencies, etc. These constitutional provisions might have influenced Indian education policymakers tremendously.

Sustainable Development Goals 4

The sustainable development goals (SDG) declared by the UN are a mandate to all Nations to achieve certain standards in the life of people across the globe. It aims to empower the people and transform the world. They are a call to action to end poverty and inequality, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy health, justice, and prosperity. Among SDGs, SDG 4 is one of the most important ones, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. It has seven targets and three sub-targets to achieve by the year 2030. They are:

1. Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

2. Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

3. Ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university.

4. Substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship.

5. Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations.

6. Ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

7. Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

The sub-targets in the SDG 4 are:

a. Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability, and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all.

b. By 2030, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular, least developed countries, small island developing States, and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programs, in developed countries and other developing countries

c. By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States.

SDG 4 on quality education focuses on inclusion, equity, and equality in terms of education which is empowering the people and transforming the world into a better place to live. Sustainable development goals are the mandate for all the countries that are the signatories of the same. The nations have the mandate to achieve the same by creating appropriate education policies if they are not in vogue at present so that appropriate strat-

egies and programs can be developed to achieve the goals. As India is a signatory of the SDG, the government has the mandate to achieve the goals within the stipulated time. The NEP 2020 is a revolutionary step taken by the Government of India to achieve the goals of SDG4. A close look at the NEP 2020 shows that the policymakers have taken utmost care in incorporating the idea behind SDG4 while preparing it.

NEP 2020 document para 2 says that "the global education development agenda reflected in Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda forSustainable Development, adopted by India in 2015 - seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable qualityeducation and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030. Such a lofty goal will requirethe entire education system to be reconfigured to support and foster learning so that all of the criticaltargets and goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be achieved." This emphatic statement shows the commitment of India towards SDGs and the policy initiative to achieve the same in the education sector.

National Policy on Education (NPE), 1968

NEP 1968 says "The great leaders of the Indian freedom movement realized the fundamental role of education and throughout the nation's struggle for independence, stressed its unique significance for national development. Gandhiji formulated the scheme of basic education, seeking to harmonize intellectual and manual work. This was a great step forward in making education directly relevant to the life of the people".

The NPE 1968 narrates the development of the policy in the post-independence period. It states that after independence a major concern of the Government of India and the States has been to give increasing attention to education as a factor vital to national progress and security. The policy of 1968 states that "Problems of educational reconstruction were reviewed by several commissions and committees, notably the University Education Commission (1948-49) and the Secondary Education Commission (1952-53), some steps to implement the recommendations of these Commissions were taken; and with the passing of the Resolution on Scientific Policy under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, the development of science, technology and scientific research received special emphasis. Toward the end of the third Five Year Plan, a need was felt to hold a comprehensive review of the educational system with a view to initiating a fresh and more determined effort at educational reconstruction; and the Education Commission (1964-66) was appointed to advise Government on the national pattern

of education and the general principles and policies for the development of education at all stages and in all aspects. The Report of the Education Commission has since been widely discussed and commented upon. The NPE 1968 notes that a consensus on the national policy on education has emerged in the course of these discussions".

The 3rd paragraph of the NPE 1968 can be considered as the philosophy of the NPE, which points out that: "The Government of India is convinced that a radical reconstruction of education onthe broad lines recommended by the education commission is essential for the economic andcultural development of the country, for national integration and for realizing the ideal of asocialistic pattern of society. This will involve a transformation of the system to relate itmore closely to the life of the people; a continuous effort to expand educational opportunity; asustained and intensive effort to raise the quality of education at all stages; an emphasis onthe development of science and technology; and the cultivation of moral and social values. The educational system must produce young men and women of character and ability committed to national service and development. Only then will education be able to play itsvital role in promoting national progress, creating a sense of common citizenship andculture, and strengthening national integration. This is necessary if the country is toattain its rightful place in the comity of nations in conformity with its great cultural heritageand its unique potentialities."

Accordingly, NPE 1968 has put forward the following agendas to implement in the education sector: free and compulsory education; increased status, emoluments, and education of teachers; development of languages-regional languages; three language policy; promotion of Hindi, Sanskrit, andInternational languages; equalization of educational opportunity; girls education; educational facilities for the physically and mentally handicapped children; education of Minorities; work experience and national service; science education and research;

education for agriculture and industry; production of books; spread of literacy and adult education; games and sports. The NPE also advocated the introduction of the 10+2+3 pattern in the Indian education system.

The NPE 1968 was prepared with a focus on the holistic development of the students. The policy visualizes to inculcate nationalistic fervour, strengthening national integration, cultural heritage, ethics, and values of India. It was the reflection of the ideals of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi.

The National Policy of Education 1986 as modified in 1992

The NPE 1986 is an extension of the policy of 1968 and has reiterated the need to strengthen the education system to reach all children. The policy of 1986 placed the individual first in its framework while stating that, "In the Indian way of thinking, a human being is a positive asset and a precious national resource, which needs to be cherished, nurtured, and developed with tenderness, and care,coupled with dynamism. Each individual's growth presents a different range of problems and requirements, at every stage from the womb to the tomb. The catalytic action of education in this complex and dynamic growth process needs to be planned meticulously and executed with great sensitivity. The policy further shows its anguish at the happenings in the country when it states that "India's political and social life is passing through a phase, which poses the danger of erosion of long-accepted values. The goals of secularism, socialism, democracy, and professional ethics are coming under increasing strain." The policy has noted the problem of lack of access to education by the masses. It points out that "The rural areas with poor infrastructure and social services, will not get the benefit of trained and educated youth unless rural-urban disparities are reduced and determined measures

are taken to promote diversification and dispersal of employment opportunities." The NPE 1986 talked about the need for population education, "The growth of our population needs to be brought down significantly over the coming decades. The largest single factor that could help achieve this is the spread of literacy and education among women."

NPE 1986 has considered the need to equip the children world-ready and prepare them to face the challenges of the modern world. The policy states that "Life in the coming decades is likely to bring new tensions together with unprecedented opportunities. To enable the people to benefit in the new environment will require new designs of human resource development. The coming generations should have the ability to internalize new ideas constantly and creatively. They have to be imbued with a strong commitment to humane values and social justice. All this implies better education.

NPE 1986 focus is on equality. It was on providing education to all the citizens of India and to reach the marginalized and downtrodden like scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, minorities, and women. The policy states that, "In our national perception, education is essentially for all. This is fundamental to our all-round development, material and spiritual. Educa-

tion has an acculturating role. It refines sensitivities and perceptions that contribute tonational cohesion, a scientific temper, and independence of mind and spirit -- thus furthering thegoals of socialism, secularism, and democracy enshrined in our Constitution.Education develops manpower for different levels of the economy. It is also the substrate onwhich research and development flourish, being the ultimate guarantee of national self-reliance. In sum, Education is a unique investment in the present and the future. This cardinalprinciple is the key to the National Policy on Education."[9] The guiding principles of the policymakers in preparing the policy were those of the thinkers of ancient and modern times. It has largely drawn from the Gandhian philosophy while stressing the need for elementary education, non-formal education, vocationalisation of education, and work experience.

National Education Policy 2020

The NEP 2020 is a beautiful blend of tradition and modernity. It has tried to emulate the finer elements of ancient wisdom, the philosophies of all our great philosophers, and the modern world. The whole focus of NEP 2020 is about education that is transforming and empowering children, recognizing, identifying, and fostering the unique capabilities of each student with multidisciplinarity and a holistic education, emphasis on conceptual understanding rather than rote learning and learning for exams;creativity, and critical thinking to encourage logical decision-making and innovation;ethics and human &constitutional values like empathy, respect for others, cleanliness, courtesy, democratic spirit, spirit of service, respect for public property, scientific temper, liberty, responsibility, pluralism, equality, and justice;life skills such as communication, cooperation, teamwork, and resilience.

Education Policy lays particular emphasis on the development of the creative potential of each individual. It is based on the principle that "education must develop not only cognitive capacities - both the 'foundational capacities 'of literacy and numeracy and 'higher-order' cognitive capacities, such as critical thinking and problem-solving – but also social, ethical, and emotional capacities and dispositions". NEP 2020 is a recreation of the educational philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, viz., life-building, man-making, character-making, and assimilation of ideas. Education to Vivekananda is the manifestation of perfection in oneself. It adopts the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi by adopting his principles of vocationalisation of education, experiential learning, character building, universaliza-

9   https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/nep/Policy_1986_eng.pdf

tion of education up to secondary level, learning in the mother tongue, etc.

The NEP 2020 has laid down the fundamental principles that will guide the education system and the individual institutions within the system. They are:

- Recognizing, identifying, and fostering the unique capabilities of each student, by sensitizing teachers as well as parents to promote each student's holistic development in both academic and non-academic spheres;

- According the highest priority to achieving Foundational Literacy and Numeracy by all students by Grade 3;

- Flexibility, so that learners can choose their learning trajectories and programmes, and thereby choose their paths in life according to their talents and interests;

- No hard separations between arts and sciences, between curricular and extra-curricular activities, between vocational and academic streams, etc. to eliminate harmful hierarchies among, and silos between different areas of learning;

- Multidisciplinarity and a holistic education across the sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, and sports for a multidisciplinary world to ensure the unity and integrity of all knowledge;

- Emphasis on conceptual understanding rather than rote learning and learning-for-exams;

- Creativity and critical thinking to encourage logical decision-making and innovation;

- Ethics and human & Constitutional values like empathy, respect for others, cleanliness, courtesy, democratic spirit, spirit of service, respect for public property, scientific temper, liberty, responsibility, pluralism, equality, and justice;

- Promoting multilingualism and the power of language in teaching and learning;

- Life skills such as communication, cooperation, teamwork, and resilience;

- Focus on regular formative assessment for learning rather than the summative assessment that encourages today's 'coaching culture';

- Extensive use of technology in teaching and learning, removing language barriers, increasing access for Divyang students, and educational planning and management;

- Respect for diversity and respect for the local context in all curriculum, pedagogy, and policy, always keeping in mind that education is a concurrent subject;

- Full equity and inclusion as the cornerstone of all educational decisions to ensure that all students can thrive in the education system;

- Synergy in curriculum across all levels of education from early childhood care and education to school education to higher education;

- Teachers and faculty as the heart of the learning process – their recruitment, continuous professional development, positive working environments, and service conditions;

- A 'light but tight' regulatory framework to ensure integrity, transparency, and resource efficiency of the educational system through audit and public disclosure while encouraging innovation and out-of-the-box ideas through autonomy, good governance, and empowerment;

- Outstanding research as a corequisite for excellent education and development;

- Continuous review of progress based on sustained research and regular assessment by educational experts;

- A rootedness and pride in India, and its rich, diverse, ancient, and modern culture and knowledge systems, and traditions;

- Education is a public service; access to quality education must be considered a basic right of every child; and

- Substantial investment in a strong, vibrant public education system as well as the encouragement and facilitation of true philanthropic private and community participation[10].

A closer look at the principles of education laid down in NEP 2020 shows that it's a collection of the principles propounded by our great forefathers explained elsewhere in this article. In that sense, the policy is purely Indian and reflects our ancient wisdom, tradition, and culture.

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10   Govt of India. National Education Policy 2020, pp 5-6

The Vision of the NEP 2020 is a beautiful blend of the Indian knowledge system, the requirement of the skills and competencies of the 21st century, and constitutional values. "This National Education Policy envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, thereby making India a global knowledge superpower. The Policy envisages that the curriculum and pedagogy of our institutions must develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values, bonding with one's country, and a conscious awareness of one's roles and responsibilities in a changing world. The vision of the Policy is to instill among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen."[11]

The National Education Policy 2020 exhorts the traditional Indian ethos of Vasudaiva Kudumbakam and Loka samasta sukhino bhavantu. This policy seeks to educate the children that the whole world is one family and we aim to ensure the safety and happiness of all human beings. The policy has considered and incorporated the needs, demands, and aspirations of youngsters and society in the 21st century.

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11   Ibid,p-6.

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Envisioning Heutagogy - Driven Lifelong Learning Ecosystems for Life Skills Enhancement

Vaibhav Verma* and Dr. Jijo Varghese**

Abstract

The twenty-first century has accompanied an era of rapid advancements in technology, globalisation, and transforming socioeconomic dynamics, making it challenging for conventional educational systems to keep up with the demand for practical life skills. Life skills acquisition and proficiency are necessary for personal development, adaptability, and success in an ever-evolving society. Traditional educational approaches frequently fail to provide learners with the dynamic and practical life skills required to navigate the complexity of modern life. This study investigates the notion of heutagogy-driven lifelong learning ecosystems as a possible method to address this quandary and describes the key components of such ecosystems to examine their influence on skill development using deductive thematic analysis. Heutagogy emphasises self-determined learning and places learners at the core of the educational process. It allows individuals to take charge of their learning journey by emphasising learner autonomy, self-direction, and lifelong learning. Individuals can foster crucial life skills throughout their lives by envisioning and designing lifelong learning ecosystems inspired by heutagogy. The potential for it to develop leadership, initiative, flexibility, adaptability, and accountability skills is highlighted in this paper. In today's connected world, heutagogical ecosystems promote collaboration and cross-cultural engagement. Lifelong learning ecosystems based on heutagogy have the potential to provide individuals with critical life skills, assisting them to flourish in a constantly evolving world. Managing the underlying issues and enabling fair access to such ecosystems are critical steps towards a more flexible and skilled society.

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Introduction

The 21st century has brought forth an era of unparalleled progress characterised by rapid technological advancement, globalisation, and changing socioeconomic dynamics. In this fast-paced world, traditional educational systems frequently find it difficult to keep up with the need for practical life skills. The term "life skills" refers to a broad variety of abilities, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, creativity, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and digital literacy which serve as the bedrock upon which personal and professional success are built (UNESCO, 2013). Additionally, the Fourth Industrial Revolution has highlighted that the value of lifelong learning as conventional skill sets are quickly supplanted by emerging, more specialised proficiencies (Schwab, 2016).

In today's changing environment, the focus on life skills in education is becoming progressively more crucial. Traditional education has generally concentrated on hard skills, such as knowledge and technical skills, but the demands of social and professional life require that people have soft skills, including social, communicative, and other skills. Educators play a vital role in assisting children to develop their life skills. According to research done in Pakistan, educational institutions have an important function to play in helping young students develop their life skills (Hussain, 2022).

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in heutagogy, a learning approach which places a strong emphasis on self-determined learning and offers a viable framework for satisfying the increasing need for skill development and lifelong learning. In heutagogy, students actively manage their learning process by determining what, how, and when to learn (Hase & Kenyon, 2007).

This paper explores the concept of heutagogy-driven lifelong learning ecosystems, which extend beyond formal education and provide individuals with continuous opportunities to acquire and refine life skills. Hence the objectives of the study were formulated as to identify the core elements of a heutagogy-driven lifelong learning ecosystem and to assess the impact of these ecosystems on the development of life skills. The researchers used deductive thematic analysis to carry out the study.

Heutagogy: A Framework for Lifelong Learning

In an ever-evolving knowledge landscape, the need for lifelong learning

has become increasingly evident. Heutagogy, the term coined by Stewart Hase and Chris Kenyon in 2000 is a concept that gained prominence in the 21st century and offers a compelling framework for lifelong learning that empowers individuals to take control of their learning journey. It strongly emphasizes the development of self-determined and self-directed learners (Hase & Kenyon, 2007). Its key characteristics include learner autonomy, self-direction, and lifelong learning (Hase & Keynon, 2007; Blaschke, 2012). Unlike pedagogy (teacher-centered) and andragogy (adult-centered), heutagogy empowers learners to become autonomous, responsible, and self-regulated in their learning processes. The theoretical underpinnings of heutagogy are constructivism, humanism, capability, systems thinking, action learning, connectivism, rhizomatic learning, and neuroscience (Hase & Kenyon, 2007). Numerous educational settings, including higher education, career development, and vocational education, have used the heutagogical method. Innovative learning environments that support student autonomy and self-directed learning have been created using it (Sinfield & Cochrane, 2019). Considering the widespread use of technology in classrooms, it is a potential strategy to encourage the development of lifelong learning abilities (Blaschke & Hase, 2019). The key components which constitute heutagogy as a lifelong learning approach are:

- **Self-determination:** It places a strong emphasis on self-determined learning, which refers to learners choosing what and how they learn based on their interests, needs, and goals by taking ownership of their education and actively participating in it (Blaschke & Hase, 2019; Morrison, D. 2020).

- **Autonomy:** Learners take responsibility for their learning, setting their objectives, and methods and evaluating their progress (Blaschke & Hase, 2019).

- **Openness to experiences:** Heutagogy encourages exploration, curiosity, and embracing new challenges to explore new perspectives (Blaschke & Hase, 2019).

- **Reflection and Metacognition:** Learners continuously reflect on their learning experiences, adapting and improving their strategies (Blaschke & Hase, 2019).

- **Learning how to learn:** Heutagogy encourages people to develop the capacity to learn freely and adapt to new situations as it places an emphasis on the learning process itself (Glassner & Back, 2020).

It can be said that heutagogy enables an individual to be the innovator, moderator, and administrator of one's own learning.

Lifelong Learning Ecosystems

Lifelong Learning Ecosystems (LLE) are comprehensive frameworks that enable learning throughout a person's life and go beyond the confines of traditional classrooms. These ecosystems support ongoing growth and development by including a variety of learning contexts, resources, and stakeholders. LLE include formal education, informal learning, and non-formal education, forming a smooth pathway for people to learn new things and keep their knowledge and skills up to date. The necessity for people to adapt to new technology and societal changes, as well as the shifting educational landscape, has made the idea of lifelong learning more significant in recent years. The educational ecosystem in Finland is an illustration of a system that has worked to achieve equity and high quality by fusing several fundamental components, such as the flexibility of the educational structure, system-wide lifelong learning, and local responsibilities in developing curricula (Niemi et al., 2014). The notion of "learning ecology" has been put up as a theoretical and empirical framework that includes "learning processes" and "learning dispositions" (Sanmamed et al., 2019). Lifelong learning is also important in the higher education sector, where universities have a social responsibility to society, conduct research that benefits society, make research findings widely and freely available, communicate research to the public, and offer educational opportunities to people of all ages and social backgrounds (Hammer, 2019). Digital technologies are essential to these ecosystems because they provide access to a wide range of materials, programmes, and data (Cedefop, 2020). However, because of problems like Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), implementing lifelong learning in developing countries might be difficult (Yazici & Ayas, 2015).

Envisioning Heutagogy-Driven LLE for Life Skills Enhancement

The components of 21st-century skills constitute from 3Ls which are Learning Skills (4Cs), Literacy Skills (IMT), and Life Skills (FLIPS). Learning skills include Critical Thinking, Creativity and innovation, Collaboration, and communication. Literacy skills include Information Literacy, Media Literacy, and Technology Literacy. Life skills include Flexibility and adaptability, Leadership and responsibility, Initiative and self-direction, Productivity and accountability, and Social and cross-cultural interaction (Central Board of Secondary Education, 2020; Varghese &Musthafa,

2021).

Heutagogy facilitates learning that is self-directed and self-determined, making it an ideal approach for fostering flexibility and adaptability. Learners have the autonomy to look at a variety of resources and modify their learning methods to meet their educational needs. According to research by Hase and Kenyon (2013), heutagogical approaches promote adaptability by encouraging students to look for new material on their own. As it places a focus on the learning process itself, it assists individuals in developing the capacity to learn at their own pace and to be flexible in response to new situations (Glassner & Back, 2020).

Leadership and responsibility skills are crucial in both personal and professional aspects of life. The heutagogical approach fosters these by placing learners at the centre and enabling them to control their learning journey. It states that individuals take charge of their own learning by selecting what, when, how, and with whom to study (Hase & Kenyon, 2000; Blaschke, 2012; Reeve, 2013; Glassner & Back, 2020; Susilaningsih et al., 2020). They acquire the skills of goal-setting, time management, and ownership of their development. According to Zimmerman and Moylan's 2009 research, the growth of leadership is favourably correlated with self-regulated learning, an essential component of heutagogy.

Learners' initiative and self-direction are fostered when they are supported in determining their learning requirements and creating their own learning pathways. Heutagogy enhances these by encouraging self-directed learning, according to research by Blaschke and Hase (2016). It focuses on how well individuals can use their skills and knowledge in both familiar and unexpected circumstances, thereby boosting their potential for self-direction (Glassner & Back, 2020; Gillaspy & Vasilica, 2021; Susilaningsih et al., 2020).

Heutagogy is also characterized by productivity and accountability. In addition to being accountable for the results, learners are also responsible for their learning. As learners work to accomplish their objectives, this responsibility boosts productivity. Heutagogy has been linked to higher productivity in online learning settings, according to recent research by Jones et al. (2021).

In today's highly interconnected world, social and intercultural communication abilities are crucial. Heutagogical ecosystems encourage group learning and collaborations which offer learners the opportunity to interact with a range of perspectives and a source of motivation (Stoszkowski&

McCarthy, 2018; Adi &Praherdhiono, 2020; Glassner & Back, 2020). The value of social interaction in heutagogical online settings for fostering cross-cultural relationships has been highlighted by Garrison and Vaughan (2018).

To create heutagogy-driven lifelong learning ecosystems for life skills enhancement, several key considerations must be addressed:

- **Curriculum flexibility:** Developing curricula that are adaptable, responsive to learner needs, and focused on life skills. The curriculum must be adaptable enough to consider the requirements and preferences of students. Additionally, it should be developed to support lifelong learning and the acquisition of practical skills (Chiappe et al., 2020).

- **Assessment methods:** The development of life skills and the capacity to use them in real-world circumstances should be measured through assessment techniques. These techniques must be adjustable and flexible to meet the demands of learners (Chiappe et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020). Shifting from traditional exams to competency-based assessments and reflective portfolios.

- **Digital literacy:** Ensuring equitable access to technology and digital resources for all learners. For lifelong learning in the digital age, digital literacy is crucial. In order to properly access, assess, and apply information, learners need to be prepared with the appropriate digital abilities (Chiappe et al., 2020; Neck & Corbett, 2018; Firdaus & Abdulkarim, 2022).

- **Teacher/facilitator roles:** Transitioning from knowledge providers to learning guides and mentors. In addition to offering assistance and guidance when required, they should encourage learners to take ownership of their own education (Exter & Ashby, 2021; Chiappe et al., 2020).

- **Recognition and validation:** Establishing mechanisms for recognizing and crediting skills acquired within these ecosystems. It's crucial to acknowledge and validate learning successes in order to inspire students and encourage lifelong learning. Opportunities for learners to showcase their abilities and gain praise for their accomplishments should be provided (Chiappe et al., 2020).

These elements must be taken into account while developing heutago-gy-driven lifelong learning ecosystems for improving life skills. Learners may acquire the skills and information required to flourish in the digital age and beyond by addressing these essential considerations. It emphasises the necessity for learners to choose their own life path, which is why it is crucial to life-based learning (Adi &Praherdhiono, 2020; Susilaningsih et al., 2020; Glassner & Back, 2020). There are difficulties in putting heut-agogy-driven lifelong learning ecosystems into action. The necessity for strong support networks for students who may struggle with self-regula-tion, resource limitations, and reluctance to change within existing edu-cational institutions are a few examples of these. In the context of digital heutagogical ecosystems, it is also critical to take privacy, data security, and digital equality concerns into account.

Discussion

The implications and challenges surrounding the suggested idea of heu-tagogy-driven LLEs for improving life skills are explored. Emphasising flexibility, leadership, initiative, accountability, and cross-cultural commu-nication, it examines the fundamental elements of heutagogy and how they support the development of critical life skills.It is a cutting-edge teach-ing approach intended to encourage university students to pursue lifelong learning as it emphasizes the self-determination of learners, which can lead to increased motivation and engagement in the learning process where technology plays a crucial role in support for heutagogy-driven LLEs (Moore, 2020).Building individualised learning spaces using heutagogical approaches can provide learners with the tools they need to continue learn-ing throughout their lives(Cenka et al., 2022); these can also assist students in creating individualised learning programmes that suit their unique re-quirements and interests(Karoudis& Magoulas, 2016).

The setting up of technology-supported personal learning environments (PLEs), the use of technology to support heutagogical approaches, and the implementation of Critical-Heutagogy Learning (CHL) to encourage lifelong learning among university students are a few instances of heu-tagogy-driven LLLs(Blaschke, 2017; Blaschke, 2019; Moore, 2020). Heutagogy-driven LLEs have the potential to promote civic engagement, a crucial component of 21st-century life skills development(Grandić& Bosanac, 2020). Several approaches may be used in heutagogy-driven LLEs to foster self-determination. Allowing students the opportunity to define their learning objectives and goals is one approach that might help them take charge of their education.Encouraging students to reflect on their

educational experiences is another approach that can aid in their meta-cognitive skill development and self-awareness (Moore, 2020).In order to improve their social skills and gain knowledge from others, learners should also be encouraged to work together with their peers and participate in social learning activities(Blaschke, 2017). By cultivating a growth mind-set, which emphasises the idea that intellect and talents can be enhanced through effort and persistence, learners can be encouraged to engage in lifelong learning (Karoudis& Magoulas, 2016).

The necessity for learners to possess a high degree of self-direction and self-motivation, which may not be viable for all learners, is one of the criticisms and problems of heutagogy-driven lifelong learning settings, according to a systematic review by Moore (2020).Furthermore, the re-view discovered that there is a need for greater research on the efficacy of heutagogy in various circumstances and that using technology to enhance heutagogical techniques may not always be helpful. Heutagogy may not be appropriate for all learning styles, including those that call for a more organised approach, according to another criticism.

Conclusion

Heutagogy, a learner-centered approach to learning that emphasises self-determined learning, provides a robust framework for lifelong learn-ing. It allows people to take charge of their learning path by encouraging autonomy, openness to new experiences, reflection, and metacognition. It encourages the development of fundamental life skills such as adaptability and flexibility, leadership and responsibility, initiative and self-direction, productivity and accountability, and social and cross-cultural interaction. It encourages individuals to become innovators, moderators, and admin-istrators of their own learning, aligning perfectly with the demands of the 21st century. Lifelong Learning Ecosystems (LLE) expands this idea even further by offering a complete framework for ongoing learning that extends beyond regular classrooms. LLE includes formal, informal, and non-formal education, and provides learners with a variety of learning en-vironments and tools. However, the application of lifelong learning creates obstacles, particularly in developing countries, such as the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Heutagogy-driven lifelong learning ecosystems present a transformational approach to education in a society where the re-quirement for life skills is continually increasing. These ecosystems enable individuals to become lifelong learners capable of mastering basic compe-tencies by placing an emphasis on self-determined learning, continual de-velopment, and flexibility. The intersection of heutagogy and LLEs holds

great promise for enhancing life skills. Although there are obstacles, adopting heutagogy-driven lifelong learning ecosystems has a wide range of potential advantages, including the promise of more resilient, competent, and adaptable individuals who have the ability to cope with the challenges of the 21st century. Teachers' responsibilities must evolve from information suppliers to learning guides and mentors, allowing students to take charge of their education. Mechanisms for recognising and crediting abilities developed inside these ecosystems should be implemented. That said, the future of education unquestionably rests in heutagogy-driven LLEs, where individuals are enabled to map their own learning paths and build the life skills required for personal and professional success in the digital era and beyond.

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Interfacing Life Skills for Competence Building among Marginalised Communities: An Ajmal Foundation Initiative

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Abstract

Life skills have universal importance since they are essential tools for every individual to live a sound & social life. This recently evolved concept, has already been in practice across the globe and India is no exception in this regard. Life skills, though taught in a number of educational institutions in the country, has yet to play its due role among the various marginalized communities. In fact, these communities always tend to lag far behind the mainstream scenario in any educational venture. Hence it is the need of the hour to introduce life skills to these groups so as to make them at par with the national mainstream by making them discover their latent talent and build competencies among them. This can be done by using some strategies to interface life skills to them, create some trainers out of them and thus popularize the concept among them. This paper will delve deep into the issue, sort out ways and means as to how to channelize them to it and enable them to make the best utilization of this concept. Ajmal Foundation runs a number of 20 colleges under Ajmal Group of Colleges whose intake mainly comprises of students from marginalized communities like Muslims, tribals etc. This may be an appropriate ground where the initiatives can be taken and extended further.

Keywords: Ajmal Foundation, life skills, marginalised.

Background

Ajmal Foundation, a Public Charitable Trust and a unit of Ajmal CSR organisations with its headquarters at Hojai, a small town in central Assam, was established in 2005. Its journey got under way with the keen desire of a visionary and philanthropist, Haji Ajmal Ali, to transform what William Wordsworth called 'sad music of humanity' into a relatively composed

journey of life. His worthy sons considered it their bounden duty to further their father's long cherished dream and went ahead to work for bringing about socio-economic transformation in this remote and underprivileged part of the country.

With the motto 'Serving Humanity in Need', Ajmal Foundation is guided by the spirit of social welfare and passion for removing social disparity by undertaking activities in areas such as education, health care, poverty alleviation, employment generation, women empowerment, relief & rehabilitation, environment awareness & its protection etc. The Trust has thus taken a small step in the direction of empowering the underprivileged and the marginalised communities so as to enable them achieve a degree of confidence and respectability so that a new era of social progress is assured. Since its birth in 2005, Ajmal Foundation has put in tons of hard work based on meticulous planning in its efforts to impart a galloping pace to its activities directed at socio-economic uplift of the needy and the poor. It may hardly be an exaggeration to state that it has virtually transformed into a helpline and succour of life for the marginalised sections of the society.

In the education sector, Ajmal Foundation came up with its first college, Maryam Ajmal Women's College of Science & Technology, in 2006. With its motto 'Ajmal for Education, Education for All', Ajmal Group of Colleges now comprises 20 colleges that include 2 Degree Colleges, one B Ed College and the rest imparting +2 courses in Arts, Science and Commerce streams. In addition, the establishment of some more institutions including one Law College, one more Junior College and two Schools is under way. Moreover, a mega educational project named Ajmal National Rural Education Movement (ANREM) was launched on Dec 6, 2015. As a part of this project, some select schools in rural areas of specific districts are earmarked. One such named Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam Mini Science Lab has been provided a set of equipment needed for scientific experiments and resource teachers are sent to them for taking special classes. All these institutions are scattered across different areas of Assam predominantly inhabited by the people belonging to the marginalised sections of the society especially Muslims, Christians, Nepalis, Manipuri's, Karbis etc. About 95 per cent of the student intake in these institutions belong to the said communities. There are many challenges that come on the way of these students. Majority of them are first generation learners coming from the remotest regions of Assam and other neighbouring states. For such stu-

dents, a lesson of life skills can provide with psychological and emotional support that they badly need.

Sales Orientation Programme (SOP), an ambitious project of Ajmal CSR, is implemented by Ajmal Foundation. It is a three-month residential training programme whose key focus is to provide employment opportunities to educated but unemployed youths belonging to the marginalised communities of Assam among the MNCs and Ajmal Group of Companies (India Operation). During the training period, the trainers specifically stress on to groom the trainees in effective communication in English, communication skills, personality development, computer and salesmanship etc. which are of utmost importance in the professional field.

Skill Training for Employment and placement (STEP) under Ajmal Foundation is the project implementing Agency of the Ministry of Rural Development, Govt of India for implementing special projects under SGSY scheme for facilitating employment of rural unemployed youths belonging to the below poverty line families. Project STEP is a step forward in bringing changes in the lives of over 8,000 unemployed youths and a sustainable growth in the income of their families. The beneficiaries of this project are the underprivileged and unreached sections of the society irrespective of caste, religion and region. AF Employment programme is designed to enhance income through marketable skills for social dropouts, unemployed, migrants, displaced persons, minorities, the vulnerable and the disabled through community-based programmes which has so far spread over 40 centres in small towns and Panchayats in rural and tribal areas in the states of Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka covering over 30,000 youths. Skill training through STEP will help to facilitate the process of social inclusion. Improved skills will create better jobs, greater income and opportunity to the marginalised communities.

'Seeko aur kamao' (Learn and Earn), a project launched by Ministry of Minority Development, Govt of India, is also implemented by Ajmal Foundation by virtue of which educated youths belonging to minority communities are trained in different skills and eventually helped in getting employment. Flood and river erosion are two regular annual disasters that make thousands of people homeless every year. The worst victims are mostly those living in the lower Assam districts. Ajmal Foundation has a full-fledged project of providing relief and rehabilitation to such victims in the form of building low-cost houses, payment of cash amounts, and sponsoring the children belonging to such families for higher studies.

Introduction

Life skills are the essential ingredients without which one cannot equip oneself with the mechanism for a happy living. There are many different understandings of life skills. Different organisations attach different meanings to the term. The International Bureau of Education (IBE) derives its understanding from the Delores four pillars of learning - learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together - and defines life skills as personal management and social skills which are necessary for adequate functioning on an independent basis. UNICEF has defined life skills as psychosocial and interpersonal skills that are generally considered important. According to UNICEF, it is ultimately the interrelations between the skills that produce powerful behavioural outcomes especially where this approach is supported by other strategies such as media, policies and health services. The Mental Health Promotion and Policy (MHP) team in World Health Organisation (WHO) Department of Mental Health has produced this definition of life skills: "Life skills education is designed to facilitate the practice and reinforcement of psychosocial skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way; it contributes to the promotion of personal and social development, the prevention of health and social problems, and the protection of human rights". (WHO 1999).

Life skills defined in a general way mean a mix of knowledge, behaviour, attitudes and values and designate the possession of some skill and know-how to do something, or reach an aim. They include competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, ability to organise, social and communication skills, adaptability, problem solving, ability to co-operate on a democratic basis that are needed for actively shaping a peaceful future.

It is evident that in addition to practical and vocational skills, other types of skills such as social, individual and reflective skills are also needed. Life skills programmes emphasise abilities that help to facilitate communication, negotiation, to think critically and solve problems and make independent decisions. These developments in the field have in fact resulted in important breakthroughs in policy and planning especially in non-formal education programmes for marginalised and disadvantaged youths and adults (UNESCO, New Delhi 2001). In many parts of the world, life skills form a significant and regular part of the school and adult curriculum.

The constituents of generally defined life skills can be described in the following ways: a) they include the abilities necessary to apply the conceptual

thinking and reflection in concrete situations; b) they imply capacities to be involved in effective interaction with the environment and provide an appropriate motivational attitude; c) they involve psychological prerequisites for successful performance, such as problem solving capacities, self-confidence and skills for critical thinking (Dohmen 1996).

Ajmal Foundation and the Promotion of Life Skills Education

The Hon'ble Trustees of Ajmal Foundation have always stressed on imparting quality education and thereby uplifting the marginalised and communities. Noteworthy efforts have been made in this direction and considerable outcomes have already been achieved, though the management of Ajmal Foundation have always felt that the standard of outcome with regard to skill development initiatives among the marginalised communities is not up to the mark. Something seemed to be missing somewhere. Some rectification or additions seemed to be required here and there. Khasrul Islam, the Foundation's Manager, came across the concept of life skills education a couple of years ago and thought this might be the most sought-after one to fill the vacuum. Having been amply inspired, he along with his deputy Dr MRH Azad paid a visit to Don Bosco University, Guwahati. Dr Paul Puduserry, HoD of Education of the said University, made necessary arrangements for them to contact Dr A. Radhakrishnan Nair, the Founder President of Indian Association of Life Skills Education, Chennai. Dr Nair having been introduced to the activities of Ajmal Foundation and motivated by the strong enthusiasm of the Foundation forerunners duo, agreed to send a team of life skills experts to conduct a training for the faculties teaching in Ajmal Group of Colleges.

Consequently, a week-long teachers' training on life skills education was held at Hojai during May 14-20, 2015. The 24 teachers from different colleges under Ajmal Foundation having been trained as such took up the task of providing similar training to the remaining members of the faculty in their respective colleges in addition to taking classes with the students and applying the principles of life skills education in their own teaching venture. This is how Ajmal Foundation embraced life skills education and became actively involved in educational ventures under the aegis of Ajmal Foundation have been run with no less sophistication though, the introduction of life skills education has made noticeable changes all through - be it in behavioural changes of faculty as well as learners, be it the everyday transaction of affairs, or be it the decisions being taken by the management in matters crucial to the progress of the Trust. In achieving such desirable changes, the attitudinal changes in everyone concerned are at the root of

all. Although life skills as a concept was hardly known to those required shouldering different responsibilities, their practice, though unknowingly, has always been there like elsewhere. But once the concept became known and people became well-acquainted with the benefits of its conscious practice, academic standard of all institutions especially those imparting skill development courses for employment generation have undergone a regeneration. Inter-personal relationships among various incumbents have considerably grown which suggests development of intra-personal skills too. Moreover, the whole work force seems to be more engaged in its activities with a stronger sense of belongingness and with more judicious actions as they have been able to make self-discoveries and identify themselves as more complete and developed human beings. In fact, with some additions and modifications in strategies, Ajmal Foundation has equipped itself with the principles of life skills and that too to the improvement of its quality and standard.

Having already got a host of trained faculties in life skills education, the Foundation has recently introduced some more trainers among teachers followed by imparting lessons in life skills education to its young and enthusiastic learners. In fact, life skills education has not been introduced as a regular academic subject, a venture likely to be taken up in forthcoming sessions, but the students are given slices of what it is in the form of some extra classes in addition to teachers' references to such skills in everyday classroom discourses. This has proved the whole initiative to be extremely fruitful in that students are seen very curious and enthusiastic to learn it as an academic subject.

The benefits of introduction of life skills education in educational ventures under the aegis of Ajmal Foundation are manifold. There are lots of concrete examples that make it evident that its promotion will definitely lead to a huge amount of transformation in the life of all concerned. A few reports on the case studies conducted on some individual students and faculties as well showcase this. For example, Akibul Sheikh belongs to an extremely poor family run by his father who is a daily wage earner in the Bongaigaon District of Assam. Despite having passed HSLC examination with 79 per cent marks, he saw only darkness all around so far as his admission in a good college for higher study was concerned. Ajmal Foundation adopted this budding talent and provided him with all necessary facilities free of cost. He was admitted into the 1st year of the Higher Secondary course in the Science stream in Ajmal College of Arts, Commerce & Science, Hojai, in June, 2015. His life at the Ajmal College for the last eight months has

made distinctive changes in his personality – in verbal and body language, in dress, in talk, in attitude etc. Coming from a very interior area and having been schooled in the Assamese language medium, he can now speak fluently in English and is a confident young guy for whom the limit seems to be beyond the sky. But his eight-month stay here was full of twists and turns and at one point, he even left the college without the authority's permission. This was due to the fact that he found a gulf of difference between the standard of life that he had long been a part of and the one that he came across at Ajmal College. But the trained faculty of the College put in their strong efforts and considered him an object of their case study and the outcome is noteworthy. Akibul's case is one among many and they undoubtedly inspire everyone concerned to embrace life skills education more fervently.

Even teachers after having been trained in life skills education and getting involved into it have shown wonderful improvements in their professional as well as personal life. This could not even escape the notice of those at the helm of affairs and as such a team of eleven of them were promoted as Resource Teachers. Moreover, the Principals of different colleges under AGC and the managerial team of Ajmal Foundation all speak in the same tune with regard to fruitful introduction of life skills education and its bright future prospects.

Conclusion

Ajmal foundation and its constituent organs consider it a very remarkable achievement to be a part of a nationwide initiative taken up to promote life skills education. It has already become a member of the Indian Association of Life Skills Education and is ever ready to work hand in hand to play a more active role in the days to come so that life skills education is mainstreamed for nation building. As for now, its priority is the marginalised communities and that also those in Assam, it will aptly get involved in working on a broader perspective once the specific objective it is working on at present is fulfilled.

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Life Skills: A Biblical Continuum
in the context of 21ˢᵗ Century

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Abstract

This paper aims to reflect upon the teachings of Jesus Christ on Bible in the learning of core life skills developed by WHO. The Holy Bible is considered as the world's most referred book. According to Philip Wesly, the Bible is still the most printed, the most translated, and the most read book in the world(Henry, 1992, p. 26-27). The English word 'Bible' comes from the Greek word "biblion". This word meant "roll" or "book". But today the word "Bible" means much more than just a book. It carries a sense of majesty as being the ultimate book par excellence. The Bible is always referred to as Holy Scripture, Oracle of God, Book of the Lord, etc. This study is a grapple to understand the life skills employed in the Holy Scripture in the context of the 21st Century. The Holy Bible is intense to inform, enable and transform one in the journey of attaining the goal of one's life, in accordance with one's well-being as well as that of a fellow being. Life skills are doing the same in a secular style of action to address the demands and challenges of every life.

Introduction

Life Skills are considered an effective tool to promote pro-social behaviour. It is a set of psycho-social skills which are socially acceptable, learned behaviour that enables individuals to interact in ways that elicit positive responses. Life skills enhance social competence (Yarham et al., 1979).

For believers' the Bible is the word of God inspiring with values of life and guidance for one's life. It is the source of inspiration and influences all aspects of one's life. World leader Mahatma Gandhi said "I consider it as part of my scriptures" hence, for Gandhi, "…the Sermon on the Mount was the whole of Christianity." (MK Gandhi, 1927). Swami Vivekananda spoke that Jesus's message to all was to pursue the ideal and achieve it in one's own way, irrespective of whether one gives credit for His teachings

or not. Religion is not traded like a shop owner. What is taught by Jesus is only truth, which is nobody's proprietorial right. "Truth is God Himself." (Vivekananda, 2015). The Bible has got 72 books spreading out in The Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT). The author is concentrating the study mainly on the teaching of Christ seen mainly in the gospels and in the apostolic writings.

Jesus Christ is a central figure for Christianity. He had a special personality, and made a lasting notion on his followers. He was charismatic in the deepest sense of the word. Jesus Christ is an exemplary and perfect leader and he is a divine and legendary being. Jesus taught the fundamental moral values of brotherhood and benevolence, which became the central thesis of Christianity. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ are the motivations for a human being.

Life is the greatest teacher but to learn from life we require skills. Skills form an essential part of the learning system, no matter where we are and what we propose to do. Life skills are skills that we learn and practice throughout our lives. These skills are harnessed for and from life. Life skills, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) are "the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life." Life skills include psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help us to make informed decision, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy interpersonal relationships, empathize with others, and manage our lives in a healthy and productive manner.

The ten core skills developed by WHO are well explained and exposed in the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Bible. He has proposed them to tackle the human problems/ challenges and make life more meaningful in its fuller sense, (St. John, 10:10). The present study is in a descriptive manner which is based on the teachings of the bible.

A Reflection on Self - awareness and Self- knowledge in the Bible

Self-awareness is emphasis on valuing oneself, including our personality, attributes, tastes and distastes, while self-knowledge is knowing thyself. It is an invitation to journeying through self. It is important to develop self-knowledge and self-awareness to eventually develop all other skills like empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, cognitive skills as well as coping skills. From scripture, we find that we can be enigmatic figures, sometimes acting out of ignorance, but at the same time with a deep self-awareness and in a conscious way too.

According to scripture, while on the cross, Jesus says, "God forgive them, for they know not what they do." (St. Luke 23:34).In the ethos of the moment, we hear the testimony to the lack of awareness or blindness that we as people can have, resulting in us carrying out violent,destructive acts of injustice. Saint Paul comments, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." (Romans 7:15). Paul is referring to this lack of understanding or awareness of self. Both Jesus and Paul acknowledge that we are a confluence of knowing and not knowing, of being aware and unaware, conscious and unconscious, light and shadow. Ignorance and lack of awareness are not blessings, but human condition that can lead to hurt, pain, and injustices. Often, sins of omission and commission do not grow out of conscious disobedience, but unconscious blindness. We can and are challenged to grow in self-awareness and consciousness. In the words of the theologian, Nicholas of Cusa, "A theology of unknowing is necessary for a theology of knowing." (Nicholas of Cusa, 1985).

To know ourselves or for a community to know itself fully is too simplistic for the wonderful, complex, mystery that we are. The inner journey is not as much about knowing oneself as it is about becoming a deeper person, thoughtful and intentional about ordinary life and our relationship to self, God, and one another.

Empathy as seen in the light of the Bible

Empathy is one of the major tools needed to form positive relationship among our fellow beings. Empathy is the capacity to feel another person's feelings, thoughts, or attitudes vicariously. The Scriptures refer to the quality of empathy, which we see demonstrated in several biblical narratives. The apostle Peter counselled Christians to have "compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tender-hearted, be courteous."(1 Peter, 3:8). St. Paul also encouraged empathy when he exhorted fellow Christians to "rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." (Romans, 12:15). St. Mathew says, "you shall love your neighbour as yourself." (St. Mathew, 22:38). Though one intends to love one another, he/she often misses occasions to relieve others' pain. That could be because we are unaware of others' needs, or perhaps we are not practicing empathy. Empathy is the key that can unlock the door to our kindness and compassion.

The word 'compassion' describes the deep mercy of God. God is very best at empathy: There are several examples of empathy in action in the Bible. Jesus was always sensitive to the plight of others. St. Mathew tells how

Jesus behaved with people. "When saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (St. Mathew, 9:36). On another occasion, Jesus observed a widow about to bury her only son. Sensing her pain, He approached the funeral procession and resurrected the young man (Scripture says) "he had compassion for her." (St. Luke, 7:13). "Having lived a human life, our Lord can and does empathize with all of our weaknesses." (Hebrew, 4:15).

Effective communication skills in the Scripture

The skills to communicate with other people, whether directly or indirectly, enable us to relate to other people. Interpersonal communication skills involve communications that help us get along, work, team up, and live amicably with other people. These skills help us meet our social obligations and achieve our goals. Communication originates from the Latin word "communis" which means 'common'. It simply means sharing, imparting, fellowship, giving and taking. In other words, it is a process of interaction. The first page of the Bible, uncovered that God is the God of communication or God is a communicating God. His means and ways of communication with nature and other human beings are many and different. He speaks and acts in history in a different manner.

In the Old Testament, God reveals himself through words, deeds, and His own presence. It shows God's revelation is dreams, omens, divination, and other signs and symbols like thunder, rain, and fire. (Lev, 19:26, Deut, 18:10,1Sam, 15:23). The prophets and the law signify the everlasting presence of God's divine communication and in the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the medium and message of God's communication. The gospel says that "in the beginning was the word and the word were with God, and the word was God. "Effective communication is an ever-continuing and ever-going process in the Bible and it is a fundamental need for any human being. The Bible is a "written document of God's self-communication, and it is a man's response to God's self-initiation." (Sebastian, 2015).

Interpersonal relationship in the context of the Bible

Interpersonal relationship is a skill that helps us to relate in positive ways with the people we interact with. This skill helps explore how to establish healthy, respectful relationships and sustain them effectively. The Bible is all about relationships. Obviously, the first example would be Jesus. When he was asked to sum up the God-centred life, he said that it was quite simple. "Love God; love others." (St. Mark,12:28-31).

As Michael Wittmer says, "The one truth that everyone seems to agree on, from Moses through Jesus and on to Augustine and the Reformers, is that it's virtually impossible to please God without loving our neighbours. "A large section of the sermon Jesus spoke when He was with His disciples on the mountains, by the Sea of Galilee, is explicitly focused on our inter-personal relationships. Jesus made it clear that to live in peaceful harmony with one another, requires us to change our heart attitude towards one an-other, not just our outward behaviour. Jesus said, "throughout the history of the human race, a murderer is put on trial, but I say to you, if you are angry and hate from the heart, it is the same as murder."(1 John, 3:15). Our failing love causes failure in our interpersonal relationships.

Jesus, Himself was an example. "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same"? (St. Matthew,5:40-46). Through His life and teachings, He proposes an interpersonal relationship without any selfish motive.

Cognitive skills in the Biblical Perspectives

Ennis (1996) mentions that critical thinking is a reflective way that creates understanding or is based on logic to determine what is believed and done. Critical thinking is a process based on analysing steps, testing, and evalu-ating arguments, (Proulx, 2004). Meanwhile, Walker (2005) mentions that critical thinking is an intellectual process of creating a concept, applying it, analysing it, synthesizing it, and evaluating information obtained from the observation results, and this reflection process is used as a basis in de-termining further action. From a biblical perspective, Jesus challenged his followers to use critical thinking to solve problems associated with preach-ing and teaching, (James et al., 2015). Critical thinking is an expectation of the mature Christian, and most importantly every Christian as he or she ac-tively engages in faith in the world, (Sanders, 2018). Knight (2006) adds a third source of epistemology for the Christian: human reasoning. Humans are endowed with God-given reasoning abilities to know and discover the world despite the diminishing of those abilities by sin.

Creative thinking is an innovative way of seeing or doing things, that is characteristics of four components- fluency (producing new ideas), flex-ibility (shifting perspective easily), originality (conceiving of something

new) and elaboration (construction on other ideas). The very first verse of the Bible details an act of creativity and creation. Book of Genesis (1:1) reads, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The Lord is the ultimate creative. God fashioned the entire universe out of nothingness; His creativity was breathed into being. As prophet Jeremiah (10:12) puts it, "But God made the earth by His power; He founded the world by His wisdom and stretched out the heavens by His understanding. God filled the artisans and craftspeople of Israel with skill; He inspired their artistic designs and invited them to follow in His footsteps, creating things that served as a testament to the majesty of the Lord." (Vine et al,).

Problem solving and Decision-making skills in the context of the Bible

Problem solving is the ability to use knowledge, skills and understanding to manage an unfamiliar situation or issue constructively. Whereas, decision making can be defined as identifying and choosing from alternatives. Decision making process depends on our values, beliefs and goals etc. (Martin, 2007). In scripture, the first book of Kings (3:16-28) we find an account of King Solomon hearing a case involving two prostitutes (also known as the judgment of Solomon). The two women had both recently given birth to sons, and they lived together in the same home. During the night, one of the infants was smothered and died. The woman whose son had died switched her dead baby with the baby of the other woman as she slept. The other woman, seeking justice, took the matter before the king. She stated her case: "We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us. During the night this woman's son died because she lay on him. So, she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. The next morning, I got up to nurse my son, I saw that he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it was not the son I had borne." (1 King, 3: 18-21). Solomon could not tell from their words which woman was telling the truth. Instead, he issued a shocking command: "Bring me a sword. . . . Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other." (1 Kings, 3: 24- 25). After he said this, the woman whose son was still alive said, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him"! However, the other woman, whose son had died, answered, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two"! (1 Kings, 3: 26). Based on their responses, Solomon knew the identity of the true mother: "Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother." (1 Kings, 3: 27). By ordering that the child be sliced in two, the king proposes a brilliant stratagem designed to reveal which of

the two applicants was the true mother of the child. His judgment reveals his justice and, more important, responded with the problem and took the wise decision into action.

Decisions are made in order to solve an issue and also achieve a specific result, address an opportunity, or solve a particular problem; and decision-making is "the process of choosing a particular action that deals with a problem or opportunity."(Konopaske, Ivancevich, & Matteson, 2018, p. 371). Solomon's story educates today's decision-makers and helps them understand the elements and obstacles involved in effective decision making and problem solving and their potential results. "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." (St. Mathew, 7:7).

Coping Skills in the light of Scripture

Stressful situations reveal what we are made of. Some extent, stress is helpful for good performance, but when stress becomes too great, it is a destructive force. Bridges, for example, are designed for b certain weight limits. Newstrom (2015) suggests that symptoms of stress can negatively impact a person's emotions, thought processes. Behaviours, and even physical health. Once the weight load becomes too great for an extended period of time, the bridge may collapse. People are the same way, once stress levels exceed the level of tolerance, they will begin to break down. As Newstrom puts it, "As stress increases, performance trends increase." (Newstrom, 2015, p.415).

Significant that human beings are frail and have limits, it is wise to allow the God of the universe to bear all loads. Scripture offers an invitation too, "Cast your cares upon the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken". (Psalm,55:22). Those who pray about situations that are beyond control, transfer the concern from themselves into the capable hands of the creator of the universe. Elizabeth Moyer from the Institute of Faith, Work, and Economics concludes that, "Uncertainties in life are opportunities to depend on God the way he intended us to." (Moyer, 2018, para.7). This type of thinking is anchored in a biblical response to handling stress and emotions. The Bible addresses anxiety, fear and worry, which are symptoms of stress. The apostle Paul, who endured much stress in his ministry boldly commands, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philip-

pians 4:6-7). Consider the Biblical examples of people facing severe trials. Whatever the trial, when they asked God for help, He provided the strength and help for them to bear it. Jesus Christ Himself was 'in agony' and 'His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground' as He prayed before His crucifixion". (St. Luke 22:44). God strengthened Him, and God will strengthen us as well when we ask.

In the Scripture St. Matthew (26:36-39) said, "Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little further, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed. "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." This passage shows the four coping mechanisms of Jesus: He makes himself vulnerable, identifies his three closest friends, and asks them for support. 2. He intentionally goes to the Garden of Gethsemane, one of his favourites, most familiar, and tranquil places. 3. He focuses his thoughts on God's goodness and 4. He prays with honesty.

Limitations

This article has not analysed the life skills concepts in the Bible in detail. It's only a preliminary attempt to see how many resources are there in the Scripture to teach and train the students and youth in life skills using the teachings of Jesus. Detailed research and content analyses is required to unearth the hidden treasure in the epic book.

Conclusion

The ten core life skills are very much exposed, explained and employed in the pages of the Bible. It contributes a holistic approach to human development and to the goal of life. In the teachings of the Holy Bible, life skills make one's life more meaningful and pleasant in the moments of struggles and trials in one's journey towards the end of life in harmony with fellow beings and with nature.

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Life Skills in the Light of the Holy Quran

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Abstract

The holy Quran is believed to be the ultimate divine message for man-kind. The holy Quran, authenticates the genuineness and worth of the teachings imparted by Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) to whom it was revealed. The ten core life skills as formu-lated by WHO and UNICEF can well be developed if references and anecdotes related to the two major sources of Islamic philosophy and teaching are taken into account. Self- awareness is at the root of one's discovery of one's potential. This, like many other factors such as im-bibing scientific enquiry, kindness to living as well as the non-living world, controlling emotions, having empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, judicious analysis of   issues, holistic approach of education, nationalistic outlook, universal brotherhood of mankind, living in harmo-ny with nature, creation & preservation etc. are   either directly taught or considerable light is thrown on them at various places in the Quran and the Prophet's sayings and/or actions. Islam is not just a   worship   pro-gram, but a comprehensive, intelligent   and   practical life system. Is-lam respects all the different components of human life and advocates their   regulation to the fullest; it neither suppresses them   nor   leaves them completely uncontrolled. The Islamic Philosophy of Education is a holistic medium of education, which includes the comprehensive as-pects of knowledge.

Keywords: Quran, life skills, Prophet, scientific enquiry, harmony, creation, improvement

Introduction

The holy Quran is believed to be the ultimate divine message for mankind. As such, it carries knowledge, wisdom, teachings, guidance, references and signs helpful to those willing to learn lessons, acquire knowledge and develop skills for living a sound and healthy life and helping   to   make this planet a better place to live in. The holy Quran authen-ticates the genuineness and worth of the teachings imparted by

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) to whom it was revealed. Teachings that enable one to successfully meet the demands and challenges of life abound in the holy book and the Prophetic Traditions.

The ten core life skills as formulated by WHO and UNICEF are as below. This can well be developed if references and anecdotes related to the two major sources of Islamic philosophy and teachings are taken into account. Self-awareness is at the root of one's discovery of one's potential. Like many other factors, such as imbibing scientific enquiry, kindness to living as well as the non-living world, controlling emotion, having empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, judicious analysis of issues, holistic approach for education, nationalistic outlook, universal brotherhood of mankind, living in harmony with nature, creation & their preservation etc.

These are either directly taught or considerable light is thrown on them at various places in the Quran and in the Prophet's sayings and/or actions.

These are briefly discussed below.

1.   Self-awareness in the light of the Holy Qur'an:

The holy Quran lays great stress on self-awareness. Verse 19 of Chapter 59 reads, "And be not like those who forsook Allah, so He made them forsake their own souls: these it is that are the transgressors" (59:19)[2] This verse gives priority on knowing the Creator leading to knowing oneself. Knowledge about God's infallibility will convince people about human follies and foibles; this will ultimately help us learn what makes us human, superior to other animals. Another verse pertaining to self-awareness is: "O you who believe! Take care of yourselves; he who errs cannot hurt you when you are on the right path".(5:105)[3] This verse enjoins upon us to take care of and pay attention to ourselves, to be careful about the well-being of our spirits and to be aware of the diseases of our souls and how to cure them. The holy book also says, "We will soon show them our signs in the universe and in their own souls, until it becomes quite clear to them that it is the Truth" (41:53)[4]. Allah says that very soon He will show man His signs; but where are these signs to be found? These are to be found in two places: in the external world and in human souls. In verse 21 of Chapter 51, the Lord says, "And in your own souls (too); will you not then see?" (51:21)[5] This verse draws our attention to the need to look for these signs within

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2   Chapter No: 59; Surah Al- Hasr, Verse No: 19
3   Chapter No: 05; Surah Al- Maida, Verse No: 105
4   Chapter No: 41; Surah Al- Fussilat, Verse No: 53
5   Chapter No: 51; Surah Adh - Dhariyat, Verse No: 21

ourselves. We are clearly and unambiguously told that there are signs in the external world as well, and these are sources of guidance for us.

2. Effective Communication in the Glorious Qur'an:

The glorious Qur'an says, "O you who believe, guard your duty to Allah, and speak words straight to the point" (33: 70)[6]. It is advised in the Quran not to act smart or beat around the bush while talking with people, but to come to the point and be straightforward in our expression according to Qur'an and Hadith (sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him) . Human beings are advised to use apt words and speak directly and not to play with words. While inviting people to Islam, the Qur'an guidance is, "And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear [Allah]"(20: 44)[7]

This verse tells Prophet Musa and Haroon (peace be upon them) to talk to Pharaon, the tyrant, in a gentle way. The holy Qur'an further says, "And if you (must) turn away from the needy awaiting mercy from your Lord which you expect, then speak to them a gentle word" (17: 28)[8] This verse is about spending one's wealth. The situation is: if somebody comes and asks you some help, and if you are not in a position to pay them or fulfill their demand, then at least be kind enough to use easy, polite, soft, kind and gentle words. Mankind is instructed not to repel or be harsh on the poor and the needy.

3. Interpersonal Relationship:

The holy Quran advises mankind to maintain relationship in the most appropriate way. Selection of proper words, good conduct and generosity towards others constitute the Islamic way of interpersonal relationship. The glorious Quran states in the following verses: "Say to My servants that they should (only) say those things that are best: for Satan doth sow dissensions among them: For Satan is to man an avowed enemy" (17:53)[9]. "Turn not thy cheek in scorn toward folk, nor walk with pertness in the land. Lo! Allah loveth not each braggart boaster. Be modest in thy bearing and subdue the voice. Lo! The harshest of all voices is the voice of the ass" (31: 18 & 19)[10]. "O ye who believe! Enter not houses other than your own without first announcing your presence and invoking peace upon the folk thereof. That is better for you, that ye may be heedful. And if you find no

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6 Chapter No: 33; Surah, Al - Ahjab, Verse No: 70
7 Chapter No: 20; Surah, Al- Ta-Ha, Verse No: 44
8 Chapter No: 17; Surah, Al - isra, Verse No: 28
9 Chapter No: 17; Surah, Al- Al-isra,Verse No: 53
10 Chapter No: 31; Surah Al- Luqman,Verse No: 18-19

one therein, enter not until permission hath been given. And if it be said unto you: Go back, then go back, for it is purer for you. Allah knoweth what ye do" (24:27 & 28)[11]. "Indeed, Allah enjoins justice, and the doing of good to others, and giving to the kindred; and forbids indecency, and manifest evil, and wrongful transgression. He admonished you that you may take heed" (16:90)[12].

4. Critical Thinking in the Quranic Light:

The Qur'an repeatedly encourages and inspires human beings to think and contemplate on the signs of Allah so that they can understand. Human destiny is not to be passive like the angels but to be creative for which man has been given the most sublime gift of all, the mind. A critical mind is a creative mind. Qur'anic view of creative reflection is called Al-Basira. In Islam, Ijtihad or independent thinking is used as a principle of creative and critical thinking, rationality and scientific inquiry in a secular perspective. The Quran encourages us over and over again to think, reflect, ponder, understand and analyse. "Do they not do ponder over the Quran ?(4:82)[13]. So says Allah in the Quran. The Arabic word 'tadabbur' used in this verse means 'highly concentrated, goal-oriented critical thinking like the scientists do when challenged to find something new or when they embark upon solving a difficult problem. "(Here is), a Book which We have sent down unto thee, full of blessings, that they may meditate on its Signs, and that men of understanding may receive admonition" (38: 29)[14]. In fact, "verily in that are signs for those who reflect (30: 21)[15].

5. Creativity in the Quran:

Allah tells us that He started the creation of life on earth from clay (which is a combination of water and earth soil). Then He stayed away from his creation, for a specific term that He had determined. The Quran says, "It is He who created you from clay and then decreed a term and a specified time (known) to Him; then (still) you are in dispute" (6: 2)[16]. Scientists in general and Biologists and Anthropologists in particular can derive knowledge from this verse as well as from those following, for their evolutionary explanation of how different species evolved on earth, on their own, in specific periods of time. In the Holy Quran, Allah has commanded us to travel through the earth to study how He began His creation, in order to

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11   Chapter No: 24; Surah An Nur,Verse No: 27-28
12   Chapter No: 16; Surah An Nahl, Verse No: 90
13   Chapter No: 04; Surah An Nisa, Verse No: 82
14   Chapter No: 38; Surah Al- Saad, Verse No: 29
15   Chapter No: 30; Surah Al- Room,Verse No: 21
16   Chapter No: 06; Surah Al- Anam,Verse No: 02

explain to us how He can repeat it again in the Hereafter; thus, the emergence of Anthropology, Biology, Geology, and all other modern sciences which investigate how the Universe, including our solar system, started, as well as how life began and how it has continued on our planet, represent an implementation of this divine command. "Have they not considered how Allah begins creation and then repeats it? Indeed, that, for Allah, is easy" (29:19)[17]. "Say, (O Muhammad), travel through the land and observe how He began creation. Then Allah will produce the final creation. Indeed, Allah, over all things, is competent" (29:20)[18]

6. Empathy in Islam:

Here is a Quranic verse about empathy: "There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is what you suffer; (he is) concerned over you and to the believers is kind and merciful." (9:128)[19] This verse is about the Prophet who would always feel our suffering and that's why he is being praised by Allah Himself for his empathetic nature. The Prophet himself also encouraged us to feel empathy for each other. The following Qur'anic verses encourage us to practice compassion, which is a form of empathy that moves one to help others."And what can make you know what is (breaking through) the difficult pass? It is the freeing of a slave or feeding on a day of severe hunger an orphan of near relationship or a needy person in misery, and then being among those who believed and advised one another to patience and advised one another to compassion (90: 12-17)[20].

7. Decision Making:

Islam, as we know, provides a comprehensive system of life. As such, it lays down certain basic principles to guide us in allof our activities. An essential requirement in all our affairs concerning two or more persons is that of 'Shura', or consultation. Shura must take place in all situations – domestic, social, national or international. Its deficiency leads to multiple problems in different aspects of human life. Thus, problems that were rarely encountered before now occur with much frequency, such as domestic disputes, domestic violence, increased divorce rates, dowry, unmanageable children etc.We must start consulting our spouses and our youngsters at home. They will develop self-confidence knowing that their ideas are meaningful and are valued. We should actively seek opinions from oth-

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17   Chapter No: 29; Surah Al- Ankboot, Verse No: 19
18   Chapter No: 29; Surah Al- Ankboot, Verse No: 20
19   Chapter No: 09; Surah Al- Tauba, Verse No: 128
20   Chapter No: 90; Surah Al- Balad, Verse No: 12-17

ers and develop an appreciation for them, and we should restore Shura in all of our collective affairs for allround welfare and improvement. It is clearly laid down in the blessed Quran, "And those who have responded to their Lord and established prayer and whose affair is (determined by) consultation among themselves; and from what we have provided them, they spend" (42: 38)[21].

8. Problem Solving:

Theholy Quran says: "Say: never will we be struck except by what Allah has decreed for us; He is our protector. And upon Allah let the believers rely" (9:51)[22]. Scholars of Islam has explained that problem comes to man as a result of signs of divine wrath due to mischiefs committed by man on earth. For example, Allah states in the Quran: "Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by (reason of) what the hands of people have earned so. He may let them taste part of [the consequence of what they have done that perhaps they will return (to righteousness)" (30:41)[23]. Allah further says, "And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient" (2:155)[24].

9. Coping with Stress:

The first point is that we need to be active in stress management. Whilst Allah is in control of everything and will be the one to alleviate our stress, this does not mean we should sit back and wait for that to happen. We need to actively seek ways to manage our stress. "Verily Allah does not change men's condition unless they change their inner selves" (13: 11)[25]. The Qur'an further Says, "… without doubt in the remembrance (Zikr) of Allah do hearts find tranquillity" (13:28)[26].

10. Coping with Emotion:

First, it helps to remember that loss is a natural part of life because everything is transient and temporary. Although we can experience great sadness, we can also experience great joy. Allah tells us once again, "And that to your Lord is the finality, and that it is He who makes (one) laugh and weep, and that it is He who causes death and gives life." (53: 42-44)[27]

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21   Chapter No: 42; Surah Al- Shura,Verse No: 38
22   Chapter No: 09; Surah Al- Tauba, Verse No: 51
23   Chapter No: 30; Surah Al- Rum, Verse No: 41
24   Chapter No: 02; Surah Al- Baqarah,Verse No: 155
25   Chapter No: 13; Surah Al- Rad, Verse No: 11
26   Chapter No: 13; Surah Al- Rad, Verse No: 28
27   Chapter No: 53; Surah Al- Najm,Verse No: 42-44

Conclusion

Islam is not just a worship program, but a comprehensive, intelligent and practical life system. Islam respects all the different components of human life and advocates their regulation to the fullest; it neither suppresses them nor leaves them completely uncontrolled. Emotions are given their due place of importance in all Islamic teachings as fundamental elements of the human soul. The Islamic Philosophy of Education is a holistic medium of education, which includes the comprehensive aspects of knowledge. Islam teaches moderation in everything, aiming to create equilibrium so that one is always at peace with one's self, surroundings, the universe, and the Creator. Life skills result in improvement of mental health, richness of human relations and increase of health-relatedbehaviours – mental or physical - in the community. If these abilities having the Quranic approach could increase the adaptation level and positive and effective human behaviour, it is likely to result in improvement of happiness and success in life.

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