

Status of Life Skill Education in Teacher Education Curriculum of SAARC Countries: A Comparative Evaluation

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Abstract

The concept of Life skills have been incorporated to the curriculum of many developed and developing countries of present world at different levels of their educational systems and the authority concerned are trying to implement those in large scale. SAARC, a consortium of some South Asian nations based on regional economic, socio-cultural cooperation is trying to minimize the gap, formed between the intended curricula with that of the implemented one. In spite of little bit variations, to keep pace with modern global trend of educational system all the SAARC Countries are in a process of incorporating Life Skill Education in the secondary teacher education curriculum. Besides National Governments, some Non-Government Organizations of the region have also created a longing for continuation of Life Skill-Based Education (LSBE) among all the stakeholders. A secondary teacher, trained in Life Skill Education not only can use it for self-help and for the solution of health and sexual problems of adolescent students , rather can implement the same to improve quality of life of young population by helping in overcoming various obstacles faced by them in their daily life. This article is an attempt to overview a comparative estimate of secondary teacher education curricula of SAARC countries with special reference to the status of Life Skills-Based Education. The method employed for the present study is interpretative, analytical and comparative in nature.

Keywords: Life Skill Education, SAARC, Curriculum framework

I. Introduction

Life skills have been defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”.¹ They actually signify the psycho-social skills that resolve around valued behaviour and include reflective skills like problem-solving, critical thinking. These also include personal skills like self-awareness and interpersonal skills like keeping effective communication, maintaining healthy relationship with others. Practice of life skills can bring qualities like self-esteem, sociability and tolerance, action competencies to the contemporary secondary school students and can generate enough capabilities among them to have the freedom to decide what to do in a special situation. Health and livelihood education can balance life skills education and vice versa.

¹ Source: http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_7308.html...retrieved Jan, 2014.

SAARC was set up with Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in 1985 with a view to promote and develop various fields of education, culture, science etc. of the member countries in a platform of mutual understanding and collaboration. Afghanistan joined the forum in 2007 as its eighth member.

All the countries belong to SAARC share common legacy of colonial culture with almost common educational structure and issues in primary, secondary, tertiary and professional levels. Education development authorities of all the countries in the region are in a view to produce competent and professionally sound teachers for secondary level. So they have developed need-based, rational curriculum frameworks for teacher education at secondary level which is guided by their national philosophy, goals and value system and are trying to implement them within their capacity. To keep pace with contemporary global trend, all the SAARC Countries are in a process of integrating Life Skill Based Education (LSBE) to their secondary teacher education curriculum in varied forms for individual growth and optimal living in a community.

This article is an attempt to outline a comparative estimate of secondary teacher education curriculum of SAARC countries with special reference to the status of Life Skills Education. The method employed for the present study is interpretative, analytical and comparative in nature.

II. Background Study

WHO pointed ten core life skills which include² : a) self-awareness b) empathy c) critical thinking d) creative thinking e) decision making f) problem solving g) effective communication h) interpersonal relationship i) coping with stress j) coping with emotion. Inclusion of Life Skill Education in the secondary teacher education curriculum is now a global trend. At present Life Skills-Based Education (LSBE) has played an important role in child development and health promotion throughout the world. In 1986, the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion acknowledged life skills as an important factor of making better health choices.³ To ensure fullest potential of children the United Nations in Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989)⁴ associated life skills with education. In 1990, Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (EFA) also pointed out life skills as essential learning tools for better survival, better aptitude development and a better life. In Dakar World Education Conference (2000) too, education was considered as an agent which can promote learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. Life skill was identified as one of the six goals of EFA. Secondary level students in the region are largely featured with adolescence, a vital stage of growth and development, which is characterized by rapid psychological changes, psychological maturation, abstract thinking, risk taking mentality and sexual activities. Teachers can play a pivotal role in shaping personality of the students to the right direction by providing necessary guidance and counseling and suggest them to adopt some necessary life skills.

Life Skills-Based Education is often treated as an attitude related to different issues of child and youth development programmes as expressed in the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS (2001), UNGASS on Children (2002), World Youth Report (2003), World Program for Human Rights Education (2004), UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005), UN Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children (2006) and the World Development Report (2007). It is opined by the experts that life skills should be practiced in learning environment in large extent to make it steady and secure. Keeping these in consideration, member states of SAARC region have incorporated life skill education to the secondary school curriculum and accordingly kept tint of these in corresponding secondary teacher education curriculum also.

III. Life Skill Education in Secondary Teacher Education Curriculum in SAARC Countries

- **Afghanistan**

Secondary teacher education curriculum of Afghanistan in the past did not properly represent social and economical needs of the Afghans. After the Taliban Regime in 2002, the Transitional Government was allowed to re-build entire education system of the country taking support from the international agencies.

² WHO (1997). Life Skills Development for Children and Adolescents in Schools. Program on mental health, Geneva.

³ Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1986 – Europe by WHO. Available in http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/129532/Ottawa_Charter.pdf ...retrieved Jan, 2014.

⁴ UN, Convention on the Rights of Child. Distr. GENERAL. CRC/C/GC/12, 20th July, 2009

<http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/participation/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf>... retrieved Jan, 2014.

Compilation and Translation Department (CTD) of Ministry of Education (MoE) with the help of some international donor agencies like UNICEF and UNESCO commenced a major revision of the curriculum which came into effect in June 2003. The objective was to form a curriculum of teacher education linked with the global trend of shifting from knowledge or objective-based curriculum to competencies-based one.

The curriculum so made was steered by the principles and values of Islam, with a strong national identity which is clearly articulated in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). To implement intended curriculum in different levels National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) was formulated in 2006-2010. The role of teachers was described in the Curriculum Framework as one who can “facilitate learning” by using diverse methods of instruction. In Afghanistan, Life Skills are considered as moral education for the teaching of Islamic morality. It also deals with gender issues, human rights, character education, peace education, and health education. The subject has immediate relevance to the objectives of new curriculum such as “fighting against any kind of discrimination”. Afghanistan has established Life Skills within their school curriculum as a subject area in itself. Recently teachers are participating in several life skills workshops organized throughout the country in topics like peace, health, psychology and manners.⁵

- **Bangladesh**

The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) of Ministry of Education (MoE), Bangladesh is responsible for secondary and higher level of education in the country which is comprised of three sub-sectors: general, madrasah, and technical and vocational education. The Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP) (April-2005) and National Education Policy-2010 were framed with a view to prepare quality teachers for secondary level. Curriculum of secondary school education and secondary teacher education were reformed accordingly. The government and non-government Teachers' Training Colleges (TTCs) generally follow the curriculum made by the National University. The Institute for Educational Research (IER), University of Dhaka and that of Rajshahi and some private autonomous universities carry out the B.Ed (Diploma in Education) and M.Ed (Masters' in Education) programmes according to their own curriculum, which is different from that of the National University. In Bangladesh Life Skill Based Education (LSBE) was incorporated in the secondary education since March 2004. Ministry of Education supported the scheme in 2005. Secondary school curriculum had been reviewed and gaps were identified with respect to LSBE. National Curriculum and Text-Book Board (NCTB) and UNICEF have jointly developed LSBE package for Grade 6-10. Training Workshops on LSBE were also organized by NCTB and UNICEF in 2005 for necessary capacity building of Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), National Academy for Educational Management (NAEM), Institute of Education and Research (IER), Teachers' Training College (TTC), secondary school teachers and NGOs. Now all the secondary teachers are provided training in Life Skill Education in a regular basis. South Asian Regional Forum on LSBE was held in Dkaha (26-28 September, 2005) which also helped in building competencies and common understanding of agencies of GOB and experts dealing with LSBE.

- **Bhutan**

Bhutan has broadly followed India in structuring their formal and innovative education system. A considerable portion of teachers from neighboring countries particularly from India are still there at the secondary and higher levels. A Strategic Plan (2004-2012) was framed by the Royal University of Bhutan and a National Education Framework 2010 was set up by the Ministry of Education (MoE), Royal Government of Bhutan to direct the educational system of the country in right way. Now National Curriculum 2010, based on the National Education Framework-2010 is followed in the country. The current status of secondary teacher education has been marked out in the 10th Five Year Plan (2008-2013).⁶ Now in the secondary school curriculum, areas related to personal development, including value education, scouts programme, career guidance and orientation to vocational skills, physical education, and games and sports are being expanded and strengthened. Accordingly, stresses have been given in the initial teacher education programmes on mastery of different life skills education along with mastery in the core subjects.

⁵ Source: <http://www.afghaninstituteoflearning.org/teacher-training.html>

⁶ 10th Five Year Plan (2008-2013). Education Sector. Policy and Planning Division Ministry of Education Royal Government of Bhutan. Available in – http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Bhutan/Tenth/Five_Year_Plan_2008-2013_Education_Sector.pdf...retrieved Sept, 2013

- **India**

In India there is one year B. Ed. programme for preparing teachers at secondary level of school education where the knowledge domain appropriate for a particular age group are only included.

The National Curriculum Framework-2005 was framed for the secondary level of Indian school education and accordingly National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education-2009 was formulated, keeping close liaison with national secondary school education and global need of the time. NCFTE considered subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and competence to implement the knowledge in specific contexts of teaching in structuring the secondary teacher education programme in India. But in operationalisation of the same, the NCFTE viewed that certain courses in the curriculum may be kept as optional in the secondary level which may be effectively implemented through co-curricular and curricular activities. Adolescence Education and Life Skills linked to health, consumer rights and legal literacy have been acknowledged by the NCF, 2005 as important areas in school education and included accordingly in secondary school curriculum.⁷ After 2005, over country-wide debate, sex education was restructured as the Adolescence Education Program (AEP) which focused on enhancing life skills among the adolescents, so that they can be responsive to the real life situations. The NCF, 2005 clearly outlined that the AEP should not be practiced separately rather be included in school education. It was also decided that responsibility of implementing life skill based education to the secondary school students should be assigned to nodal teachers. Nodal teachers trained in cascade manner will provide guidelines and materials to facilitate the transaction process through interactive methodologies. The method used in teaching of Life Skills is based upon the social learning theories.

- **Maldives**

In 1978 Maldives saw the major historical development in the field of education with the decision to move to a unified national educational system and to promote more equitable distribution of facilities throughout the atolls. Ministry of Education, Maldives has formulated their Education Strategic Action Plan (2004-2006). A New Education Master Plan (2006-2015) was proposed in 2008. The new Government of Maldives has also prepared a National Development Plan (2009-2013) keeping pace with the modern global educational progress in all level. Institute for Teacher Education (ITE) and Educational Development Centres (EDCs) have shared the responsibility of Teacher Education in Maldives over the years which have been working within the newly established Maldives College of Higher Education since 1999. In 2004 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) took the initiative to promote Life Skills Education Project in Maldives as a co-curricular sector and the projects were practiced in several schools. In those projects different age-specific resource materials were developed for several age groups and teachers were trained accordingly to implement the LSBE packages. A review in 2008 recommended considering the Life Skills Based Education into the secondary curriculum. The National Institute of Education (NIE), a division of Ministry of Education is responsible for developing the National Curriculum. It has felt the need to integrate different life skills into the curriculum to achieve the overall objectives of the curricular reform. As a part of revision of existing curriculum, the National Curriculum Framework was framed in 2012 which pointed out a wide range of key life skills like understanding and managing self, thinking critically and creatively, involving with people, and living a healthy lifestyle.

- **Nepal**

Teacher Education Programme started its journey in Nepal in 1948 with the set up of Basic Teacher Training Centre. In 1997 Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) was established in Nepal to design the curriculum, text books and different instructional materials in order to achieve national goals of education. On behalf of Ministry of Education (MoE), CDC framed the National Curriculum Framework-2005 (which was revised in 2007) for professional development of teachers. A Teacher Education Project (2002-2008) was also administered by the MoE for betterment of professional teaching in the country. Provisions of life skill-based education are kept in the secondary curriculum and corresponding teacher preparing curriculum. They may be integrated in a specific subject.

⁷Life Skill Education and CCE (class IX & X), Central Board of Secondary Education, Preet Vihar. ...from...http://www.cbse.nic.in/cce/life_skills_cce.pdf...retrieved Oct, 2013.

Nepal National Life Skills Education Programmes are integrated into its health curriculum. According to National Curriculum Framework 2005, life skills incorporated in the present curriculum by CDC are of generic in nature, related to all aspects of life. So stress should be given on all learning areas of school education to attain these skills optimally through cross-curricular provision. These must be utilized across a range of content areas. Before implementation of life skill education in secondary grade, the same has been integrated to the secondary teacher education curriculum and the teachers are being trained accordingly. National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) has tried to address this challenge of incorporating life skills in traditional school education system. NCED is also trying to develop a package on ‘training of trainers on life skill based active learning and learning through games’.

- **Pakistan**

One of the strategic visions of Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan according to its Medium Term Development Framework (2005-10) was to promote worldwide accepted paradigm shift from ‘Teaching’ to ‘Learning’ and organize programme of study to focus on ensuring maximal acceptance of core subject knowledge by the students. The initiatives taken in the education sector are mostly guided by the National Education Policy (1998-2010), the Education Sector Reforms Action Plan (2001-2006) and the Education for All National Action Plan (NPA) 2001-2015. Universities have prepared their own curricula for secondary teacher education. The HEC has also taken initiatives in preparing curriculum outlines through various committees in consultation with different teacher education institutions. These outlines are provided to the universities as guidelines and minimum requirements. Secondary Teacher Education curricula have been reformed by the Higher Education Commission in 2005. In the Bachelors of Education course social issues in education, drug abuse and its prevention, environmental education, population education, moral or religious education and value education are incorporated along with core subjects. In Pakistan, life skill-based education is often delivered in informal way in the education sector as in-school extra-curricular activities. These are usually offered by non-government organisations with limited coverage which is delivered with the implicit approval of local authorities. A noteworthy project on life skill based education was taken by World Population Foundation during 2006-10 in the country which included sexual abuse and exploitation, juvenile justice, corporal punishment, empowerment, HIV/AIDS, child participation etc. The UNICEF took initiatives on Empowerment of Adolescent Project (EAP) where secondary school teachers are imparted training on life skill based education on cascade manner in Pakistan so that they can deliver these to their students.

- **Sri Lanka**

In Sri Lanka the perceptible motion to teacher education courses were commenced with the recommendations of National Education commission (2003). As per NEC, teachers have to function as ‘change agents’ for operationalisation of the policies adopted. These optimistic trends have come up due to the policies of Sri Lankan Government, which have assured that only qualified and trained teachers are to be appointed to Government schools. So an enthusiasm to undertake secondary teacher education among young generation is noticed in Sri Lanka. In educational sector, Sri Lanka is following recommendation of National Education commission (2006-2011). The country has also formulated Education Sector Development Programme (2006-2010). Sri Lanka has incorporated life skills within their secondary curriculum as a subject area in itself. Life Competencies Programmes (LCP) has a self-sufficient core curriculum which has covered thousands of secondary schools in Sri Lanka. LCP is managed by the Social Science Department and coordinated with Science and Health and Physical Education Departments. LCP has offered four days of initial training to teachers and five days of training to In-Service Advisors (ISA). This has followed by semiannual review workshops. UNICEF is also supporting an interactive youth radio programme for promotion of life skill based education in Sri Lanka.

IV. Comparative Evaluation

All SAARC member countries have felt the importance of incorporating Life Skills Based Education into their secondary teacher education curriculum to intrude these skills within secondary school students in a varied way. Country wise status of life skill based education in the teacher education curriculum of SAARC region is like:

Names of Countries	Life Skill Education in Secondary Teacher Education Curriculum
Afghanistan	integrated Life Skills within their curriculum as a subject area in itself
Bangladesh	reviewed its secondary school curriculum to identify gaps with respect to LSBE
Bhutan	mastery on life skill education is being provided to the teachers at the initial teacher education programmes to the four years programmes to make them sound in all respect
India	NCF-2005 clearly outlines that rather than a stand-alone program the Adolescent Education Programmes (AEP) should become an integral part of school education and the responsibility of transacting life skill based education to secondary school students are fixed up on secondary teachers
Maldives	United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supported the Life Skills Education project as a co-curricular activity
Nepal	National Curriculum Framework 2005 stated that life skills, incorporated in the present curriculum by Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) are mostly generic life skills related to all aspects of life
Pakistan	A flag ship project on life skill based education was taken by World Population Foundation during 2006-10
Sri Lanka	Life Competencies Programmes (LCP) are conducted to train the secondary teachers

Where Afghanistan has incorporated Life Skills within their curriculum as a subject area in itself, Bangladesh has reviewed its Secondary curriculum to identify gaps with respect to LSBE. In Bhutan mastery on life skill education is being provided to the teachers at the initial teacher education programmes to the four years programmes to make them sound in all respect. India in NCF 2005 clearly outlines that rather than a stand-alone program the Adolescent Education Programmes (AEP) should become an integral part of school education and the responsibility of transacting life skill based education to secondary school students are fixed up on secondary teachers. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supported the Life Skills Education project in Maldives as co-curricular activities. In Nepal, National Curriculum Framework 2005 has stated that life skills incorporated in the present curriculum by Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) is more of generic life skills related to all aspects of life. A flag ship project on life skill based education was taken by World Population Foundation during 2006-10 in Pakistan where Life Competencies Programmes (LCP) arranged training for the secondary teachers in Sri Lanka.

V. Conclusion

Along with providing the basic academic skills of literacy and numeracy, a quality education endowed with Life Skills has been offering to secondary school students of the region to help them tackle the challenges in their societies. These skills include preventing of HIV/AIDs and environmental depletion and skills to promote peace, human rights and democracy. The increased demand of expectations are being advocated internationally which was extended also in SAARC member countries. Some have considered life skills based education as co-curricular activities, some kept those in core curriculum as stand-alone and others have considered these as integral part of curriculum. Life skill education should be framed as a well structured programme to satisfy needs and outcome based participatory learning which aims at increasing positive and adaptive behaviours among individuals on different psycho-social skills. Social structure, sense of equality, school realities and teacher capacity of a country can only determine ways to integrate Life Skills into formal education systems of that country. Training of life skills is an effective means to empower the youth to act sensibly, to take initiative and take control over the adverse situations. The method generally used in teaching of life skills in secondary level involves the process of participatory learning using four basic activities like practical activities , feedback and reflections activities, consolidation and reinforcement activity and practical application in day to day life situations. The SAARC Social Charter was signed by the SAARC Heads of States at the 12th SAARC Summit in Islamabad on 4th January 2004.

The Charter anticipated some activities in the areas like poverty alleviation, health, education, human resource development, population stabilization, drug addiction, rehabilitation, status of women, rights and well being of children, and life skill education. These actions will surely help the national processes of policy making, policy implementation and their evaluation with respect to secondary education and teacher education of the country concerned.

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