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INTERACTIVE EFFECT OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION PROGRAM AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF STUDENTS ON THEIR CRITICAL THINKING

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ABSTRACT

World Health Organization (1998), describes life skills as psycho-social competencies which encompass a person's ability to maintain a state of mental wellbeing and to demonstrate this in adaptive and positive behavior as s/he interacts with others, his/her culture and environment. Childhood and adolescence are the developmental periods during which one acquires these skills through various methods and people. Life skills education program are designed in such a way for the youth to understand self and able to assess their skill, abilities and developments, these skills include decision making, problem solving, critical thinking, creative thinking, effective communication skills, crises management, stress management, time management, emotional management etc. In today's fast paced and technologically advanced world, the challenge for teachers is to teach students critical thinking skills and the ability to practice them competently in a variety of situations not only in the schools but also in day to day life. Classrooms can act as simulated environment where critical thinking skills can be taught to students which will prepare them to face the world outside in near future. The present study was to ascertain the interactive effect of life skills education program and socio-economic status on critical thinking among standard eighth students. For this purpose, an intervention program based on life skills education of about 29 hours 30 mins was developed for students spreading over eight weeks. The aim of the research was to ascertain whether life skills education facilitates the critical thinking of students, and if so, for which level of socio economic status of students. The participants of the study included 55 and 48 students in the experimental and control groups respectively. Critical thinking was significantly affected by the life skills education program whereas the socio-economic status had no effect on the critical thinking of students.



KEYWORDS: *Life Skills, Life Skills Education Program, Socio-Economic Status, Critical Thinking.*

INTRODUCTION :

Life skills is a term used to describe a set of basic skills acquired through learning and/or direct life experience that enable individuals and groups to effectively handle issues and problems commonly encountered in daily life. Children's optimal development as the child's ability to acquire culturally relevant skills and behaviors which allow the child to function effectively in his/her current context as well as to adapt successfully when the context changes, and/ or to bring about change. In a constantly changing environment, having life skills is an essential part of being able to meet the challenges of everyday life. To cope with the increasing pace and change of modern life, students need life skills such as the ability to critically think, to take correct decisions, to solve their own problems in a sorted manner, to find out creative solutions, to be emotionally strong, etc. An education system should involve learning of life skills that a person will carry even after school/college in order to navigate relationships and careers and be a well-rounded, successful person. Life skill education refers to an interactive process of learning which helps the learners to acquire knowledge and to develop positive attitudes and skills which support the adoption of healthy behaviors in day to day life. The lifestyle and environment that students are experiencing today is not properly preparing them for socializing in an effective way, hence the importance of life skills education should be understood by the teachers as teachers are moulding the students for tomorrow.

The development of thinking is considered one of the main objectives that educators seek to achieve. Once these objectives are achieved, students are able to effectively address issues and crises in everyday life as well as the complications of the present and future. Scenarios are a huge way to foster critical thinking and problem solving. Placing students in a real-life scenario and asking them to make decisions is a great way to sharpen their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This offers students a safe environment to make mistakes that they can learn from. Unfortunately, creating scenarios and projects takes a lot of time and effort from the teacher. Most countries today are interested in increasing educational standards and emphasizing on teaching basic skills. However, basic skills are not sufficient to meet market needs, leading to the urgent need to focus on higher-order thinking skills because individuals are unable to retain the tremendous amounts of information in their memory for use and retrieval in the future. Critical thinking is essential for effective functioning in the modern world. Higher-order critical thinking skills are necessary for students preparing for and/or enrolled in professional programs, especially the ability to evaluate and synthesize information, which are vital for problem-solving. Critical thinking is the mental process of analyzing or evaluating information. 'To reason' is the capacity for rational thought or to think logically. Once a solid foundation or a healthy self-concept has been established, it is important to be able to think critically, or to reason. In order to assess roles in and the consequences of any actions that are taken, it is important to evaluate and determine what is taking place in a given situation. This requires the organization of thinking, integrate the information at hand, distinguish between what is fact and what is opinion, and then weigh potential outcomes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Yadav and Iqbal (2009) in their study aimed to see the impact of life skill training on self-esteem, adjustment and empathy among adolescents. Total sample comprised of 60 students (30 males and 30 females) from the Hans Raj Model School, Punjabi Bagh who has received life skill training from the team of Expressions India. Self-esteem inventory (school form), Adjustment inventory for school students (AISS) and the Empathy quotient (EQ) were administered in a group session one by one in two or three days both before training was given and after training. In the post condition, test scores were obtained after 5 months of training. The result showed that subjects improved significantly in post condition on self-esteem, emotional adjustment, educational adjustment, total adjustment and empathy. However, no significant

difference was found on social adjustment in pre and post condition. Overall training was very effective as subjects improved in the post condition on all measures except one, thus showing that Life skill training do show positive result in bringing change in adolescent's attitude, thought and behavior by providing supportive environment to them.

Obiozor (2010) in his article discusses the teaching of life skills to urban American youths who are highly fascinated with the hip-hop culture—songs, raps, miming, lyrics, dressing and musical rhythms, especially individuals with emotional disabilities in the public schools. This is an instructional curriculum strategy to encourage positive and active participation of these students, promote perfect school attendance, encourage good behaviors, deal with anger management and motivate committed learning in the classroom. The instructors' understanding of students' culture, learning needs and styles, and using such background knowledge to educate them become imperative in this setting. These urge for innovative and leadership projects in the author's special education classroom necessitated the application of hip-hop music to teach life skills, reading and other functional skills in the classroom. The outcome was positive and rewarding to both the teachers and students. There are recommendations for interested teachers to devise creative teaching methods, differentiated instruction and appropriate classroom management practices to attain student achievement.

Nirmala and Shakuntala (2011) conducted the following research with the objectives to evaluate the effectiveness of concept mapping as a teaching strategy to develop critical thinking skills. Pretest, post test control group design was used. The IV year B.Sc. nursing students were included as experimental group ($n=40$) and control group ($n=44$). The experimental group was given a training to prepare nursing care plans using concept mapping. The training program was for 12 weeks where the participants were given case study scenarios every week to prepare nursing care plans using concept map. The experimental group and control group were again assessed for the critical thinking skills. The concept maps were evaluated using scoring criteria. In the post test, there was a significant difference in the critical thinking scores of both the groups at 0.05 level. ($t= 2.16$). A significant improvement was identified between the pretest and post test critical thinking scores of experiment group at 0.05 level ($t=2.0$). Comparison of concept mapping scores of the experimental group in the pretest and post test showed a highly significant difference at 0.041 level. The study was able to show a significant improvement in the critical thinking skills of nursing students. However, the critical thinking scores were poor due to the high standard of the assessment tool. It is needed to develop critical thinking skill assessment tool which will suit the nursing community and further research is required to promote concept mapping as a teaching and learning strategy.

Fallahchai (2012) aimed to examine the effectiveness of instruction of academic and life skills on the freshmen academic achievement. The research procedure was semiexperimental with pre-test and post-test design with a control group. The statistical sample included 170 freshmen were randomly selected and assigned in experimental and control groups. The instruments were Life skills inventory, average grade first term, and demographic questions. The experimental group attended in 10 weekly sessions (35 hours) of academic and life skills training. The results showed that the students who had received academic and life skills training gained significantly higher scores in life skills and academic achievement than those with no training. Also, not significant different between male and female students in the score of life skills and academic achievement observed. It seems that assessing and meeting student's life skills and academic achievement needs, especially in the first year of their study is very essential.

Zakariya (2013) in his study aims to investigate and measure the students' critical thinking skills and achievements in the Arabic language at Primary and secondary stages, also measuring the development of the cognitive Dimensions of critical thinking asserted by the researcher. The researcher has identified five elements which comprise of the varying levels of critical thinking abilities in the Arabic Language. These are as follows; analyses, inference, Induction, deduction and evaluation. The Arabic grammar and literature exam has been formulated for both primary and secondary Pupils, in order to answer the questions posed

by the study. The researcher found out that the levels achievement of critical thinking of students in both stages, are average and satisfactory, there is no significant statistical difference in the achievement of critical thinking skills between primary and secondary students, there is also no significant statistical differences in the achievement of critical thinking skills attributed to gender, However there are significant statistical differences in the achievement of critical thinking skills between Government schools & public schools. Records show that critical thinking thrives mostly in public schools. According to the category of critical thinking skills, students can deal with analysis best, this dimension ranked top of the list of answers Evaluation, inference, deduction and induction came last respectively.

Subasree and Nair (2014) conducted a study with the purpose to develop a valid, reliable scale to measure life skills. The first phase involved the conceptualization and operationalization of life skills based on the review and identifies the research gaps. Similar questionnaires, scales were reviewed, based on that the items were framed for the tool. In the second phase, Face and content validity were assessed by a panel of experts, data collection (N= 890) was carried out extensively to establish reliability and validity for the Life Skills Assessment Scale. Using Cronbach's coefficient alpha, test retest, split half reliability methods the internal consistency was assessed for the tool. After item analysis and construct validity assessment, the test items showing weak indicators were eliminated in a stepwise fashion until the reliability coefficient peaked. However, highest reliability was already obtained without eliminating items. The final summated scale of 100 indicators had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .84. The psychometric properties were established adopting standard procedure

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF THE TERMS

Socio-Economic Status: Socio-Economic Status refers to the amount of wealth, power and prestige enjoyed by a student's family.

Life Skills Education Program: Life skills education program is a structured program developed by the researcher designed to bring about a change in behavior in relation to knowledge and skills which includes the preaching of life skills required in day to day life to face the challenges of the growing world. Life skills may include communication skills, stress and conflict management, decision making, problem solving, creative and critical thinking.

Critical Thinking : Critical thinking is that mode of thinking about any subject, content, or problem in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing it.

Statement of the Problem

Interactive Effect of Life Skills Education Program and Socio-Economic Status of Students on their Critical Thinking.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

In the present study, English medium schools from South Mumbai affiliated to the SSC board have been included. It excludes schools with other medium of instruction such as Marathi, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati etc. Students from standard eighth were included for the study, other primary and secondary classes have been excluded. It also excludes schools affiliated to ICSE or CBSE boards. The present research studied the interactive effect of life skills education program and socio-economic status on decision making of students. It has excluded other student-background variables such as religion, mother tongue, etc. from its purview. The study has adopted the quantitative approach to the study rather than the qualitative approach.

Aim of the Study

To ascertain the interactive effect of the intervention program and socio-economic status of students on their critical thinking

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Following are the objectives of the study:

1. To ascertain the interactive effect of the intervention program and socio-economic status on critical thinking of students.
2. To compute the effect size of the intervention program and socio-economic status on critical thinking of students.

Null Hypothesis of the Study

Following is the null hypothesis of the study:

1. There is no significant the interactive effect of the intervention program and socio-economic status on critical thinking of students.

Methodology of the Present Study

The study adopted the quasi- experimental method. In the present research, quasi -experimental design of the pre- test post-test, non-equivalent group's type was used. It can be described as follows:

The pre-test-post-test non-equivalent groups design.

O1 X O2 O3 C O4

Where,

O1 and O3= Pre-test Scores

O2 and O4= Post- test Scores

X : Experimental Group

C : Control Group

The duration of the treatment was for 29 hours 30 mins in the experimental group. There was no treatment given in the control group.

SAMPLE OF THE STUDY:

In the present study, the sample has been selected consisting of one intact class each of standard eighth from two different schools situated in the South Mumbai. The experimental and the control groups included 55 and 48 students respectively.

TOOLS OF THE STUDY

In the present study the following tools were used by the researcher to collect data:

1. Critical thinking rating scale prepared by Mincemoyer, Perkins and Munyua (2001)
2. Socio-Economic Status inventory prepared by Patel (1997)

INTERVENTION PROGRAM

The duration of the intervention program was 29 hours 30 mins. The experimental group was taught about life skills education through the intervention program where as no treatment was given to the control group. The life skills education program mainly highlighted the cognitive skill of critical thinking. Various activities were designed to develop critical thinking among the students which included case studies, role play, stories, moral dilemma, situations and scenarios, etc.

DATA ANALYSIS

Null hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the interactive effect of the intervention program (IP) and socio-

economic status (SES) on critical thinking (CT) of students.

This hypothesis was tested using two-way ANCOVA in which the pre-test scores of students is controlled. The following table shows the relevant statistics of critical thinking of students by treatment and socio-economic status

Table 1: Relevant statistics for ANCOVA

Socio-economic status				
	Low SES	Average SES	High SES	Total
CG	12	24	12	48
EG	15	26	14	55
Total	27	50	26	103
Mean scores				
CG	66.1397	67.8791	66.3279	67.0565
EG	79.5985	81.908	81.4788	81.1689
Total	73.6168	75.1742	74.4861	74.5922

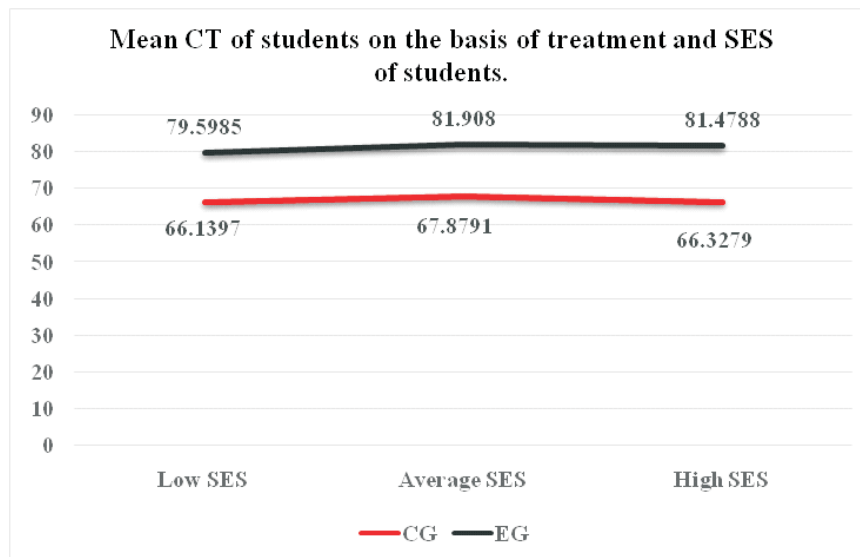
The following table shows the ANCOVA for critical thinking of students by intervention program and SES after partial ling out the effect of the pre-test critical thinking of students.

Table 2: ANCOVA for critical thinking of students by treatment (T) and Socio-Economic Status (SES)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P
Rows	5104.66	1	5104.66	72.12	<0.0001
Columns	42.86	2	21.43	0.3	0.7415
Interaction	42.32	2	21.16	0.3	0.7415
Error	6794.76	96	70.78		

The preceding table shows that (a) the F-ratio for rows i.e. intervention program is significant at < 0.0001. Hence it may be concluded that the Mean CT of the experimental group is significantly greater than that of the control group. (b) The F-ratio for columns i.e. socio-economic status is not significant at 0.05 level. Hence it may be concluded that the Mean CT does not differ significantly on the basis of socio-economic status of students. (c) The F-ratio for interaction effect of intervention program and socio-economic status is not significant at 0.05 level. Hence it may be concluded that the Mean CT of students do not differ on the basis of the interaction between intervention program and Socio-Economic Status of students.

The following figure shows the differences in the Mean CT of students on the basis of treatment and SES of students.



The effect size of the independent variables was computed using Wolf's formula and was found to be 1.67 which was high for the intervention program.

CONCLUSION

It may be concluded that the Mean CT of students of the experimental group is significantly greater than that of the control group. Thus, the life skills education program was found to be effective in enhancing critical thinking of students with high, moderate and low socio-economic status. The SES of the students was not found to influence the critical thinking of students.

DISCUSSION

The treatment i.e. the intervention program developed by the researcher is found to be effective for enhancing critical thinking of students. The literature review indicated that the roles that teachers play in the critical thinking are paramount in student success. This study could serve as a contribution to educational research that will help to enrich the teaching and learning practices with the help life skills education program. Making choices and thinking critically are a part of life. Simply put, the way life unfolds, with its twists and turns, starts and stops, requires us to make choices and think critically in every step of the way. By encouraging the children and adolescents in house hold activities, they are enabled to strengthen their life skills. If such activities are accompanied by suitable classroom activities by teachers, the children and adolescents would acquire skills required for happy and healthy life. Not only classroom activities but also outdoor activities help enhancing children's critical thinking abilities. Classroom activities like moral dilemma helped the students to think critically about the situation considering the ethics of life which usually is neglected when it comes to use situations which cannot be handled effectively. Outdoor activities like walk in the garden helped the students to deal with the obstacles as the number of them kept increasing in the process by critically thinking about the methods to overcome them. Also, fun loving activities like scrambled sentences, puzzles, etc. helped students to develop higher order thinking skills thus improving not only the critical thinking abilities but also helping them wisely solving problems.

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