



Life Skills Education for Underprivileged Adolescent Girls

by

Dr. P. Pandia Vadivu

Associate Professor

School of Education

Tamil Nadu Open University

Abstract

Despite advancements in women's development, marginalized adolescent girls, especially those from poor families, remain highly vulnerable. These girls often face suppression, exploitation, and discrimination, leading many to drop out of school and leaving them ill-equipped for daily challenges. Gender-biased socialization at home further impedes their development and self-esteem.

Denied their developmental rights, these girls are frequently deprived of equal opportunities, perpetuating gender discrimination. Nurturing their raw skills, hopes, and aspirations is essential for transforming them into valuable societal contributors. Empowering them to control their lives builds human capital and aids community development.

Life skills intervention programs can renew hope and improve their quality of life. By equipping these girls with essential life skills, such programs enhance their ability to navigate challenges and foster personal and interpersonal growth. Comprehensive life skills education is crucial for bridging gender equality gaps and supporting adolescent development.

Key words: Life Skills, Education, Underprivileged, Adolescent Girls.

Introduction

“Full many a gem, of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear.
Full many a flower is born, to blush unseen,
And WASTE its sweetness on the desert air.”

These lines of grey remind us of the vast untapped potential going to waste. The massive wastage of human resources, particularly women's resources, is an issue that must be addressed with the right perspective.

Women are an essential productive force in a developing country like India. As a significant part of the labor force in the Indian economy, empowering women will reduce their dependency, enhance their status and security within the family, and increase their productivity.

A large number of girls from rural areas remain out of school, with those from underprivileged backgrounds suffering the most. The lack of skills, support, resources, and education further diminishes their already limited

opportunities for progress. Adolescent girls, in particular, continue to be victims of gender-based discrimination. Unless these girls are encouraged to build self-esteem and make responsible choices, they cannot evolve into responsible citizens who contribute to the well-being of their families and communities. Life skills education, through intervention programs, can renew hope and provide a future for these vast women resources.

This paper presents the effectiveness of the Life Skills Intervention Programme in improving the quality of life for adolescent girls from underprivileged segments. The action-oriented, interactive, and educative intervention program helped the target group to unlearn, learn, and relearn the values, beliefs, and attitudes necessary for effective living.

LIFE SKILLS

Education is about giving people the opportunity to develop their potential, personality, and strengths. This involves not only acquiring new knowledge but also developing abilities for successful living. These abilities, known as life skills, encompass both inner capacities and practical skills necessary for effective functioning (UNESCO, 2001).

Life skills can be categorized into three essential groups that complement and reinforce each other:

- **Social or Interpersonal Skills:** This includes communication, negotiation/refusal skills, assertiveness, cooperation, and empathy.
- **Cognitive Skills:** This encompasses problem-solving, understanding consequences, decision-making, critical thinking, and self-evaluation.
- **Emotional Coping Skills:** This involves managing stress, managing feelings, self-management, and self-monitoring.

The development of these skills is closely tied to the pedagogy of active learning. Participatory teaching methods such as role-playing, debates, situation analysis, and problem-solving can actively engage young people in their own developmental process. Thus, beyond practical and vocational skills, it is essential to cultivate social, individual, and reflective skills. Life skills programs emphasize abilities that facilitate communication, negotiation, decision-making, and critical thinking. These advancements have led to significant breakthroughs in policy and planning, particularly in non-formal education programs for marginalized and disadvantaged youth and adults (UNESCO, New Delhi 2001).

Life Skills in the Indian Context

This study aims to impart life skills to adolescent girls from underprivileged backgrounds to evaluate the impact on their self-confidence levels after the intervention program.

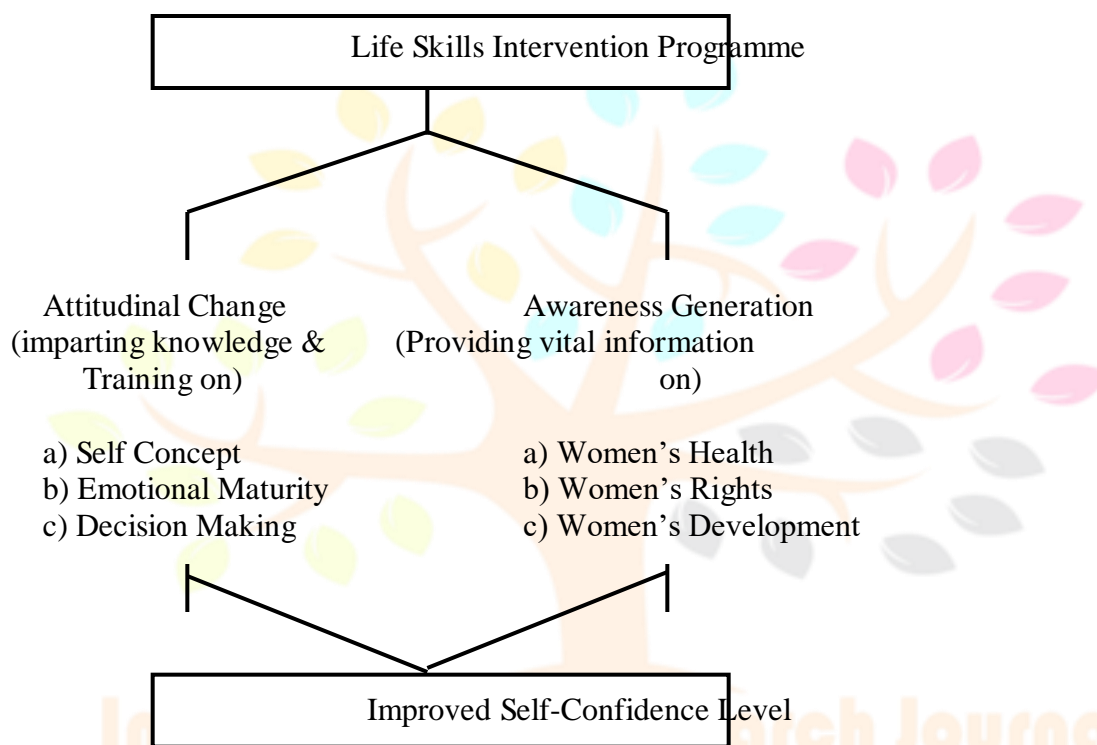
The participatory action program includes lessons on self-awareness, emotional management, and decision-making skills, alongside raising awareness about critical women's issues. Through focus group discussions, it was identified that awareness of women's health, rights, and development is crucial for these underprivileged girls, especially within a male-dominated patriarchal society that frequently denies them opportunities for survival and growth.

Adolescent girls in these settings often face physical and sexual exploitation and abuse within their families and communities, leaving them with little or no chance to express opinions or make responsible choices as they transition from childhood to adulthood. This exploitation and denial of participation rights are closely linked to gender relations within the family and community. The resulting deprivation of developmental rights reinforces gender discrimination and lowers the self-esteem of these girls, who grow up in a cultural environment that often fails to promote equal opportunities for both sexes. Additionally, early marriage further exacerbates the denial of their survival rights.

Framing a Life Skills Curriculum for Underprivileged Adolescent Girls in India

When developing a life skills curriculum for underprivileged adolescent girls in India, it is crucial to include not only cognitive, emotional coping, and social skills but also lessons on vital women's issues such as women's health, rights, and development.

Understanding the restraining forces of the cultural environment and systemic challenges allows the girls to recognize the pitfalls, denials, threats, discrimination, and limitations they face. With this comprehensive perspective, the intervention program can be designed holistically, making it more effective and capable of producing the desired outcomes.



Definition of Life Skills

Life skills are understood in various ways, with no universally accepted definition. Different organizations interpret life skills differently. The International Bureau of Education (IBE) bases its understanding on the Delors Report's four pillars of learning:

- Learning to know: Acquiring knowledge and developing cognitive skills.
- Learning to do: Applying knowledge and skills in practical situations.
- Learning to be: Fostering personal development and self-awareness.
- Learning to live together: Developing social skills and understanding to live harmoniously with others.

According to IBE, life skills encompass personal management and social skills essential for functioning independently and effectively in daily life.

To further refine this definition, life skills can be categorized into several key areas:

- Cognitive Skills: Problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making, and self-evaluation.
- Emotional Coping Skills: Managing stress, regulating emotions, and developing resilience.
- Social or Interpersonal Skills: Communication, negotiation, assertiveness, empathy, and cooperation.
- Practical Skills: Financial literacy, time management, and practical knowledge applicable to daily tasks.

Life skills education aims to empower individuals to navigate the complexities of life, make informed decisions, and contribute positively to their communities. This holistic approach ensures that individuals are equipped not only with practical and vocational skills but also with the ability to manage their personal and social lives effectively.

WHO Definition and Essential Life Skills

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines life skills as abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

Essential Life Skills According to WHO (1993)

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 1993), the most essential life skills include:

- 1. Decision-Making Skills:** Help students assess their options and consider the consequences of their choices.
- 2. Problem-Solving Skills:** Enable students to find constructive solutions to problems, reducing anxiety.
- 3. Creative Thinking:** Essential for decision-making and problem-solving, allowing students to explore all possible alternatives and their consequences, and to look beyond their personal experiences.
- 4. Critical Thinking:** Helps students objectively analyze information and experiences, recognize influences on behavior (such as societal values, peer pressure, and media), and make informed decisions.
- 5. Effective Communication:** Enables students to express their feelings, needs, and ideas verbally and non-verbally.
- 6. Interpersonal Relationship Skills:** Help students interact positively with others, especially family members, and build healthy relationships.
- 7. Self-Awareness:** Involves understanding one's own identity, preferences, strengths, and recognizing stressful situations.
- 8. Empathy:** The ability to understand and share the feelings of others, promoting acceptance of diversity and improving interpersonal relations.
- 9. Emotional Management:** Enables students to recognize and regulate their emotions, especially difficult ones like anger and violence, to avoid negative health impacts.
- 10. Stress Management:** Helps students identify sources of stress in their lives and develop strategies to manage it effectively.

These skills collectively contribute to the holistic development of individuals, empowering them to navigate the complexities of life, make informed decisions, and build positive relationships.

Objectives of the Study

Primary Objective:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of a life skills intervention program for underprivileged adolescent girls and determine the extent of its impact.

General Objectives:

- To measure the self-confidence levels of the target group by assessing their:
 - Self-concept
 - Emotional maturity
 - Decision-making ability
- To evaluate the level of awareness on women's issues, including:
 - Women's health
 - Women's rights
 - Women's development
- To conduct an intervention program for the target group and assess its effectiveness.

Specific Objectives:

A. Measuring Instruments:

- To revalidate the Self Confidence Rating Scale (SCRS) developed by Research Scholar.

- To develop and validate a scale for assessing awareness of women's issues, named the Women's Issues Awareness Scale (WIAS).
- To use the SCRS and WIAS scales to assess the self-confidence levels and awareness of women's issues among the target group (underprivileged adolescent girls of Class XI) before and after the intervention.
- To revalidate the self-appraisal inventories (on success proneness, personality, and emotional health) created by Dr. P. Pandia Vadivu.

B. Treatment (Intervention Programme):

- To study the effectiveness of the treatment-intervention programme.

C. Relationship Study:

- To study the relationship between self-confidence and the three dimensions of self-management, namely:

- Success proneness (SP)
- Emotional health (EH)
- Personality (P)

D. Prediction:

- To determine the relative influence of the three dimensions of self-management, thereby predicting the self-confidence level.

Sample

Group	Stream & Medium of Instruction	Class	No. of Students
Experimental Group	Commerce, Tamil Medium	XI	60
Control Group	Commerce, Tamil Medium	XI	60

Variables Selected:

- Self-concept
- Emotional Maturity
- Decision Making
- Women's Health
- Women's Rights
- Women's Development
- Instrumentation:

Self-Confidence Rating Scale (SCRS)

Intervention Programme:

The pre-test was administered to the samples of the two schools (sixty in each) – the control and experimental groups. The results are as follows:

Women's Issues Awareness Scale (WIAS)

Table 1
A PRE TEST (Control group Vs Experimental group)

Dimensions	Control Group		Experimental Group		Value of 't'	Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Decision Making	2.72	1.54	2.75	1.53	0,12	NS
Emotional Maturity	2.55	1.56	2.62	1.63	0.23	NS
Self Concept	2.75	1.57	2.73	1.58	0.06	NS

Self Confidence level (A)	8.02	4.44	8.10	4.52	0.10	NS
Women's Health	1.57	1.03	1.60	1.08	0.17	NS
Women's Development	1.42	0.74	1.40	0.76	0.12	NS
Women's Right	1.15	0.76	1.18	0.77	0.24	NS
Self Confidence level (B)	4.13	1.66	4.18	0.71	0.16	NS
Global Score (A+B)	12.15	4.80	12.22	4.62	0.16	NS

NS- The 't' Values are not significant. This substantiates balancing of the groups.

The Intervention Programme:

The intervention program was conducted for Standard XI Tamil Medium girl students (sixty in total) from Guntur Subbiah Pillai Girls School, T. Nagar, Chennai-17.

The program ran from 5/10/06 to 12/11/06 over a period of twenty-four days, with a total of thirty-six hours dedicated to it.

The intervention program was structured to provide life skills training, aimed at helping the target group understand and learn methods to cope with and manage their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

The essential skills for managing the internal aspects of social life—such as stress reduction, self-control, and decision-making—were cultivated.

Themes Covered:

- Self and personality
- Emotional maturity / stress management
- Decision-making: importance and need
- Sensitizing and creating awareness on women's issues

Activities Conducted:

- Knowing and Understanding
- Observing and Learning
- Reflecting and Acting
- Program Goals:

The primary aim of the program was to help the target group understand:

Theoretical concepts

- External factors influencing their attitudes and perceptions
- Active participation through role-play methods
- Application of learned principles
- Motivation to reflect on observed outcomes and internalize acquired values and skills

The objective was to encourage active participation, involvement, learning, application, and internalization of key concepts.

Table showing the mean and standard deviation of the pretest and post test respectively of the control group for the different dimensions

Table 2

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Pre test</i>		<i>Post test</i>		<i>Value of 't'</i>	<i>Significance</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Self concept	2.75	1.57	2.73	1.54	0.30	NS
Emotional Maturity	2.55	1.56	2.65	1.72	1.10	NS
Decision Making	2.72	1.54	2.63	1.33	0.87	NS
Self Confidence level (a) c	8.02	4.44	7.93	3.92	0.59	NS
Women's health	1.57	1.03	1.55	0.85	0.28	NS
Women's rights	1.15	0.76	1.18	0.75	1.43	NS
Women's development	1.42	0.74	1.45	0.70	1.43	NS
Self Confidence level (b) c	4.13	1.66	4.18	1.40	0.77	NS
Global Score (a + b)	12.15	4.80	12.28	4.48	1.02	NS

Findings:

The 't' values are not significant, confirming that the absence of intervention resulted in no learning gains for the control group. This substantiates the research hypothesis that, without treatment, the control group would not experience an improvement in overall self-confidence levels or any of its dimensions. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted and proved correct.

Table showing the mean and standard deviation of the pretest and post test respectively of the experimental group for the different dimensions

Table 3

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Pre test</i>		<i>Post test</i>		<i>Value of 't'</i>	<i>Significance</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Self concept	2.74	1.57	4.90	2.55	18.74	S
Emotional Maturity	2.58	1.59	4.95	2.72	18.76	S
Decision Making	2.73	1.53	5.10	2.74	22.05	S
Self Confidence level (a) c	8.06	4.47	14.91	7.73	22.20	S
Women's health	1.58	1.05	5.46	4.01	47.09	S
Women's rights	1.17	0.76	5.09	4.03	45.83	S
Women's development	1.41	0.75	5.28	3.95	48.67	S
Self Confidence level (b) c	4.16	1.68	15.83	11.85	67.26	S
Global Score (a + b)	12.22	4.62	30.83	19.01	55.49	S

Findings:

The 't' values are significant at the 0.01 level, confirming that the treatment (intervention) led to significant learning gains for the experimental group. This supports the research hypothesis that the experimental group would experience substantial improvement in overall self-confidence levels and each of its dimensions. Consequently, the hypothesis is accepted and proved correct.

Table showing the posttest-mean and standard deviation of the control and experimental group respectively for the different dimension.

Table 4

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Control Group</i>		<i>Experimental Group</i>		<i>Value of 't'</i>	<i>Significance</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Self concept	2.73	1.54	4.90	2.55	17.73	S
Emotional Maturity	2.65	1.72	4.95	2.72	17.56	S
Decision Making	2.63	1.33	5.10	2.74	23.16	S
Self Confidence level (a) c	7.93	3.92	14.91	7.73	23.29	S
Women's health	1.55	0.85	5.46	4.01	51.12	S
Women's rights	1.18	0.75	5.09	4.03	45.83	S
Women's development	1.45	0.70	5.28	3.95	45.92	S
Self Confidence level (b) c	4.18	1.40	15.83	11.85	66.20	S

S-All 't' values are significant at 0.01 level.

These finding highlights that the post-test performance of the experimental group is significantly superior to that of the control group, affirming the significant effect of the treatment (intervention). Thus, the research hypothesis—that the improvement in overall self-confidence and each of its dimensions in the experimental group will surpass that of the control group—is accepted and proven correct.

Conclusion

Despite notable advancements in women's development, alarming statistics continue to underscore areas in need of urgent attention and action. Within marginalized communities, adolescent girls constitute one of the most vulnerable groups, especially those from impoverished families. These girls frequently face suppression, exploitation, and discrimination, with many leaving school after middle level, rendering them ill-equipped to handle daily challenges. Additionally, a flawed socialization process at home further hinders their personality development. Gender-biased attitudes and practices within families and communities often lead to exploitation and denial of participation rights, identity respect, and acknowledgment of their evolving maturity.

This persistent denial of developmental rights perpetuates gender discrimination and erodes the self-esteem of these girls, who are raised in cultural settings that often do not support equal opportunities for both sexes. The raw skills, hopes, dreams, and aspirations of these girls must be cultivated, transforming them into valuable assets and contributors to society. Empowering adolescent girls to assume greater control over their lives aids in building human capital, enabling them to shape their futures and contribute to the development of their communities.

Life skills intervention programs are essential for renewing hope and improving the quality of life for these young women.

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Additional Resources

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- Adolescent Reproductive Health (ARH) project in Bangladesh. <http://www.jhvccp.org/asia/bangladesh/arh.shtml>
- CEDPA's Better Life Options Program http://www.cedpa.org/files/634_files_b/p_report.pdf
- Kishor Mitra Pariyojana: Life skills education programme for out-of-school adolescents, madyapradesh. <http://cbhi-Hsprod.nic.in/listedtails.asp.roid=125>.

Author profile:



Dr. P. Pandiya Vadivu is an Associate Professor in the School of Education and the Chairperson (i/c) of the Faculty of Education at Tamil Nadu Open University (TNOU), Chennai. With over 20 years of academic experience, including 17 years at TNOU, she is recognized for her substantial contributions to education as a researcher, educator, and administrator. Dr. Vadivu holds advanced degrees across multiple disciplines, including M.Sc. degrees in Biology, Psychology, and Guidance & Counseling, an M.Ed., and a Ph.D., and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Literature (D.Lit.).

A dedicated researcher with over 18 years of experience, Dr. Vadivu has supervised five Ph.D. graduates and is currently mentoring four additional scholars. She has published 157 articles in UGC-listed and refereed journals, authored nine books, and developed 59 Self-Learning Materials (SLMs). Her research tools and contributions have earned recognition from prestigious institutions, including Stanford University. Among her awards are Best Professor, Best Teacher, and a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Dr. Vadivu has also held significant academic leadership positions, including Director at TNOU's Regional Centre and at the Material Production & Distribution Division (MP&DD). An active member of 22 professional bodies, she has delivered over 70 invited lectures, organized 17 conferences and workshops, and served on the editorial boards of 15 national and international journals. Her ongoing contributions to interdisciplinary research and innovative teaching methods continue to enhance both the academic and professional communities, making her a distinguished leader in the field of education.