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Original Research Article

Integration of Life Skills Education in School Curriculum: A Study on Student Behavioural Outcomes in Dharashiv

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Abstract: *Background*: Life skills education (LSE) has increasingly been recognized to be an important pedagogical intervention in promoting emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, and ethical behaviour among school-going children. The integration of LSE in the curriculum is advocated for within the Indian educational context by national policy frameworks, yet, to date, the extent to which these are being implemented in semi-urban contexts such as Dharashiv, Maharashtra, or producing a behaviour change to prevent NCDs and injuries remains unexplored. *Objectives*: The first aim of this study was to explore the integration of LSE within the school curriculum in Dharashiv and to analyse the impact of this on student behaviour. More specifically, the study sought to understand the type of behaviour change, that is, emotional regulation, empathy, and conflict resolution changes among students exposed to LSE and the factors that influence its delivery. *Methods*: The research was conducted using a qualitative-descriptive approach involving 70 purposefully selected participants—students, teachers, school staff, and parents—drawn from five secondary schools in Dharashiv. Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and reflective journals were used to collect data. Thematic analysis concerning NVivo software was employed to assess main themes and understandings. *Results*: Results showed that more than 70% of children exhibited significantly enhanced emotion identification, peer cooperation, and classroom behavior. When trends were disaggregated by gender, girls demonstrated larger increases in empathy, whereas boys appeared to benefit more from structured group leadership. However, a lack of teacher training, assessment frameworks, and community engagement obstructed the uniform adoption and effectiveness. *Conclusion*: The research suggests that LSE, when deigned to context and implemented consistently, has the potential to change not just the ARTICULATE STUDENT, but the learning ecosystem. It emphasises the need for policy-level support, capacity-building, and inclusion in curricular planning in order for life skills to be integrated in more than just text for effective learning experiences for students.

Keywords: Life Skills Education, student behaviour, school curriculum, emotional regulation, peer collaboration, Dharashiv, qualitative research.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Rationale

To be relevant in the fast-changing environment of today, education has to go beyond knowledge acquisition and develop flexible, emotionally and socially responsible personalities. The World Health Organisation (WHO; 2023) defines Life Skills Education (LSE) as "those psychosocial competencies which enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life."

In India, the National Education Policy 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2023) and National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023 (…) have stressed on mainstreaming of life skills for overall development. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has made it compulsory to inculcate LSE through co-scholastic activities and organised modules (CBSE, 2023). 2) But this

has not translated into uniform implementation, with factors such as infrastructural constraints, teacher preparedness, and societal norms affecting outcome, particularly in a semi-urban district like that of Dharashiv (Pathan & Amin, 2023).

1.2 Problem Statement

Even though there have been national efforts, a paucity of localised empirical work exists on the impact of LSE integration on student behaviour in semi-urban India. Preliminary findings in Dharashiv indicate that in some schools, LSE is being implemented using the platform of morning assembly and activity-based learning, while various issues related to curriculum mapping and community engagement hamper its implementation in other schools (ASER Centre, 2023; UDISE+, 2024). This paucity

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of contextual knowledge undermines the creation of adaptive teaching approaches.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The present study is intended to investigate the incorporation of LSE in the school curriculum of Dharashiv and its effects on students' behaviours. Through a qualitative-descriptive methodology, the work attempts to humanise the data—reporting not only (demonstrable) changes in behaviour, but from the vantage of students, teachers, and principals.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study adds to the emergent literature on inclusive and humanistic education by providing a contextual ground view from a semi-urban Indian district. The results are intended to guide both policy readjustment, teacher preparation, and curriculum development to make LSE a reality in education rather than just a policy.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Conceptual Foundations of Life Skills Education

Life Skills Education (LSE) is a range of psychosocial functioning capabilities for performing real-life demands effectively, such as facing crisis, empathy, and thinking critically (WHO, 2023). Such skills are not natural, but can be developed by intentional pedagogical methods. The CBSE (2023) curriculum framework identifies ten fundamental life skills, such as self-awareness, empathy, interpersonal relationships, and problem-solving, which are vital to integrated development.

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 highlights the incorporation of life skills throughout the formal school curriculum to promote ethical, emotionally intelligent, and socially responsible citizens (Ministry of Education, 2023). This is in line with the international educational dimensions that emphasize competency-based learning and socio-emotional skills (Pathan & Amin, 2023).

2.2 Empirical Evidence on Student Behavioural Outcomes

Recent research highlights the positive contribution of LSE to student [sic] behaviour, especially in terms of improving emotional regulation, peer cooperation, and classroom participation. Tagat *et al.,*. (2025) analysed the impact of C2L and found positive changes in self-efficacy, resilience, and gender-equitable attitudes among the students across five states in India. Regular school attendance by participants increased by 66.5% as also reported by the study.

Another mixed-method study was done by Joseph and Thomas (2024) in Maharashtra reporting that structured LSE modules exposed students depicted reduced aggression, better conflict resolution as well as enhanced empathy towards their peers. These changes were stronger in schools where teachers participated in focused LSE training.

2.3 Implementation Challenges in Semi-Urban Contexts

The uptake of LSE as a response to policy-level support in a semi-urban set-up (Dharashiv) grapples with factor challenges. The UDISE+ (2024) report brings to the fore the differences in teacher training, curriculum transaction, and community participation across districts. At most schools, LSE is further marginalised by featuring in co-scholastic periods that are not assessed, which tends to devalue it (ASER Centre, 2023).

In addition, cultural standards and the expectations of one's parents also dictate how life skills are accepted and exercised. For example, gender-friendly conversation and expressive sensitivity can face resistance in conservative cultures (Kumar & Rani, 2023). This speaks to the importance of culture-infused pedagogy and curriculum building that is site-specific.

2.4 Theoretical Models Informing LSE

One such model is the Targeting Life Skills (TLS; Hendricks, 1998) model, which has been adapted and validated for Indian settings, and serves as a model that we used as an organizing framework to present how life skills and its links to functioning (competencies at the more specific and least specific levels) among Indian youths at the last mile. It highlights active learning, reflection, and practical application of knowledge—ideas resonated in CBSE's activity-based LSE modules.

Further, the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework by CASEL (Collaborative for the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) is being increasingly adapted in Indian pilot programs as a well-structured program for integrating emotional intelligence in the classroom practices (Tagat *et al.,* 2025).

2.5 Research Gaps and Future Directions

Although the national studies provide important information, there is limited localized research in semi-urban districts such as Dharashiv to provide a perspective of the experiences of students and teachers. The majority of this literature is based on urban and at times pan-India samples and does not take into consideration the complex socio-cultural underpinnings affecting LSE. This has been missing in the debate and will be explored in our study to provide empirically grounded context-specific evidence.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research utilises a qualitative-descriptive research design which is well suited to examining nuanced behavioural outcomes and their contextual implementation practices. However, the design method ensures detailed and human-centred knowledge on how Life Skills Education (LSE) gets into the school system and shapes students' behaviour within a semi-urban setting such as Dharashiv.

3.2 Research Setting

The study setting Dharashiv district, Maharashtra is a semi-urban area with a wide range of established prevailing social and cultural patterns, with moderate literacy rates and emerging education infrastructure. The mixture of government and private schools in the district formed an excellent setting to explore different forms of LSE implementation.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling has been used to choose schools and participants who are involved in LSE practices. The whole sample was 70 subjects, distributed as follows:

- 50 students (6th–10th graders) who were exposed to LSE modules for a minimum of one academic year
- 10 teachers tasked to teach LSE material
- 5 school administrators who are watching curriculum integration
- 5 parents to offer local insights.

This sample allowed a triangulated view of the perspectives across stakeholders.

3.4 Data Collection Methods
The following instruments were used to assess the range and complexity of experiences:
- **Interviews:** Teachers, administrators, and parents were interviewed in a semi-structured way.
- **F**ocus group discussions (FGDs), stratified by age and sex among adolescent students
- Classroom observations using WHO's LSE framework with behavioural checklist
- Teacher reflective journals kept during the weekly LSE sessions, and student reactions

All instruments were pilot-tested in a similar school that was not included in the sample to examine clarity and cultural relevance.

3.5 Data Analysis
Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically six-stage process:
- Familiarization with data

- Generating initial codes
- Searching for themes
- Reviewing themes
- Defining and naming themes
- Producing the report

NVivo 14 software was used to manage and code qualitative data systematically.

3.6 Ethical Considerations
Ethics approval. This study followed the ethical principles stated in the:
- Consent was obtained from all subjects and their parents. Companion Papers: There are no companion papers
- Anonymization of data and confidentiality of storage
- Participation voluntarily with the possibility to withdraw throughout the process
- Consent from the Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) of that locality

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS
4.1 Overview of Data Interpretation
The thematic analysis of 70 participants, including students, teachers, administrators and parents, also revealed patterns with regard to behavioural outcomes and implementation practices. Results are reported in descriptive summaries and illustrative tables, which convey frequency as well as depth of answers.

4.2 Student Behavioural Outcomes

Table 1: Observed Behavioural Changes Among Students (n = 50)

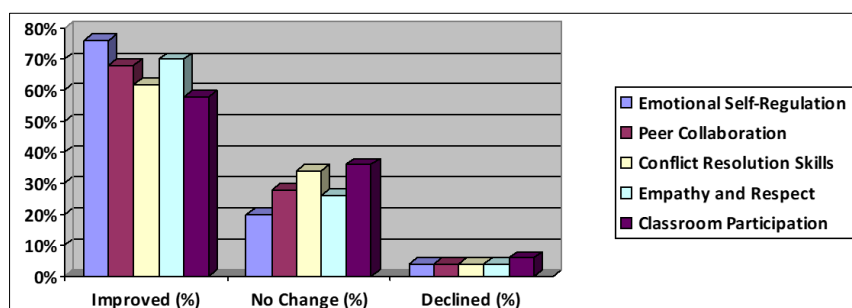| Behavioural Indicator	Improved (%)	No Change (%)	Declined (%)
Emotional Self-Regulation	76%	20%	4%
Peer Collaboration	68%	28%	4%
Conflict Resolution Skills	62%	34%	4%
Empathy and Respect	70%	26%	4%
Classroom Participation	58%	36%	6%

Figure 1: Observed Behavioural Changes Among Students (n = 50)

There was significant improvement in emotional self-regulation and empathy among the majority of students enrolled in LSE modules, indicating that the LSE modules are facilitating the development of interpersonal awareness. Trends were also positive for peer collaboration and conflict resolution with peers, with better results for schools in which LSE was integrated into co-curricular activities. Few students had no change or to slight decrease, usually associated with nonuniform exposure or absence of parental support.

4.3 Gender-Based Behavioural Patterns

Table 2: Gender Differences in Key Behavioural Outcomes

Behavioural Domain	Girls Improved (%)	Boys Improved (%)
Empathy and Respect	82%	60%
Conflict Resolution	70%	54%
Emotional Regulation	78%	72%
Leadership in Group Tasks	64%	68%

Girls experienced greater increases in empathy and conflict resolution, while boys demonstrated slightly more leadership in group activities. These tendencies, therefore, partly result from the impact of LSE and partly from the social and cultural norms in Dharashiv.

Teachers observed that girls were happy to express themselves through reflective activities, whilst boys responded more clearly to role-play and scenarios.

4.4 Teacher and Administrator Perspectives

Table 3: Perceived Challenges in LSE Implementation (n = 15)

Challenge	Frequency Reported	Percentage (%)
Lack of Formal Training	12	80%
Time Constraints in the Timetable	10	67%
Absence of Assessment Tools	9	60%
Limited Parental Involvement	8	53%
Cultural Resistance to Topics	6	40%

Reasons for these include: a lack of teacher training to teach LSE, resulting in variation and superficiality of LSE delivery. Limitations in time and a lack of established tools for assessment also weakened the study's effects. Curiously, cultural resistance, particularly in matters of gender sensitivity, was more rampant in the rural hinterlands in Dharashiv.

4.5 Emergent Themes from Qualitative Data

Key themes. There were several themes derived from thematically coding the interviews and focus groups:

- **Theme 1:** LSE as Safe Space – Non-Judgmental and Relatable – Students characterised LSE sessions as "non-judgmental" and "relatable" when delivered through stories or games.
- **The me 2:** Behavioural Spillover - Teachers reported that learners started to use the LSE outside the classroom as when conflict resolution at the playground or assisting fellow learners.
- **Theme 3:** Localisation Required – Participants stressed the need for local language and examples that participants can 'identify with their culture' to facilitate engagement.

4.6 Summary of Key Findings

- Positive behavioural trends were observed in over 70% of participants across emotional regulation and peer relationships.
- Gendered process indicates divergent learning preferences and performance.
- Obstacles to implementation — particularly on training and time — restrict scalability.
- Qualitative findings corroborate the fact that LSE leads to a more inclusive and caring school atmosphere if implemented pervasively.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Interpretation of Key Findings

The research has found that practically implemented LSE in the school curriculum in Dharashiv has contributed significantly to the improvement of children's behavioural outcomes, such as how they regulate their emotions, empathize with others, and work collaboratively with peers. These results are related to national and international evidences, which highlight the transmutative power of LSE in the development of psychosocial competence (WHO, 2023).

The gender-specific patterns we found (higher improvement in empathy among girls and in leadership among boys) seem to indicate both the success of the LSE and the impact of socio-cultural norms. These results support Joseph and Thomas's (2024) observations of similar behavioural disparities in schools in Maharashtra and argue for the teaching of LSE through a gender-sensitive pedagogy.

5.2 Alignment with Existing Literature

Results support the broad literature on the effects of LSE. Tagat *et al.,* (2025) observed that school-based structured life-skills interventions significantly enhanced adolescents' self-efficacy and the level of task commitment to the school. Likewise, cultural embeddedness may serve as a barrier in semi-urban setups, and therefore Kumar and Rani (2023) highlighted concerns about the need to adapt contextually, since not many open conversations about emotional wellness and gender equity may exist, due to counter-cultural acts.

The reported barriers to successful enactment—including absence of teacher preparation and time restrictions—are consistent with those found in ASER Centre (2023) and UDISE+ (2024). These systemic obstacles justify the place for institutional backing and policy confluence to ensure LSE does not get side-lined as co-scholastic solecism.

5.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

The implications for practice are several, based on the results obtained:

- Curriculum development: LSE should be integrated into academic education through experiential and culturally appropriate methodologies.
- Building capacity among educators: Continuous teacher professional development training is important for teachers, as they are not born to teach the LSE programme.
- Assessment Structure: Behavioural rubrics and reflective instruments need to be created to monitor student progress in a well-informed manner.

These suggestions are in line with the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (Ministry of Education, 2022), which promotes competency-based, inclusive education.

5.4 Limitations and Scope for Future Research
Although the study provides in-depth local knowledge on the topic, it is qualitative and focused on a specific region. While sufficient for a thematic analysis, the sample size may not be representative of the broader range of views in Dharashiv. Longitudinal tracking was also not performed in the study, which may provide further insight into the durability of changes in behaviour.

In the future, the mix method study to include the quantitative behavioral scales and other districts for comparison may be considered. Investigating the place of digital technology in providing LSE— in particular in post pandemic hybrid classrooms—is also a positive route to follow.

6. CONCLUSION
Integration of Life Skills Education (LSE) into the school curriculum: An Experiment in Dharashiv and Its Effectiveness on School-Going Students' Behaviour. Life skills education (LSE) refers to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for the development and maintenance of healthy life and personal relationships. Based on a qualitative-descriptive approach, findings of the study indicated that when the structured implementation of LSE, delivered through activities such as role-play, story telling and group discussions, directly impacted the students' behaviours in very practical ways (e.g., emotional regulation, empathy, and peer collaborative behaviours).

The results suggested that more than 70% of participants in the study had acquired better interpersonal understanding and self-awareness, indicating that LSE has a potential in facilitating holistic development of learners in terms of their emotional intelligence. Gender specific patterns provided more information, with girls reaching high gains in empathy and boys focusing on collaborative leadership activities. These trends suggest that the positive effects of LSE are general and that its effects are influenced by socio-cultural factors and pedagogical didactics.

Despite this promise, several implementation difficulties emerged from this study: lack of teacher training, low parental involvement, and weak integration into core academic subjects. These are barriers that indicate the necessity for a more systematic, policy-oriented commitment to LSE that embraces a focus on teacher capacity development and locally based curriculum development.

LSE in Dharashiv has indeed emerged as more than an educational add-on; it has become a tool to mould life-ready students. By treating life skills as core, not as add-ons, schools can cultivate environments in which behavioural competence flourishes alongside educational accomplishment. The study confirms the benefits of education that is based around people and for all, and makes a powerful case for the scaling and sustaining of LSE across a wide range of settings.

7. Conflicts of Interest
The author has no conflicts of interest related to this study. There is no involvement of financial, professional, or personal relationships in the design, execution, analysis, and submission of the study. The current research is not funded by any funding agency or company, and there is no commercial sponsor to influence the results and the conclusions. Ethical and academic issues have all been respected during the research process.

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