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## Effect of Life Skills Training on Social Skills of Slum Youth

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### Abstract

Social competence is the ability to interact with people, build and form quality interpersonal relationships for successful adaptation. Good Social Skills promote self confidence when interacting with others and gives a sense of belongingness, avoiding the fear of rejection by friends, family, peers and or significant others. Not all have the ability to develop required skill sets to handle oneself and interact with others for successful adaptation. Life Skills are “those skills that enable individuals to succeed in the different environments in which they live such as school, home and in their neighborhoods. Life skills can be behavioral (communicating effectively with peers and adults) or cognitive (making effective decisions); interpersonal (being assertive) or intrapersonal (setting goals)” Danish, et al., (2004). They are essential for successful adaptation and are basic developmental building blocks of human existence. The main objective of this study was to examine the effect of Life Skills Training on Social Skills of 60 college going slum youth (both male and female) aged 15 to 22 years. A single group quasi-experimental design, with pre and post test was adopted. A 30 hour Life Skills Training intervention program was carried out. Life Skills Assessment Scale by Nair et al. (2010) was used for this study. The results confirm that Life Skills Training intervention has had a significant impact on enhancing the Social Skills of slum youth. It was also found that strengthening of ‘self awareness’ skill through appropriate training activities and exercises has helped strengthen their self expression and self confidence thereby enhancing their social competencies.

**Keywords:** Life Skills Training, Life Skills, Slum Youth, Social Skills.

### Introduction

Social competence consists of social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral skills which are essential for an individual to successfully adapt with the people and society. Social competence has been described as consisting of the personal knowledge and skills which a person develops in order to deal effectively with life’s many choices, challenges, and opportunities (Leffert, Benson, & Roehlkepartan, 1997). Social competencies play a vital role in adolescent and youth development. Successful adaptation to the roles as a process of growth and development depends

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on how well adolescents/ youth have acquired the social skills apart from the emotional, cognitive and psycho social competencies which are essential for optimal functioning and well being. This study explores the effect of Life Skills Training (adopting the 10 core Life Skills as stated by WHO 1997) on the Social Skills of college going slum youth.

### **Facets of Social Competence**

Social Competence is defined as the “capacity to coordinate adaptive responses flexibly to various interpersonal demands and to organize social behaviour in different social contexts in a manner beneficial to oneself and consistent with social conventions and morals” (Bierman, 2004). Having such competence also means to possess the ability to take another’s perspectives, empathise with them and their situation, learn from past experiences and apply that learning to the changes in social interactions. Being socially competent means to be able to create an impact on others by understanding their expressed thoughts and feelings resulting in a win-win situation. Such competencies help individuals to function successfully in social situations and enhance self confidence. Argyle (1999) defines social competence as ability, the mastery of social skills, which make it possible to generate the desired effect in social relationships. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL 2003) emphasize that Social and Emotional Skills (SEL) are decisive in being a good student, citizen and worker. In a nutshell, social competence facilitates the understanding of self in relation to others, enhance self and interpersonal knowledge, inculcates positive self identity, fosters formation of quality friendships, builds positive social values, strengthens relationships with family, peers and others, helps in handling and resolving interpersonal social conflicts and gives a feeling of ‘belongingness’ thereby reducing the risk of being rejected. Various definitions have been cited by researchers emphasizing on self, intra personal, inter personal, situational, social context, emotional or and cognitive abilities which are essential for mental health and well being.

### **Life Skills**

Spence (2003) describes Life Skills as “essential abilities that help promote mental well-being and competence in young people as they face the realities of life.” Life Skills can be applied for gaining awareness of self, understanding others, and taking informed decisions for positive behaviour, the goal being promoting health and wellbeing at the individual, familial, societal and community levels. Life Skills are universally applicable to all, are generic in nature though some of the core Life Skills is used in specific situations and combinations to overcome problems and deal with risks. The ten core Life Skills by WHO 1997 are – Self awareness, Empathy, Effective Communication, Interpersonal Relationships, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Problem Solving, Decision Making, Coping with Emotions and Coping with Stress. These core skills may be categorized into Social Skills (Self awareness, Empathy, Effective Communication and Interpersonal Relationships), Thinking Skills (Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making) and Coping Skills (Coping with Emotions and Coping with Stress).

The term competency and skills may overlap and used interchangeably, but both have different meanings. A skill is seen as the ability to perform tasks and solve problems, while a competency is seen as the ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education,



work, personal or professional development). So here, when we discuss about Life Skills, it embodies the characteristics of both skills and competency—Life Skills as defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) is an ability to do something (skill) and when an individual is introduced to Life Skills through training intervention, it gives scope for understanding and space for practice of the skills in conducive environments, thereby fostering the process of internalization resulting in positive behaviour, which is when it transcends to competency. “Life Skills involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context” OECD (2003). Competencies change and develop through our life span, gaining strength as we mature (an adult) and show signs of decline as we grow older.

### Objectives

1. To ascertain the level of Social Skills among college slum youth
2. To examine the effect of Life Skills Training on Social Competence of college slum youth

### Definition of the terms used for this study

**Life Skills:** Life Skills is defined as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life” WHO (1997).

**Social Competence:** Social competence involves understanding self and others’ needs and feelings, taking others perspectives, communicating effectively, initiating, maintaining friendships and adapting to different social situations. Social Skills comprises of the following four dimensions:

- Self-awareness: It is awareness about oneself and includes recognition of oneself, one’s strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes.
- Empathy: The ability to understand, accept and share the feelings of another person.
- Effective Communication: It is the ability to express oneself verbally and non-verbally in ways appropriate to the context and culture.
- Interpersonal Relationships: These are skills to initiate and maintain positive relationships with other individuals and disassociate unconstructive relationships with minimum disturbance to both.

**Slum Youth:** Slum youth are those persons including both boys and girls aged 15 to 22 years, pursuing either their first or second year Pre-degree course/ Bachelors degree in Arts, Humanities or Commerce from city colleges of Bengaluru city and live in slums of Rajendranagara, Lakshmi Rao Nagar, Neelasandra and Basavanagudi in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

### Materials and Method

#### (a) Participants

The sample of the study consisted of (n=60), college youth from slums, going to Arts & Science Colleges of Bengaluru City, between age group of 15 to 22 years, both boys and



girls (boys=10, girls =50). Purposive sampling method was adopted, as the sample was restricted to those slum youth who were beneficiaries of an NGO in Bengaluru City.

(b) Research Design

A single group quasi- experimental research design was adopted, following a pre and post test.

(c) Measures

The variables of the study were Life Skills Training (independent variable) and Life Skills (dependent variable). The tool used for the study was Life Skills Assessment Scale by Nair et al. (2010). It is a multidimensional standardised scale, consisting of 100 items, in English language, with statements adopting a five point Likert scale for respondents to mark the responses which is most descriptive of them, viz., 'Always true of me, Very true of me, Sometimes true of me, Occasionally true of me and Not at all true of me'. The scale has both positive and negative items. The maximum Life Skills score that can be obtained is 500 and maximum score that can be obtained in the four dimensions of Social Skills is 210. Table 1 gives the dimensions of Social Skills, the number of items and maximum score that can be obtained in each Life Skill.

**Table 1 Dimensions of Life Skills with Number of Items & Maximum Score that is obtained**

S. No	Categories	Dimensions of Life Skills	No. of Items	Maximum Score
1	Social Skills	Self Awareness	11	55
2		Empathy	11	55
3		Effective Communication	09	45
4		Interpersonal Relationships	11	55
5	Thinking Skills	Critical Thinking	11	55
6		Creative Thinking	08	40
7		Problem Solving	09	45
8		Decision Making	11	55
9	Coping Skills	Coping with Emotions	11	55
10		Coping with Stress	08	40
		<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>500</b>

The reliability co-efficient of the tool by Cronbach's alpha = 0.84, test re-test = 0.91 and split-half coefficient =0.82. Face, content and criterion validity were established for this tool.



(d) The Intervention

For this study, the total duration of Life Skills Training intervention was for 30 hours, 15 sessions of 2 hours each, conducted every Sunday of the week for four months. The participants were divided into two groups of 35 and 25 each adhering to the norms of 'maximum group size' of a Life Skills Training program. The training was carried out in a community hall in the slums, for batch one (n=25) from 9:30am – 11:30am, followed by batch two (n=35), from 12 noon to 2:00pm. The exact same training content and procedure were followed. All the ten core Life Skills recommended by WHO were handled within the time allotted during the Life Skills Training intervention. The researcher being a trained Life Skills trainer, facilitated the entire training sessions.

As the intervention was carried out in a community setting, the activities were designed keeping that in mind. The focus of the activities was development of generic skills, with application to specific day to day life contexts of the participants. Active participatory learning methods such as brainstorming, discussions (in small groups), games, storytelling, case study analysis, reflection and experience sharing, were chosen for transacting the modules. The overall approach followed in transacting Life Skills and transferring them to the youth was first to deal with the meaning of the Life Skill, its process, followed by its practice. The steps followed in the Life Skills Training intervention were (i) being aware of possession of Life Skills in self, (ii) learning and understanding the process of acquisition and (iii) finally translating this knowledge into attitude and skills with the disposition to consciously practice them for positive behaviour in specific situations and in daily life. The exercises covered in transacting Social Skills, namely self awareness, were understanding of 'self' as 'I' and 'me' through drawing and self expression. Appropriate games and exercises to understand self concept, self esteem and exploring oneself through SWOT analysis were carried out. Storytelling and real life examples, situation analysis, games and role play helped to transact the skills of empathy, effective communication and interpersonal relationship skills. The participants also shared their personal experiences and actively participated in the various activities.

Life Skills Assessment Scale was administered during the pre and post test phase. The data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

### Results and Discussion

Objective 1: To ascertain the level of Social Skills among college slum youth before Life Skills Training Intervention



The level of Social Skills before Life Skills Training intervention is given in Table 1.1

**Table 1.1: Level of Social Skills of College Slum Youth before Life Skills Training Intervention**

Social Skills Levels based on Norms in Life Skills Assessment Scale	SOCIAL SKILLS							
	Self awareness		Empathy		Effective Communication		Interpersonal Relationship	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Very High</b>	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-
<b>High</b>	13	21.67	5	8.33	5	8.33	4	6.66
<b>Average</b>	38	63.33	35	58.33	47	78.33	37	61.67
<b>Low</b>	8	13.33	19	31.67	8	13.34	19	31.67
<b>Very Low</b>	1	1.67	1	1.67	0	-	0	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

The frequency distribution given in Table 1.1 indicates that a majority of slum youth fall in the average category and few in the low scorer category with respect to the Social Skills dimensions, namely, Self awareness, Empathy, Effective Communication and Interpersonal Relationship skills. Two of them have got very low scores in dimensions of Self awareness and Empathy skill and none in the very high score category.

In Self awareness dimension (High scorers =13, Average scorers =38, Low scorers =8 and Very Low scorer=1); Empathy dimension (High scorers =5, Average scorers =35, Low scorers =19 and Very Low scorer=1); Effective Communication dimension (High scorer=5, Average scorer=47, Low scorer=8, Very Low Scorer=0); Interpersonal Relationship dimension (High scorer=4, Average scorer=37, Low scorer=19, Very Low Scorer=0). The maximum number of participants (47) have obtained Average scores in Effective Communication, (78.33%) which is the maximum among the other Social Skills.



## Discussion

Life Skills are present in every individual, but in order to be aware and practice it, Life Skills Training or Life Skills Education is the best possible tool. With respect to slum youth, majority possess average levels of Social Skills and the rest have low or very low scores. This indicates that there is a need for Life Skills Training to enhance their Social Skills for better adaptation.

**Objective 2: To examine the effect of Life Skills Training on Social Competence of college slum youth**

### Hypothesis

*H<sub>a1</sub>. There would be significant improvement in Social Skills after Life Skills Training intervention among college youth in slums*

**Table 2.1: Mean, Standard Deviation and t values of Social Skills of Slum Youth before and after Life Skills Training intervention**

Social Skills	Mean		SD		N	't' value	df	Sig.(2 Tailed)
	Pre Test	Post Test	Pre Test	Post Test				
Self Awareness	39.43	41.80	5.130	5.399	60	-2.785	59	0.007**
Empathy	37.28	40.00	4.851	4.665	60	-4.046	59	0.000**
Effective Communication	28.48	30.30	3.955	4.035	60	-2.725	59	0.008**
Interpersonal Relationship	36.48	38.87	4.619	5.150	60	-3.224	59	0.002**
Over all Social Skills	141.68	150.97	12.081	12.999	60	-4.964	59	0.000**

\*\* Significance at 0.01

Paired sample t test was carried out to compare the pre with post test Social Skills scores and ascertain the effect of the intervention on the dimensions of Social Skills. N=60 and df is 59.

There is a significant difference in Self awareness Pre-Test scores (M=39.43, SD=5.130) and Post -Test (M=41.80, SD=5.399) conditions,  $t(59)=-2.785$ ,  $p=0.007$ ; Empathy Pre-Test scores (M=37.28, SD=4.851) and Pot-Test (M=40.0, SD=4.665) conditions  $t(59) = -4.046$ ,



$p < 0.001$  ; Effective Communication Pre –Test scores ( $M=28.48$ ,  $SD=3.955$ ) and Post-Test ( $M=30.30$ ,  $SD=4.035$ ) conditions,  $t(59)=-2.725$ ,  $p=0.008$ ; Interpersonal Relationship Pre – Test scores ( $M=36.48$ ,  $SD=4.619$ ) and Post-Test ( $M=38.87$ ,  $SD=5.150$ ) conditions  $t(59) = -3.224$ ,  $p=0.002$ . There is a significant difference in overall Social Skills Pre-Test scores ( $M=141.68$ ,  $SD=12.081$ ) and Post-Test ( $M=150.97$ ,  $SD=12.999$ ) conditions,  $t(59) = -4.964$ ,  $p=0.000$  ( $p < 0.001$ )

From the results, it is indicative that, the alternate Hypothesis  $H_{a1}$  that '*there would be significant improvement in Social Skills after Life Skills Training intervention among college youth in slums*' is accepted. Hence, it could be concluded that the intervention was effective in improving the Social Skills of college slum youth.

#### **Discussion:**

On analysing the dimensions of Social Skills, namely 'self awareness', it is seen that their pre and post test scores have improved. Paired sample t- test of pre and post test scores revealed significant changes in all dimensions of the Social Skills, viz. Self awareness, Empathy, Effective Communication and Interpersonal Relationship. College slum youth have showed significant improvement in their Social Skills.

The activities conducted to explore self and enhance self expression through drawing and art may have fostered this. The major themes that emerged from the drawings by participants portraying 'SELF' were - their strengths, hobbies, focus on future such as to get a good job, build and own a house, buy a vehicle, take care of family, be independent and earn money. Some of the respondents (college slum youth) expressed their most memorable moments in life and their personality. The respondents also showed willingness and ability to help and understand family members and others, show empathy to other fellow humans and animals. Spirituality and dimensions of personality were some of the other themes that emerged from the drawings. One take away from this drawing activity on expression of 'Self' is that the needs and wants of the sample slum youth follow the pattern of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs- first fulfilling the basic needs and then moving on to higher needs.

The self awareness skill has helped them understand where they stand with respect to other Life Skills, especially – social skills. Activities during the intervention, helped to enhance their empathy skills, understand the needs and feelings of others, communicate effectively and appropriately which has led to strengthening their interpersonal relationship skills. Slum youth had immense self confidence, showed much ability in self expression and enhanced their Social competence after the 30 hour Life Skills Training intervention which goes to show that there has been a positive effect of Life Skills Training intervention on the Social Skills of slum youth, thereby enhancing their social competence.



Studies have shown that Life Skills Training has been effective in increasing self-esteem of adolescents (Yadav and Iqbal 2009), Life skills programs help in effectively enhancing personal and social competencies (Botvin & Griffin, 2004), Life Skills Training intervention has shown significant improvement in all Life Skills (Ramola et al. 2017), Life Skills Training had an overall positive effect on the social and academic adjustment of the students and it was also found that the self-awareness skill variable had a greater affect than the other skills Manee et.al (2015). Life Skills Training had a positive impact on self-awareness and interpersonal skills of adolescents (Suresh and Vivek 2014).

#### **Limitations:**

Having a small sample size is a limitation. A longer duration of Life Skills Training would help to gain in-depth perspectives of each core Life Skills. Other variables could have been added in the study to assess the positive outcomes.

#### **Conclusion**

Life Skills are a comprehensive set of universal cognitive and non-cognitive skills and abilities, connecting behavior, attitudes, and knowledge, which individuals can develop and practice throughout their lives. These skills increase well-being and help them to develop into active and productive members of their communities. Reviews on enhancing social competence, emphasise that increases in well-being, thriving, and social contributions are possible for all if their strengths are accompanied by adequate social support. Developing Social Skills enables individuals to be aware of the dimensions of self, understand the interplay of social skills in others, gain perspectives of self and others, thus be able to interact and adjust with people and situations positively.

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