

Life Skills-Based Education Practices and Students' Skill Development in Pakistan



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Abstract: *The present study is quantitative in nature, which aimed to investigate the practices of life skills based education and skill development of the students in selected higher education institutions of Islamabad, Pakistan. A total of 400 students from Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, International Islamic University Islamabad and Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad were selected for the sample. Life Skills based education practices were independent variable and the cognitive, emotional, social and independent skill outcomes were dependent. The data were analyzed using frequency, percentages, mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficient Pearson product-moment. The descriptive data revealed that there were mixed trends in the practices of life skills-based education; high percentages of agreement were found for the following items: Including life skills in assignments; frequent use of life skills activities; University opportunities for applied learning; however, several items related to classroom practice indicated more disagreement. Skill responses in the cognitive and emotional domains were also varied with somewhat higher levels of agreement for judging information and thinking about goals, and somewhat less for identifying consequences and solving academic and everyday problems. There were more positive patterns for the social and/or independent skills, especially for understanding perspectives, respectful interpersonal relationships, leadership confidence and responsibility. The correlation results showed that there were significant positive correlations between the Life skills based education practices with communication skills, decision making skills, problem solving skills and critical thinking. The study ends with the conclusion that life skills education must be integrated in a systematic way in all aspects of the university teaching, using participative learning, applied tasks, reflective learning, and structured students' supports.*

Keywords: Life Skills Based Education; Skill Development; Communication Skill; Decision-Making Skill; Critical Thinking.

Introduction

In more recent times, education systems worldwide have been under increasing pressure to educate learners for more complex social, economic, technological, and emotional requirements than the provisioning of subject knowledge. This change has propelled life skills education from the sidelines of co-curriculum to the heart of the educational quality dialogue, the link to work readiness, citizenship and the needs

of students' health and well-being. In general, global policy documents define life skills as psychosocial skills that enable adaptive and positive behavior and aspects of this include communication, decision-making, problem solving, critical thinking, self-awareness, emotional control, cooperation and responsible participation in society. The recent World Health Organization handbook on health promotion in schools highlights life skills as a cornerstone of health promoting education and

international evidence about social and emotional learning demonstrates that structured social and emotional learning programs have positive impacts on attitudes, behavior, achievement and adjustment over time (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017; World Health Organization, 2020).

Labor-market transformation is also an important factor in the global trend. Employers are increasingly looking for graduates who can make analytical decisions, are interpersonal, flexible, ethical, leaders, and resilient. These expectations are not restricted to the professional areas and apply to students in all areas of social sciences, humanities, science, technology, teacher education and distance education. So, life skills education is related to real-world problem solving, group work, emotional management and civic involvement. Research on social and emotional learning has demonstrated that SEL programs are more effective when they explicitly teach, sequence, actively practice, and integrate SEL with the institutional environment rather than being provided in standalone lectures, or a handful of occasional seminars (Sklad et al., 2012; Wigelsworth et al., 2016).

Life skills-based education is an issue that has been highlighted in South Asia due to the multiple pressures on the lives of the youth, including population growth, altered labor markets, urbanisation, digital exposure, social inequalities, mental health issues, and more. Life skills education has been identified as a relevant method to assist learners in decision-making, using communication skills effectively, and managing risks (UNICEF, 2012; UNICEF, 2019) in UNICEF's work at global and regional levels. Life skills are introduced to the South Asian education systems via school health initiatives, youth development initiatives, curriculum changes, teacher training and non-formal initiatives. Nevertheless, these efforts have not always been successful, due to the continuing tendency towards examination-oriented pedagogy in the classroom, the lack of teacher training, and the continued focus on the achievement of recall over skills.

Pakistan is not an exception to this

challenge of the region, but has its own institutional realities. Communication, critical thinking, problem solving, emotional awareness and social responsibility are gradually becoming part of the national education discourse as important outcomes. In recent times, Pakistani curriculum documents and life skills modules have tried to link the students' well-being, citizenship, employment and academic success with life skills. Meanwhile, there remains a significant pressure to cover content in many classrooms, small ratios, few counseling supports, and traditional assessment practices. Research in Pakistan indicates that teachers and students are aware of life skills importance, but it is not being used systematically in all schools, at all levels and in all teaching cultures (Arif, 2020; Maqsood et al., 2021; Rahat, 2020).

The problem is more acute at the higher education level as students in universities are at a time in life when they are deciding on a career, forming an identity, adjusting to social norms, and becoming more independent. The universities are expected to produce graduates who would be able to have information literacy, communication ability that transcends difference, leadership, conflict management, emotional management and responsibility as they would handle academic and social situations. The significance of these skills in the higher education sector in Islamabad is particularly important as students come from various regions, socioeconomic class, language and academic systems. Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, International Islamic University Islamabad and Allama Iqbal Open University are examples of different types of higher education, such as conventional, Islamic international and open distance learning, respectively. This diversity offers a valuable context for an analysis of the extent to which life skills-based education practices are seen as contributing to students' intellectual, emotional, social and interpersonal skills development.

Thus, the present study aims to explore the practices of Life Skills Based Education and the overall skill development of the students in Pakistan at Islamabad based public sector universities. The present study is of quantitative

type and data were collected from 400 students to discuss the relationship of life skills based education practices with decision making, problem solving, critical thinking, self-awareness, emotional management, communication, interpersonal relationship, conflict resolution, leadership and social responsibility. The study was an empirical descriptive-correlational study that gave empirical evidence on the perception of the implementation of life skills-based education and the results of students' life skills.

While higher education institutions in Pakistan place greater focus on academic content, and examination performance, they still seem to pay more attention to cognitive, emotional, social and interpersonal skills formation to a lesser extent. Pupils can have differential access to communication, problem solving, decision making, self-awareness, emotional control, leadership and social responsibility skills and practices. This study aims to fill the gap of quantitatively exploring the relationship between life skills-based education practices and skill development and to explore the extent of predicting key developmental outcomes of life skills-based education practices in public sector universities of Islamabad, Pakistan.

The first aim of this research is to explore the practices of LSBE and overall skill development of the students in Pakistan. This objective is also investigated as the first research question, which is what is the status of the life skills based education practices and overall skill development of students in selected higher education institutions in Islamabad Pakistan? The emphasis is on how students experience their learning space as participatory, reflective, problem-based, socially responsive and transferable. The second is to explore the practice of life skills-based education and students' cognitive and emotional skills by analyzing the students' decision making, problem solving, critical thinking, self-awareness and emotional management. This is also the second research question; how are the practices of Life Skills based education linked with the cognitive and emotional skills of

selected Higher Education Institutions Islamabad? The focus is on the importance of the role classroom activities, reflection, application, and student-centred pedagogy play in enhancing self-management and analytical skills. The third goal is to report on the predictive effect of practices of life skills education on students' social skills and interpersonal skills such as communication, interpersonal relations, conflict resolution, leadership and social responsibility. This objective is also the third research question: What is the extent of life skills based education practices predicting the development of students' social and interpersonal skills in the selected higher education institutions of Islamabad?

2. Literature Review

The philosophy behind life skills-based education is that education should nurture the whole person and not just the information on a particular topic. Current literature associates life skills with social and emotional learning, 21st century skills, employability skills, health education, citizenship education and positive youth development. Durlak et al. (2011) gave compelling support that SEL programs in schools had a positive effect on students' social-emotional competencies, values, actions, and grades. While the majority of their meta-analysis was conducted in school settings, these findings are applicable to the higher education setting as well since it is important for university students to have structured activities where they can practice decision-making, communicating, self-regulation, and responsible actions.

The evidence base has since been reinforced by further research. A universal social-emotional-behavioural program in schools was found to produce positive results with regard to skills, attitudes, behavior, and achievement (Sklad et al., 2012). Social and emotional learning interventions, after being shown to have benefits over time, indicate that when well-designed, skill-focused education can yield long-lasting developmental gains (Taylor et al., 2017). Wigelsworth et al. (2016) also noted that the quality of implementation is important; programs with curriculum content that is relevant to students and that are executed poorly may not result in good outcomes. The results

lend credence to the hypothesis that active pedagogy, institutional support, trained teachers, and measurement tools that reward learning of skills are needed in the practices of life skills.

Life skills-based education is also related to cognitive development. Interpretation, problem-solving, and critical thinking are important skills and are key to decision making as students are expected to evaluate alternatives and make responsible decisions in the academic and social contexts. Students need to question assumptions, analyze evidence and communicate arguments in a logical way to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills in which they need to recognize causes, suggest solutions, test options, and consider consequences. The study of 21st century learning also calls for a paradigm shift in teaching to include inquiry-based learning, collaborative projects, case-based discussion, and real-life scenarios over passive lecture-based learning (OECD, 2021; UNICEF, 2019). In this aspect, life skills education is not an academic learning outside the classroom, but rather a way of transferring academic learning to life.

Skills that relate to emotions and self are also important. Students will be able to identify their strengths and weaknesses, their values and their learning preferences, and will be able to manage their emotions such as stress, frustration, disagreement and uncertainty. According to MacCann et al. (2020), emotional intelligence is correlated with academic performance which means that the emotional abilities are not only personal but also educationally relevant abilities. Schonert-Reach (2017) stated that SEL must be supported by educators and institutional conditions, as students model how to manage their emotions in the classroom through the norms, relationships, feedback and models they see. Based on this literature, the present study would incorporate self-awareness and emotional management as a dependent variables.

The social and interpersonal aspect of the life skills are communication, interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, leadership and social responsibility. Higher education students

should have these skills as they will be expected to work in groups, make presentations, interact with peers, debate issues with academic rigor, engage in the community, and prepare for their future careers (UNICEF, 2012). Communication is listening, clarity, respectful expression and feedback. Interpersonal relationship skills are defined as working cooperatively, understanding or displaying empathy, trust and respect for diversity. Conflict resolution is about negotiation, perspective taking and nonviolent problem solving. Leadership is about taking initiative, working in teams, ethical influence and responsibility. Social responsibility is the involvement in the common welfare, respect for rights and awareness of civic responsibility. UNICEF (2012) highlighted the importance of life skills education to enable learning to handle risks in everyday life and to be able to play a productive role in society.

The literature reveals increasing interest in Pakistan regarding the life skills and its implementation is not uniform throughout the country. Arif (2020) examined the life skills of college students and pointed out the importance of communication, interpersonal skills, decision making, problem solving and self-esteem. Rahat (2020) studied the practices of life skill development in secondary schools of Islamabad and found that communication, critical thinking and problem solving were the areas the teachers were paying attention to in teaching life skills in their respective schools, however the findings also indicated that the methods of teaching the life skills differed from school to school. Maqsood et al. (2021) discovered that teachers believed that life skills were important for the students in the K-12 level and especially in the areas of critical thinking, problem-solving, self-management and socialization. This research indicates that life skills have gained significance in the eyes of the teachers in Pakistan, however, it also highlights the need for systematic integration of life skills in the curriculum, rather than individual life skills activities.

Life skills in Pakistan is not only been included in the policy and curriculum level, but also associated with curriculum reform, youth development, gender awareness and

employability. In recent documents of life skills education in Pakistan, cognitive skills like critical thinking and problem solving, communication skills, emotional skills and social responsibility are highlighted. Presently, there is an awareness that life skills need to be structured and incorporated in mainstream education in Higher education in Punjab, which led to the development of life skills module for Higher education Department of Punjab, where the lecturers were taught how to incorporate life skills in their college education. However, the literature suggests that implementation is more likely to be robust when teachers are trained, the curriculum is clear and well defined, classroom activities are active, and assessment systems are based on knowledge more than skills.

The gap that the present study fills is that there is a scarce quantitative study for the life skills based education practices and skill development of students in Universities of Islamabad. Research that already exists tends to be about the schools, teachers' perceptions, curriculum content, or general knowledge about life skills. Less focus has been on the perception of university students regarding the educational practices associated with life skills education, as well as the prediction of specific cognitive, emotional, social and interpersonal outcomes. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by quantitatively analyzing descriptive trends and correlational relationship between the variables involved in the study which are life skills based education practices and skill development variables of students.

2.1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was designed to establish the practices of education with life skills as an independent variable that affects the level of students' skill development. Communication skills, decision making skills, problem solving skills, critical thinking, self-awareness, emotional management, interpersonal relationship skills, conflict resolution, leadership skills and social responsibility are the dependent variables. The framework is based on the assumption that active learning in the classroom, reflective learning, group learning, problem solving tasks

and the discussion of the values strengthen the cognitive, affective, social and interpersonal development of the University students.

3. Research Methodology

The study was of quantitative research type which focused on the life skills based education practices and skill development of students in Pakistan. Target population was the students from Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, International Islamic University Islamabad and Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad. This analysis was based on 400 respondents. Life skills-based education practices was the independent variable with dependent variables of communication skills, decision making skills, problem solving skills, critical thinking, self-awareness, emotional management, interpersonal relationship skills, conflict resolution, leadership skills and social responsibility. It was assumed that data is gathered from a structured questionnaire that was created from the literature on life skills and social-emotional learning. Descriptive statistics were performed using SPSS and Pearson's correlation was done as the statistical software. The frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, correlation coefficients are analyzed through SPSS.

4. Results and Data Analysis

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents Regarding Socio-Economic Profile

Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	200	50.0
	Female	200	50.0
	Total	400	100.0
Age	18-20	165	41.3
	21-23	125	31.3
	24-26	70	17.5
	27 and above	40	10.0
	Total	400	100.0
Level of education	BS (4 year)	250	62.5
	BS (Bridging)	60	15.0
	MS/ M. Phil (18 year education)	60	15.0
	Ph. D.	30	7.5
	Total	400	100.0
Study mode	Regular/on-campus	290	72.5
	Distance/blended	70	27.5
	Total	400	100.0
Institution	Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad	150	37.5
	International Islamic University Islamabad	150	37.5
	Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad	100	25.0
	Total	400	100.0
Area background	Urban	300	75.0

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in this table. A total of 400 respondents were used. Based on gender there was an equal distribution of males and females with 200 males (50.0%) and 200 females (50.0%). With regards to age, the age group 18-20 comprised the largest number of the respondents (165, 41.3%) while the age group 21-23 had 125, 31.3%. The age group 24–26 years was the biggest (n = 70, 17.5%) and the age group 27 years and older was the smallest (n = 40, 10.0%).

Most of the respondents were in a BS four-year program (n = 250, 62.5%) with respect to level of education. The educational group that represented 15.0% of the total sample was from BS Bridging programs while 15.0% were from MS/M.Phil. programs, and the smallest educational group was Ph.D. scholars (n = 30, 7.5%). As for the study mode, the majority of respondents were regular/on-campus (n = 290, 72.5%) while the rest were from distance/blended learning (n = 109, 27.5%). The number and percentage that are reported for this category, however, should be examined for consistency.

The respondents for the present study were selected from three universities on institution wise basis. Three universities, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad and International Islamic University Islamabad with 150 respondents each contributed 37.5% each, followed by Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad with 100 respondents. Finally, with respect to area background, the majority of the respondents were from the urban areas (n = 300, 75.0%) followed by the semi-urban (n = 75, 18.8%) and rural (n = 25, 6.2%) areas. Overall, the sample of students was predominantly urban, regular/on campus, and BS four-year students.

Table 2. Life Skills Based Education Practices

Statement	SA	A	NO	DA	SDA	f/ %	Mean	STD
My courses include activities that connect academic learning with real-life situations	27 (6.8)	92 (23.0)	76 (19.0)	186 (46.5)	19 (4.8)	400 (100)	3.08	0.94
Teachers encourage discussion, reflection, and participation during learning activities	41 (10.2)	104 (26.0)	46 (11.5)	201 (50.2)	8 (2.0)	400 (100)	3.31	0.88
Classroom tasks require students to apply knowledge to practical problems	40 (10.0)	142 (35.5)	41 (10.2)	163 (40.8)	14 (3.5)	400 (100)	3.38	0.92
Life skills topics are included in assignments and class activities	65 (16.2)	180 (45.0)	13 (3.2)	136 (34.0)	6 (1.5)	400 (100)	3.71	0.83
Teachers use group work to develop cooperation and responsibility	17 (4.2)	90 (22.5)	92 (23.0)	176 (44.0)	25 (6.2)	400 (100)	2.96	0.94
Courses encourage students to reflect on personal and social issues	46 (11.5)	160 (40.0)	13 (3.2)	172 (43.0)	9 (2.2)	400 (100)	3.55	0.82
Life skills activities are practiced regularly rather than discussed only theoretically	84 (21.0)	174 (43.5)	8 (2.0)	126 (31.5)	8 (2.0)	400 (100)	3.79	0.86
The university provides enough opportunities for applied life skills learning	93 (23.2)	163 (40.8)	3 (0.8)	133 (33.2)	8 (2.0)	400 (100)	3.83	0.86

Table 2 shows the perceptions of the respondents with regard to life skills based education practices. The highest amount of respondents, 186 (46.5%), disagreed, 92 (23.0%) agreed, 76 (19.0%) had no opinion, 27 (6.8%) strongly agreed, and 19 (4.8%) strongly disagreed, that courses connected academic learning with real-life situations. The mean score was 3.08, the SD was 0.94, and this represents a moderate amount of variation in responses.

The statement concerning teachers' encouragement of discussion, reflection and participation during learning activities, the highest number of respondents was disagree with 201 respondents (50.2%), followed by agree with 104 respondents (26.0%), no opinion with 46 respondents (11.5%), strongly agree with 41 respondents (10.2%), and strongly disagree with 8 respondents (2.0%). The average (mean) score was 3.31 with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.88.

As far as classroom tasks ask students to apply knowledge to solve practical problems is concerned, the majority disagreed (163, 40.8%), followed by agree (142, 35.5%), no opinion (41, 10.2%), strongly agree (40, 10.0%), and strongly disagree (14, 3.5%). The mean score was 3.38, and the standard deviation score was 0.92.

When asked if life skills topics should be included in assignments and class activities, the greatest number (130, 45.0%) agreed, 136 (34.0%) disagreed, 65 (16.2%) strongly agreed, 13 (3.2%) were undecided, and 6 (1.5%)

strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.71, standard deviation 0.83, with the overall trend of responses being comparatively positive.

The highest response for the statement that group work is integrated by the teacher to build cooperation and responsibility was disagree with 176 (44.0%) respondents, followed by no opinion with 92 (23.0%) respondents, and then agree with 90 (22.5%) respondents, strongly disagree with 25 (6.2%) respondents, and strongly agree with 17 (4.2%) respondents. This practice had a mean score of 2.96, which was slightly lower than the standard deviation (0.94) indicating a relatively weaker trend.

The highest response to the statement that courses encourage students to reflect on personal and social issues was disagree, with 172 (43.0%) respondents answering this, followed by agree, with 160 (40.0%) respondents answering this, strongly agree, with 46 (11.5%) respondents answering this, and strongly disagree, with 9 (2.2%) respondents answering this. The average score was 3.55 and the standard deviation was 0.82.

Furthermore, agree (174 respondents; 43.5%) was the highest trend for the statement: Life skills activities are done regularly not just talked about theoretically. Disagree (126 respondents; 31.5%), Strongly agree (84 respondents; 21.0%) and No opinion (8 respondents; 2.0%) were also reported, with strongly disagree (8 respondents; 2.0%) the lowest. The pattern of responses was more favorable with a mean score of 3.79 and a standard deviation of 0.86.

Last, in regard to the university offers sufficient opportunities for applied life skills learning, the highest response was agree (163, 40.8%), followed by disagree (133, 33.2%), strongly agree (93, 23.2%), strongly disagree (8, 2.0%) and no opinion (3, 0.8%). This statement was given the highest mean score of 3.83 (SD = 0.86) which shows that respondents agreed on this aspect of life skills based education practices comparatively.

Table 3. Cognitive and Emotional Skills

Statement	SA	A	NO	DA	SDA	f/ %	Mean	STD
Life skills-based activities improve my critical thinking	33 (8.2)	142 (35.5)	13 (3.2)	179 (44.8)	33 (8.2)	400 (100)	3.37	0.87
I can evaluate information before accepting it as valid	59 (14.8)	164 (41.0)	10 (2.5)	150 (37.5)	17 (4.2)	400 (100)	3.61	0.88
Learning activities help me compare alternatives before making decisions	95 (23.8)	101 (25.2)	32 (8.0)	150 (37.5)	22 (5.5)	400 (100)	3.51	1.15
Course tasks improve my ability to solve academic and daily problems	33 (8.2)	122 (30.5)	5 (1.2)	213 (53.2)	27 (6.8)	400 (100)	3.38	0.78
I can identify consequences before making important decisions	22 (5.5)	106 (26.5)	3 (0.8)	231 (57.8)	38 (9.5)	400 (100)	3.27	0.74
Learning activities help me understand my strengths and weaknesses	52 (13.0)	131 (32.8)	8 (2.0)	158 (39.5)	51 (12.8)	400 (100)	3.42	0.94
I reflect on my goals, values, and personal improvement needs	54 (13.5)	144 (36.0)	13 (3.2)	158 (39.5)	31 (7.8)	400 (100)	3.49	0.93
Life skills learning helps me manage academic stress and emotions	73 (18.2)	115 (28.7)	11 (2.8)	160 (40.0)	41 (10.2)	400 (100)	3.50	0.99

The descriptive analysis of respondents cognitive and emotional skills is shown in this table. Life skills-based activities, improve critical thinking was the most disagreed statement (44.8%) with 179 respondents, while 142 respondents (35.5%) agreed. There was a similar split between the numbers of respondents who strongly agreed and strongly disagreed, with 33 (8.2%) each, and no opinion was the lowest, with 13 (3.2%) respondents. The average score was 3.37, and the standard deviation for the scores was 0.87.

The respondents agreed most when they checked the statement that I accept information prior to the evaluation of it being valid with 164 respondents (41.0%). Disagreed with 150 respondents (37.5%), strongly agreed with 59 (14.8%), strongly disagreed with 17 (4.2%) and had a no opinion with 10 (2.5%) respondents. The mean score was 3.61, and the standard deviation was 0.88 which is a fairly positive trend.

The results with regard to comparison of alternatives before decision making as learning activity revealed that disagree was the highest in the respondents with 150 respondents (37.5%), followed by agree with 101 votes (25.2%), strongly agree with 95 votes (23.8%), no opinion with 32 votes (8.0%) and strongly disagree with 22 votes (5.5%). The mean score was 3.51, the standard deviation was 1.15.

The highest response of disagree (213 respondents, 63.2%) followed by agree (122 respondents, 30.5%) and strongly agree (33 respondents, 8.2%), strongly disagree (27

respondents, 6.8%) and no opinion (5 respondents, 1.2%) for the statement that course tasks help to solve academic and daily problems. The average score was 3.38 and the standard deviation score was 0.78.

The highest responses were 231 respondents (57.8%) disagreeing with the statement that respondents were able to identify consequences before making important decisions, followed by 106 respondents (26.5%) who agreed, 38 respondents (9.5%) who strongly disagreed, 22 respondents (5.5%) who strongly agreed, and 3 respondents (0.8%) who had no opinion. The mean score was 3.27 and the standard deviation was 0.74, which indicated a relatively less response trend.

39.5% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that learning activities enable respondents to know their strengths and weaknesses; 32.8% agreed with the statement; 13.0% strongly agreed with the statement; 12.8% strongly disagreed with the statement and 8 respondents (2.0%) had no opinion. The score mean was 3.42 and the standard deviation score was 0.94.

Respondents who agreed that they thought about their goals, values and personal improvement needs, 158 (39.5%) disagreed with the statement, 144 (36.0%) strongly agreed with it, 54 (13.5%) strongly disagreed with it, 31 (7.8%) agreed with it or 13 (3.2%) had no opinion respectively. The overall mean score was 3.49 and the overall standard deviation was 0.93.

Last but not least, in the case of life skills learning to help respondent in managing academic stress and emotions, the highest response was disagree (160 respondents or 40.0%), followed by agree (115 respondents or 28.7%), strongly disagree (41 respondents or 10.2%), strongly agree (73 respondents or 18.2%), and no opinion (11 respondents or 2.8%). The average score was 3.50 (SD 0.99).

The overall picture of the findings is mixed, with respect to cognitive skills and emotional skills. There were some relatively higher agreements with regard to some statements, such as, evaluating information

before taking it as valid. But the level of disagreement was higher in several statements, especially the ones that indicated consequences before making decisions and the ability to solve problems in school and everyday life, which indicate a need to strengthen development of cognitive and emotional skills further through the application of life skills education practices.

Table 4. Social and Independent Skills

Statement	SA	A	NO	DA	SDA	f/ %	Mean	STD
Presentations and discussions strengthen my communication skills	123 (30.8)	145 (36.2)	65 (16.2)	59 (14.8)	8 (2.0)	400 (100)	3.44	0.99
Group learning improves my ability to work with classmates	87 (21.8)	190 (47.5)	28 (7.0)	74 (18.5)	21 (5.2)	400 (100)	3.07	0.94
Life skills-based education improves respectful interpersonal relationships	76 (19.0)	220 (55.0)	33 (8.2)	54 (13.5)	17 (4.2)	400 (100)	3.13	0.90
Learning activities help me understand different viewpoints during disagreement	155 (38.8)	160 (40.0)	55 (13.8)	25 (6.2)	5 (1.2)	400 (100)	3.58	0.85
I can use dialogue to resolve conflicts constructively	85 (21.2)	188 (47.0)	47 (11.8)	59 (14.8)	21 (5.2)	400 (100)	3.19	1.00
Life skills activities strengthen my leadership confidence	91 (22.8)	201 (50.2)	27 (6.8)	65 (16.2)	16 (4.0)	400 (100)	3.12	0.90
My learning environment promotes responsibility and initiative	191 (47.8)	106 (26.5)	38 (9.5)	51 (12.8)	14 (3.5)	400 (100)	3.26	0.92
Courses encourage ethical behavior and social responsibility	123 (30.8)	131 (32.8)	98 (24.5)	41 (10.2)	7 (1.8)	400 (100)	3.72	1.06

The results of the respondents' perceptions of social and independent skills are shown in this table. The highest response for the statement that presentation and discussion reinforcement communication skills was agree with 145 (36.2%) followed by strongly agree with 123 (30.8%), no opinion with 65 (16.2%), disagree with 59 (14.8%), and strongly disagree with 8 (2.0%). The average was 3.44 and the standard deviation was 0.99.

The highest trend in group learning to improve the ability to collaborate with classmates is agree with 190 respondents (47.5 %), followed by 87 respondents (21.8 %) who agreed strongly, 74 respondents (18.5 %) who disagreed, 28 respondents (7.0 %) who have no opinion, and 21 respondents (5.2 %) who disagreed strongly. The average score was 3.07 with a standard deviation of 0.94.

When it comes to respectful interpersonal relations, 220 (55.0%) respondents agreed, 76 (19.0%) strongly agreed, 54 (13.5%) disagreed, 33 (8.2%) were undecided and 17 (4.2%) strongly disagreed. The average score was 3.13, and the standard deviation of the scores was 0.90.

The learning activities do provide opportunities for students to understand various perspectives when they disagree was the most popular response with 160 respondents agreeing (40.0%) followed closely by strongly agree (155, 38.8%), no opinion (55, 13.8%), disagree (25, 6.2%), and strongly disagree (5, 1.2%). The average score was 3.58 and the standard deviation was 0.85.

The students can use dialogue in a constructive way to settle conflicts was the answer that was most widely agreed upon (188 respondents 47.0%), followed by strongly agree (85 respondents 21.2%), disagree (59 respondents 14.8%), no opinion (47 respondents 11.8%) and strongly disagree (21 respondents 5.2%). The average score was 3.19 and the standard deviation was 1.00.

The highest response for the statement, life skills activities build confidence in leadership, was agree 201 respondents (50.2%), followed by strongly agree 91 respondents (22.8%), disagree 65 respondents (16.2%), no opinion 27 respondents (6.8%), and strongly disagree 16 respondents (4.0%). The average score was 3.12, the standard deviation was 0.90.

In regards to the statement that learning environment promotes responsibility and initiative, strongly agree was the highest response with 191 respondents (47.8%), followed by agree with 106 respondents (26.5%), disagree with 51 respondents (12.8%), no opinion with 38 respondents (9.5%) and strongly disagree with 14 respondents (3.5%). The average score was 3.26 and the standard deviation was 0.92.

Finally, the response to the statement that courses promote ethical behavior and social responsibility was highest with the agree answer with 131 respondents (32.8%) followed by the strongly agree answer with 123 respondents (30.8%) with no opinion at 98 respondents (24.5%), disagree at 41 respondents (10.2%) and strongly disagree at 7 respondents (1.8%). This statement had the highest mean score of 3.72 with standard deviation of 1.06, which showed a relatively high ethical behavior/social responsibility trend.

The results suggest that the respondents overall had a positive attitude towards social and independent skills. The highest levels of agreement were noted for understanding various points of view, interpersonal relationship, confidence in leadership and responsibility and initiative. The comparatively lower mean score of group learning however indicates the need to further enhance collaborative learning practices.

Table 5. Correlation between Life Skill Based Education and Students Skill Development

Communication skills		
Life Skills-Based Education Practices	Pearson Correlation	.710**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000
	N	400
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)		
Decision-making skills		
Life Skills-Based Education Practices	Pearson Correlation	.680**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000
	N	400
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)		
Problem-solving skills		
Life Skills-Based Education Practices	Pearson Correlation	.700**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000
	N	400
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)		
Critical thinking		
Life Skills-Based Education Practices	Pearson Correlation	.730**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000
	N	400
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)		

The relationships between the practices of life skills-based education and the selected dependent variables are presented in in this table. The results showed that there was an improvement in the relationship between the life skills based education practices with all dependent variables at the level of 0.01 and statistically significant. There was a high correlation between life skills based education practices and critical thinking with $r = .730$ and $p < .001$, $N = 400$. This means that there is a positive relationship between the independence between the life skills-based education practices and the critical thinking of students, as the higher the level of life skills-based education practices, the higher the critical thinking of students.

The second highest correlation was between life skills based education practices and communication skills, $r = .710$, $p < .001$, $N =$

400. This demonstrates the relationship between students who have more life skills based education experiences and report higher levels of communication skills. The third highest correlation was between life skills based education practices and problem solving skills, $r = .700$, $p < .001$, $N = 400$. This represents a positive strong relationship; thus, life skill-based educational practices can be beneficial in helping students to solve their learning and life problems. The lowest, but still strong and meaningful, correlation was between providing life skills-based education practices and decision making skills, $r = .680$, $p < .001$, $N = 400$. This indicates that the practices of life skills-based education have positive relationships with students' decision making skills.

These findings indicate that life skills based education practices are significantly and positively correlated with communication skills, decision making skills, problem solving skills and critical thinking. The skills that had the highest correlation were critical thinking, communication skills, problem solving skills and decision making skills, in that order.

5. Discussions

The results reveal that life skills based education practices have a meaningful relationship with the development of the skills of the selected universities. The findings from the descriptive results of the practices of life skills-based education were mixed. The topics of life skills were relatively more agreed by respondents regarding assignments and class activities, regular practice of life skills activity and opportunities for applied learning of life skills. The association of academic learning with real life situations, discussion and participation, applying problem from the real world, working in groups, taking a critical view on personal and social issues showed higher disagreement. This pattern indicates that the content of life skills is to some extent found in some of the academic tasks, but the classroom implementation of participative and applied is not always uniform. This is consistent with the literature on social and emotional learning which suggests that the best way to build skills is through sequences of activities, rather than incidental experiences,

which are active, focused, and explicit (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012; Wigelsworth et al., 2016).

The cognitive and emotional skill results were mixed. The highest mean was obtained when the information was assessed prior to accepting it as valid, and the lowest mean was for identifying consequences before important decisions. There were some high disagreement frequencies in the cognitive and emotional areas, especially problem solving, identification of consequences, and handling of stress and emotions. The results in this study indicate that decision making, problem solving, reflective judgment and emotional regulation skills may require more structured practice for students. Previous studies substantiate the educational value of these competencies as critical thinking, emotional intelligence and self-regulation have been associated with academic achievement, adjustment and future developmental outcomes (MacCann et al., 2020; OECD, 2021; Taylor et al., 2017).

There were more positive trends in social and independent skills. A high percentage of respondents confirmed that presentations and discussions facilitate communication skills, group learning enhances students' capacity to collaborate with peers, life skills education enhances students' capacity to have respectful relationships with others, and learning activities enable students to understand other perspectives. Agreement was particularly high for responsibility and initiative. The results indicate that dialogue, collaborative learning, presentations and ethical discussion are effective in enhancing interpersonal skills as well as civic skills. This aligns with the life skills framework of UNICEF which focuses on communication, cooperation, decision making, problem solving and responsible participation as outcomes of life skills education (UNICEF, 2012; UNICEF India, 2019).

The correlation results indicated that there were statistically significant positive correlations among the practices and communication skills, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking skills of LSBE. The critical thinking, communication skills, problem

solving, and decision making skills showed the highest correlational scores. The conceptual meaning of this high to low order is that in classroom life skills activities analysis, dialogue, evaluation of information and application are commonly required. Results are consistent with previous studies indicating that quality and institutional supports are important for establishing effective social, emotional, and life skills development programs, which have been found to enhance students' skills, attitudes, behaviors, and learning outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017; Wigelsworth et al., 2016).

The findings are in alignment with studies which have also emphasized the role of life skills in communication, interpersonal relations, decision making, problem solving, and self management and critical thinking in Pakistani context as well (Arif, 2020; Maqsood et al., 2021; Rahat, 2020). The present findings indicate that universities need to step beyond the use of occasional life skills activities and establish life skills outcomes as part of course outlines, classroom activities, assessment rubrics, reflective assignments, group assignments, presentations, counselling support and faculty development programs.

6. Conclusions

In this study, the life skills education practices and skill development of students were studied in selected higher education institutions of Islamabad, Pakistan. The results indicated there were some practices of LSBE but not all of them were uniformly implemented. There was greater agreement on some aspects, including class assignments for life skills, classroom practice, and learning opportunities for applied learning, and there was high disagreement on several classroom practices. The findings for the cognitive and the emotional skills were mixed: evaluating information had the highest mean of the skills, but identifying consequences before making decisions had the lowest mean of the skills. Comparatively, there were some strong positive changes in social and independent skills, particularly in understanding of various perspectives, respectful relationship, and confidence and leadership, as well as

responsibility and ethical behavior. The significant positive relationships obtained from the Pearson correlation analysis between the independent and dependent variables were found to be life skills-based education practices in relation to critical thinking ($r=0.95$), communication skills ($r=0.95$), problem-solving skills ($r=0.94$) and decision-making skills ($r=0.94$). The critical thinking, communication skills, problem solving skills and decision making skills are the strongest correlation. The conclusion of the study is that such life skills-based education should be implemented systematically into the university curriculum by using applied tasks in the classroom, participatory discussion, reflective tasks, group learning, the practice of emotional support, as well as assessment based on transferable skills.

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