

Nurturing Life Skills Among Children

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Abstract

The early years of a human life serve as a foundation for the whole life. The role of adults is pivotal in shaping not only their child's academic success but also in instilling essential life skills. The early nurturing process becomes a key factor for children to acquire crucial skills that will aid them in navigating the complexities of life. The study aim to evaluate life skills development of 6 to 8 year old children in Nagarjuna Municipality Ward No. 2. Among the total population of children aged 6 to 8 years, 73 children were selected for the study through the purposive sampling method. The assessment questionnaire has been prepared with reference to The Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools, Geneva. The validity score of the questionnaire is 0.8367. The assessment focused on enhancement of psycho-social competence, which includes the four major areas: Decision-making and Problem solving, Creative thinking and Critical thinking, Communication and Interpersonal Relation, Coping with Emotion and Stressors. Among the total study population 76% of children have the ability to solve age appropriate problems. Similarly, only 41% of children are able to create new ideas, 47% of children could analyze the different situations in the classroom, 74% of children easily participate in different activities, and 86% of children express their emotions. Life skill training from the early years supports to development of interpersonal relations, coping with emotions, decision-making and problem solving skill was key finding of the study.

Keywords: life skill, independent, development, creative thinking, communication and Interpersonal relation, psycho-social competence

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Introduction

Early years of a human life serves as a foundation for the whole life. Life skills are fundamental for finding the direction to adjust in complexity of various situation of life. Life skill help children to maintain social connection, problem solving skill, creativity (Rout et al, 2024). Life skill development characterized by the practical, social, emotional and mental health development in children (Devis, 2023). Life Skill includes critical thinking, intrapersonal and interpersonal qualities necessary for children and adolescents to live productive and satisfying life (Olsson, 2024). These skills are essential support to fill the gap between real life experience and academic education. According to United Nation Children's Fund UNICEF (2019), life skill is a psychological and interpersonal skills that generally considered as essential for a human life (UNICEF, 2019). In this regard, World Health Organization (WHO) has different definition of life skill development. According to WHO, it is a skill to be flexible with positive behavior to enable to deal with the different challenges of everyday life (Ash, 2023). Developing life skills among the children help them to live independently, build leadership, and adjust in society (Sharma, 2021). According to Dr. Roma Kumar, a Clinical Psychologist, "Life skill training develop a sense of responsibilities as good citizen, who protect their surroundings. It assists children to build self-confidence and effectively coping with major life transitions and problems such as bullying and prejudice" (Sharma, 2021). UNESCO, UNICEF and WHO identified some essential life skills such as self-awareness, empathy, critical-thinking, creative-thinking, decision-making, problem solving, effective-communication, interpersonal relationship, coping with stress and coping with emotion (Ash, 2023). In this fast-paced life, it is critical to practice life skill activities beyond standard academic learning. Role of adult is pivotal in shaping not only their academic success but also in instilling essential life skills. The early nurturing process becomes a key factor for children to acquire crucial skills that will aid them in navigating the complexities of life (Wahi, 2022). During these years, life skills education has been found to be essential in school education. Including life skills education in day-to-day activities may help them work with the challenges of life. Teaching children to communicate in groups may develop their leadership personalities (Kirchhoff & Keller, 2021). Day-to-day theoretical and practical activities can enhance in development of life skill of children. Parents, teachers and care giver can plan different activities for the development of life skill among children. 21st century education system has been identified as a process of life skill development among children (Torkos & Bernadett, 2020). Involving children in different household activities may support them to develop life skills. During cooking meal, children can help in washing vegetables, mix ingredient and cooking with supervision. Similarly, children could be involved in gardening and other household chores, through which the children can learn life skills (Rodriguez, 2016). The life skill development has based on psycho-social competence, which includes the four major areas: Decision-making and Problem solving, Creative thinking and Critical thinking, Communication and Interpersonal relation, Coping with emotion and Stressors (WHO 1997). Decision making and problem solving relate to the ability to select various possibility with understanding the problems of situation. Critical thinking refers to the ability to think analytically and logically about anything and any situations. Similarly, creative thinking is to innovate new ideas and produce primary aspects. Interpersonal relation is the quality of building relationship (Ash, 2023). Psycho-social competence is ability of individuals to cope with the obstacle of daily life (Manjunatha & Saddichha, 2011). However, recent studies have focused on life skill development but very few studies have focused on psycho social competence in Nepal. Life skill practices are very essential for human development but in this digital era life skill practices are overlooked and

avoided due to the extreme dependence on technology, reduced social relation and interactions, and limited practices on experiential learning.

Research Questions

The study was concentrate to identify the life skill development of children of age 6 years to 8 years. Thus to fulfill the inquiry it focus on some questions.

1. How do the children demonstrate decision making and problem solving skill in class room setting?
2. How do children participate and interact during group activities in the classroom?
3. How role do the parents and teachers play in the development of life skills among children?

Objectives

The study aim to assess the life skills development among the children with aged 6 to 8 years.

- To examine the ability of decision making and problem solving skill in class room setting.
- To assess the level of children's participation in interaction during group activities.
- To identify the role of parents and teachers in the development of life skill among children.

Literature Review

Life skills are important in the formation of personality development because they influence a person's ability to effectively navigate personal, social and professional domains. It is essential in personality development because it empower individuals with the resources they need to handle various elements of life efficiently. The review has been done to identify the recent studies and their outcomes on importance of life skill development in childhood and early adolescents. It has concentrated on different domains of the previous studies.

The Magic Box India Foundation introduce a program on life skill with the objective to enhance to develop complete secondary education, secure job, and build bright future. This program is also called Childhood to Livelihood. The main purpose of the program is to develop life skill among the children with age 11 to 15 years. In 2019, a study was conducted in Indonesia with the goal of developing life skill curriculum model. The objective of the model was to support facilitators intervene in activities for children of early childhood period. The result of the study found that the method of teaching life skill should be play-way method. Therefore the model was based on creative learning and work based activities (Nurani & Pratiwi, 2019).

Preschool Life Skill Program is a program based on Trauma Informed Frame-work, which is focused on the children who are significant trauma history. The researcher believed that the life skill program can support the children having trauma history. The purpose of the study is to analyse specific preschool life skill curriculum for two boys, who had experienced significant trauma and to illustrate how the preschool life skill program may be provided within the trauma informed frame-work. The evaluation was conducted in a one-on-one setting in a UK-clinic and also in home by parents. The result of the study was identified that both boys learnt skills, however the development was occasionally erratic. The result indicated that both boys enjoyed the activities but less in overall advantages of the program.

The study found that the parents were satisfied with the program, that they found improvement in household activities (Rees et al., 2024).

An analytical study on effect of the program among the children identify that the consistence practices significantly develop participants' school attendance, ambition and socio-emotional skills. This program improves educational and socio-emotional outcomes among the early adolescents (Tagat et al., 2025). Socio-emotional development is essential during adolescents. Identifying the necessity of the situation, World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF) initiate a program Helping Adolescents Thrives (HAT) to emphasis on developing adolescent's socio-emotional life skill. The major objective of this program is to reduce suicide rate of adolescents. In collaboration of UNICEF, WHO, Save the Children and Mental Health Psychosocial Support develop a training program "I Support My Friends" for children and adolescents to teach how to support a friend in stress with encouragement and supervision of trusted adults (WHO & UNICEF, 2021).

There are number of studies conducted life skill development but very few studies have concentrated on domains of psycho-social competence. There is lack of researches on life skill in Nepal. Regarding this, there is significant need of study on life skill development.

Methodology

The current study intend to collect data on developmental status of children of 6 years old to 8 years old, using four primary areas of psycho-social competence with reference of The Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools, Geneva, WHO (WHO, 1997). Thus the study based on four domain model; Decision making and Problem solving, Creative thinking and Critical thinking, Communication and Interpersonal relation, Coping with emotion and Stressors. The assessment was conducted using 5 point rating scale.

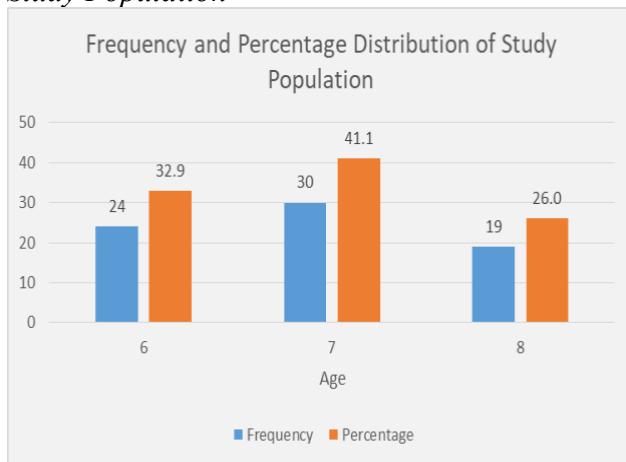
Study Design

A descriptive and cross-sectional study design was adopted for the investigation. A qualitative method was employed to identify the key findings of the study. A case study was analyzed to find the deeper insight of the study. The case study included the child's history and current practices.

Study Area

The Nagarjun Municipality ward no. 2 from Kathmandu valley was chosen as a study area. Nagarjuna Municipality located at the center of Kathmandu Valley, which has undergone diverse urbanization from different part of Nepal. Three schools from this municipality are selected to find the study population. Among the three schools, two schools are pre-school and one school is elementary school. These three schools are located in same ward. The data has been analyzed through the statistical analysis on SPSS software and a case study. The sample size was determined using purposive sampling method with 73 children from three different schools. The study population consist of aged 7 (N = 30; 41%), 6 years (N = 24; 33%), and 8 years (N = 19; 26%).

Figure 1
Study Population



The assessment was done through 21 questions based on four domains of psycho-social competences of life skill. The validation of the questionnaire was done through conducting pilot testing among 25 children of age 6 years. The validation score was 0.873 and calculated through Cronbach's Alpha. Simultaneously the validation was approved by Central Department of Home Science Tribhuvan University.

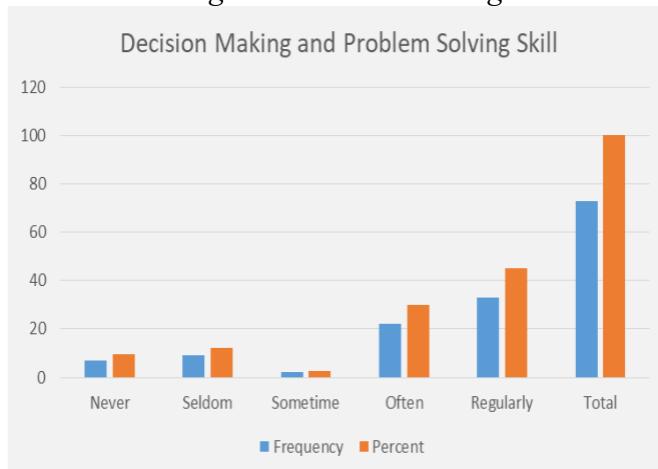
Result

The result of the study has demonstrated the importance of life skills during the early stage. Regarding the result the data was analyzed on the four domains of psycho-social competence of life skill.

Decision-Making and Problem Solving

The result of the assessment on problem solving and decision making, 30% of children often shows ability to make decision and solve problems during the classroom activities and 45% of children regularly have ability to solve the age appropriate problems from total population (N = 73).

Figure 2
Decision Making and Problem Solving Skill

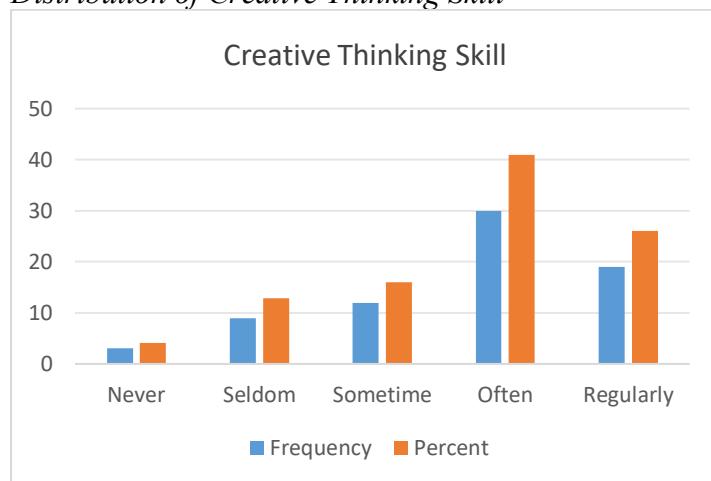


In the cumulative calculation 76% of children have ability to solve the problems as well as participate in decision making activities.

Creative Thinking and Critical Thinking

The creative thinking and critical thinking assessment have done in two different aspects including different assessment questions. It has been focused on their creative skills such as decorating pictures with different colour, create new structures with blocks and loose part materials. The result of the assessment has been presented in Figure 3 below.

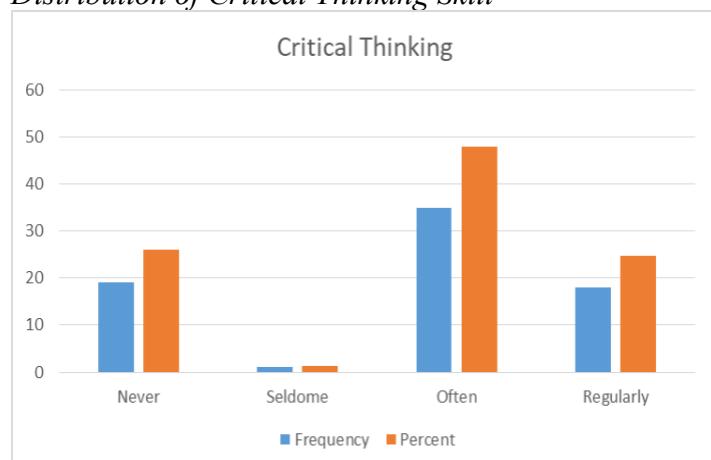
Figure 3
Distribution of Creative Thinking Skill



The result has presented that 41% of children frequently demonstrate their creative skills. However, some children occasionally participate in creative activities, the result has been presented the rate of higher percentage.

Simultaneously, the assessment has done on the critical thinking skills. Among the entire population ($N = 73$), 47% of children often completed the critical thinking activities. The set of activities include regular activities such as tie up shoe lace, age appropriate critical word puzzles.

Figure 4
Distribution of Critical Thinking Skill

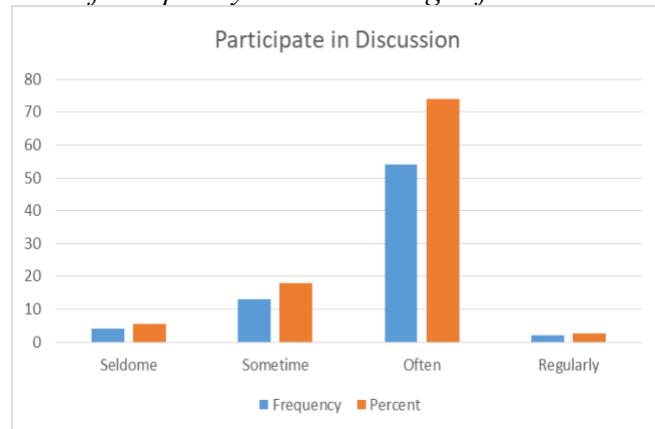


Communication and Interpersonal Relation

Development of communication skill is essential for early stage. Thus the assessment has been conducted on communication and interpersonal relation area.

Figure 5

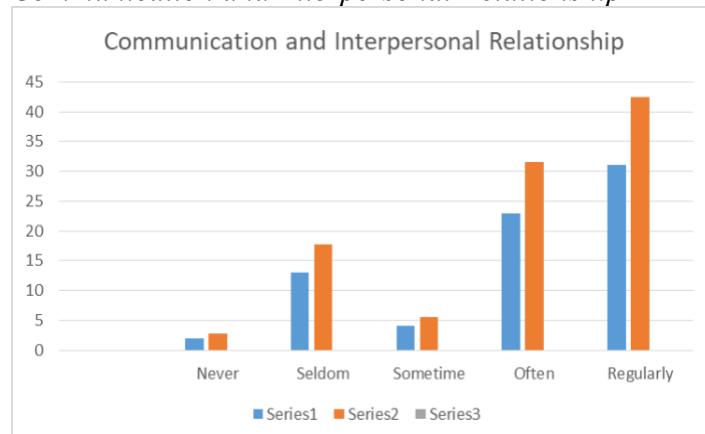
Rate of Frequency and Percentage of Children Participate in Discussion



The result has identified that the 74% of children often participate in group discussion.

Figure 6

Communication and Interpersonal Relationship

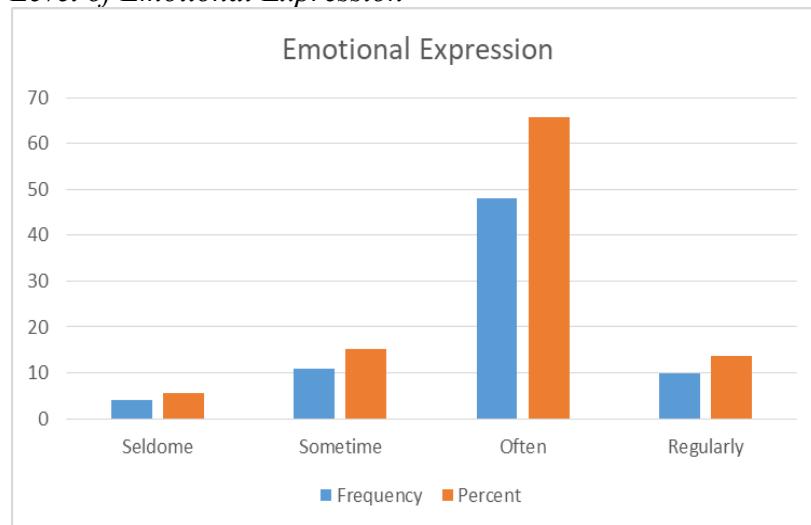


The figure above depicts the findings of the communication and interpersonal relationship assessment. These findings demonstrate that the higher percent (42%) of children express their feelings toward their teachers.

Coping With Emotions and Stressors

Emotional development is essential in the early stages. The children should be able to cope with their emotional age appropriately. Regarding this the present study try to identify the ability of coping emotional during the class room activities.

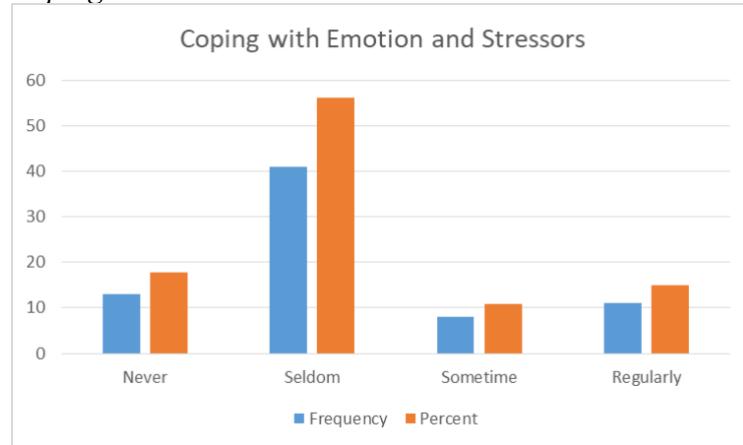
Figure 7
Level of Emotional Expression



The result of the study identified that the greater percentage of children often express their emotion during the different situation in the classroom.

Simultaneously, the current study attempted to determine the level of coping with emotion and stress. It has been assessed by the observing behavior during the classroom activities and gathering input from teachers. Since the emotional behavior cannot be measured in descriptive analysis the researcher obtained the information from teachers and conducted the observational assessment.

Figure 8
Coping With Emotion and Stressors



The result of the study found that the higher rate of study population are unable to cope with stress and emotional behavior.

Case Study

The case study was emerged when the researcher noticed that a child was unable to complete an age-appropriate task of life skill competence. The researcher investigates through the teacher's interview to analyse the case history.

Rima (her name has changed) is 6 years old and in grade UKG. During the assessment, she was unable to tie her shoelaces or button her shirt. In each task she seeks for the teacher's assistance. She hardly complete a few tasks. Her teacher indicated during the interview about her case that her progress in this area is slow owing to a lack of practices both at home and at school. She is gradually developing after the discussing with her parents and regular practices at home and at school in day to day activities.

This case study demonstrate that the regular practice can support the development of life skill of a child. Similarly, in collaboration of household activities and school activities plays major role in holistic development of a child.

Conclusion

The study conclude that the life skill development is essential during early years. This enable to navigate the complexity of different situation of life. It supports to be independent, emotionally strong. It is the foundation of personal and social development. Nurturing life skill during the early years is significantly essential for all children. The four domains of psycho-social competence can be a major factors of life skill development.

The result of the study identified that the child who regularly involved in life skill activities are significantly developed, whereas the child who has not got the opportunity to participate in life skill activities are unable to complete the task.

The involvement of teachers and parents is critical in involving children in day to day life skill activities. The collaboration between school teachers and parent to support children, can have a impact on their development.

Recommendation

The present study recommend that there should be more research on life skill development during early years. The caregivers and parents should plan to involve child in day to day life skill activities. Parents and teachers should encourage their children to practice life skill activities. 21st century skill based curriculum should be applied in each educational institute.

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