
Participatory Learning Practices and Life Skills Development among Prospective Teachers

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Abstract

The participatory learning aims at comprehensive development of the learners and its strategies are based on experiential learning. Active class participation improves critical and other life skills. Life Skills include psychological competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decision, solve problem, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner. Several studies have been conducted on participatory learning and its role in life skill enhancement. Researches showed that participatory learning impacts educational outcomes and life skills. It is advisable to learn and practice participatory learning strategies by prospective teachers to polish their life skills and in turn help them to develop these life skills among their students in future. The classroom is undergoing a drastic transformation to equip the learners with 21st century skills. Teachers should view participatory learning as a challenge and equip themselves with varied aspects of participatory learning to meet the changing needs and trends of education. So faculty development program should be arranged for teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills on different innovative approaches. Along with faculty development program, teachers also need to enhance their skills. Various skill development programs should also be arranged for teachers and prospective teachers. Teachers and prospective teachers should be given proper training to life skill education and to use participatory learning activities and approaches in the classroom.

Key Words- Participatory Learning, Life Skills

Introduction

The word participatory comes from participation, which refers to the action of taking part in activities and projects, the act of sharing in the activities of a group. Participatory learning implies attention should be paid to the interaction between teachers and students in the learning process. Participatory learning implies attention should be paid to the interaction between teachers and students in the learning process. The participatory learning aims at comprehensive development of the learners. All students must be incorporated in the learning process in such a way that their endowment and potential are comprehensively developed. In participatory learning, the teacher/ facilitator acts as an organizer inside the classroom. Participatory learning is helpful to cultivate social awareness, to appreciate self-worth and to respect others. The learners actively participate in discussion, use appropriate media to manipulate, sort out, prioritize, modify, and interpret ideas and concepts. The core of participatory learning method is group discussion and it is one of the most common methods of participatory learning. Participatory learning strategies are based on experiential learning that lets young people feel, think and act out of their comfort zone in order to challenge stereotypes and become actively engaged in pursuing their personal growth whilst developing key life skills. A teacher's attitude towards the students can dramatically affect class participation and the students are more likely to participate in class if they have a comfortable relationship with their teacher.

Role of the Teacher in Participatory Learning Process

The teacher is responsible for creating lessons and measuring how much information the students learn. The teacher access facilitator in participatory learning process. The facilitator might not be an expert in a particular subject area. Facilitators have special training in group dynamics, using processes such as conflict resolution, strategic planning and team building. In groups setting, a facilitator can quickly determine what the group knows so the group can proceed to build on that knowledge. The teacher should play the major roles:

- Structure the learning environment
- Guide the learning process viz., using probing questions, illustrations, relevant examples
- Relate the teaching to the real life experience
- Use varied instructional materials and medias
- Use varied techniques within the lesson such as learning in groups
- Use learners ideas and experiences
- Differentiate tasks: structure tasks in relation to the various learning needs
- Continuously monitor and assess the learners during the teaching learning process

- Provide constructive feedback
- Offer a warm, friendly, nurturing environment that encourages participation

Personal and Professional Qualities needed for the Teacher in Participatory Learning

- Teacher should have a passion for teaching and a sound knowledge of subject matter
- Prepares well for teaching and displays high organizational skills
- Have effective communication skill
- Be a reflective teacher , creative and resourceful
- Ability to build strong relationships with learners and community
- A role model displaying high professional ethics and moral conduct
- Have affection for the learners
- Empathy- showing genuine concern ,understanding, and being supportive
- Humor- providing an environment of fun, laughter without compromising learning
- Concern and commitment
- Attributes of honor such as honesty, cleanliness, punctuality, and respect for others.

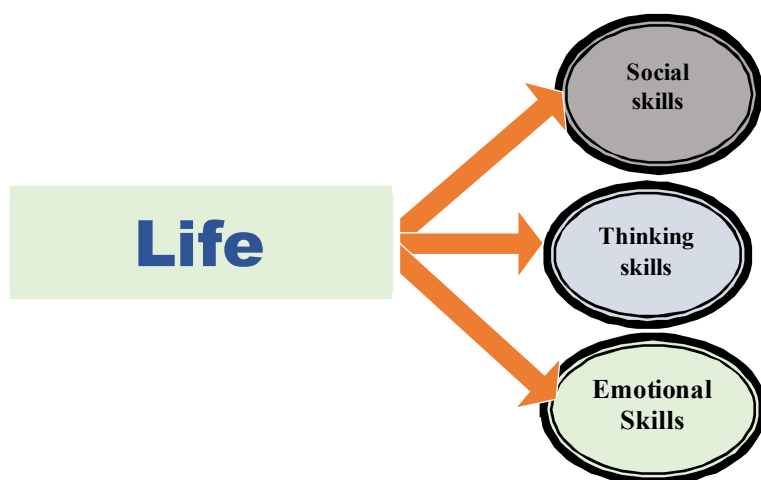
Guidelines for the Teachers in using the Classroom in Participatory Learning Environment

- Provide a variety of learning styles and strategies including individual and group activities
- Provide learners’ opportunity to touch, manipulate, and experiment, this will enable them to use their senses to learn. Experiential learning has a more lasting effect.
- Allow learners opportunities to ask questions, solve problems and think independently.
- Respect and trust that learners can learn. Provide differentiated tasks to enable each learner to reach his own pace and realize intended outcomes.
- Integrate the content across all the learning areas.
- Provide for extensive discussion to improve communication abilities as well as expressive opportunities.
- Conduct continuous assessment for learning intended to help each learner to make progress in his learning.

Teachers can increase participation by creating a safe and respectful class environment through participatory learning activities. Active class participation improves critical and other life skills and to remember greater portion of the information thus in turn academic performance of the learner (Taraban 2007).

WHO defines Life Skills as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable the individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life” .Life Skills include psychological competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decision, solve problem, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner. Empowered with these skills, young people are able to take decisions based on a logical process of “*what to do, why to do, how to do and when to do*”

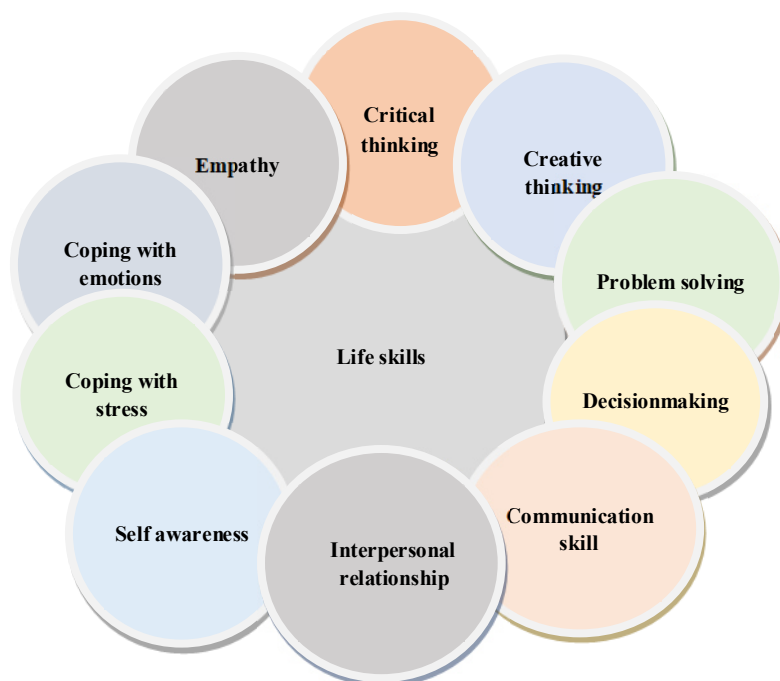
Life Skills fall into three basic categories which compliment, supplement and reinforce each other.



Essentially, there are two kinds of skills- those related to thinking termed as “*thinking skills*” and skills related to dealing with others termed as “*social skills*”. While thinking related to reflection at a personal level, social skill include interpersonal skills and do not necessarily depend on logical thinking. It is the combination of these two types of skills that are needed for achieving assertive behaviour and negotiating effectively. “*Emotional*

skills” can be perceived as a skill not only in making rational decision but also in being able to make other agree to one’s point of view. To do that, coming to term first with oneself is important skill including managing/coping with feelings, emotions, stress and resisting peer and family pressure. Think of life skills as the building blocks or framework that allow students to apply the knowledge they acquire in school to real world problems and situations. Also referred to as “soft skills” in a professional context, the ability to think abstractly to find practical solutions.

Ten core Life Skills as laid down by WHO



Several studies have been conducted on participatory learning and its role in life skill enhancement. A careful analysis on the studies on the effectiveness participatory learning provides divided results. Researches showed that participatory learning impacts educational outcomes and life skills. Researches indicate that students benefit from participatory learning activities for the active construction of knowledge and for the development of life skills

The research *Teacher Participatory Practices to Enhance Students’ Leadership Skills* (Sarawut, 2021) aimed at helping students to improve their leadership skill by utilizing by methodology of Participatory Action Research *Development of Participatory Learning Activity to enhance life skills for children and youth along the Ladpraow Waterside’s community* (Arunrung, 2020). The study revealed that the participatory learning activities enhanced media literacy of child and youth in Rimklong Ladpraow. Sugantha (2020) *Impact of Integrated Active Learning (IAL) in Physical Science on Students Thinking Skills, Social Skills Achievement in Physical Science and Classroom Climate*. The IAL intervention showed a positive statistically significant impact on high and moderate performers’ thinking skill ability. *Case study on the effect of participatory approaches to English language teaching at Secondary level in the state of Gujarat* (Parmar, Ketan B, (2019). The study found that participatory learning tasks were effective in producing authentic communicative situations inside the classroom.

Kumar, Anith(2018)studied *The Effect of Participatory Approach on Developing Environmental Competencies and the Related Variables at Primary School Level*. The study revealed that Participatory Approach of teaching is significantly more effective than Traditional Approach of teaching in enhancing Environmental Competencies, Creativity and Problem-Solving skills. *The implementation of life skills oriented participatory learning strategy to improve reading and writing skills* (Nurwalidah, 2018). The study found that life skills oriented participatory learning strategies were effective in improving the reading and writing skills. Bhatt, Dipen (2018) did a study on *Effectiveness of drama-based activities to develop speaking skills of learners at Secondary level*. The study revealed that drama-based activities to developed speaking skills of ESL learner has proven to be effective in developing speaking skills of learners keeping in view grammar, fluency, accuracy, and vocabulary.

Participatory Learning in Residential Weekends: Benefits or Barrier to Learning for the International Students? (Robson et al.,2016). The objective of the present study was to identify and explore how participatory learning in multi-cultural group enables international students to increase their self-awareness and to develop

team building and leadership skills. *Effect of Activity Based Learning ABL on development of Life Skills among elementary level students* (Singh Budh, (2016). The study concluded that there exists significant differences between pretest and posttest of experimental group regarding life skills of students at elementary level. It also showed that there was a significant effect of Activity Based Learning on the development of life skills. Vaniya, Ritesha (2015) *Enhancement of Creative Writing Ability of Standard IX Students in English through Participatory Approach Climate*. Participatory Approach was found to enhance students’ writing ability through revisiting and revising the write ups through positive attitude and added confidence. *Impact of Participatory Teaching on Students’ Generic Skills in Tertiary Education*. (Mader, 2015). The study identified that participatory teaching is an effective way to foster generic skills of students as it has a significant influence on development of students’ generic skills and in improving students’ academic performance. *Influence on Teachers’ Use of Participatory Learning strategies in Health Education Classes*. (Cahill et al., 2014), describes the influence of participatory learning strategies in health education classes. The study found that teachers identify understanding the educational rationale for the approach, student engagement, confidence in class control and having positive relationship with the students, along with practicalities such as having time to adequately prepare a class, as the most significant influences on their pedagogical choices.

The study conducted by Deepa (2012) on *Effect of co-operative Learning on Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Ability in Mathematics among Higher Secondary Students* revealed that co-operative learning approach was more effective than the traditional method in developing critical thinking ability, problem solving ability with respect to gender, locality, among high middle and low achievers. Ambili & Sreejith (2010) on *Efficacy of Participatory Learning and Action for Quality Improvement in Environmental Education and Research*, the paper outlined several strategies found effective in engaging students in participatory learning making them experts challenging them to develop their own theory and develop skills in problem solving. Kim, Simon; Parks, b. Sue; and Beckerman, Marvin (1996) conducted a study on *Effects of participatory learning programs in middle and high school civic education*. The study revealed Participatory learning program in school civic education increased student awareness and helped to improve communication skills among students through active participation in community service. In a study conducted and experimented by Gokhale (1995) to examine the *effectiveness of individual learning versus collaborative learning in enhancing drill and practice skills and critical thinking skills*. The study showed that students who participated in collaborative learning had performed significantly better on the critical thinking test than students who studied individually. *The effects of Literary Discussion on Students’ Critical Thinking Ability and Attitude towards Reading* (Schulhauser, C.E. 1990) studied the effect of participation in literacy discussion groups on the fourth-grade students’ critical thinking reading comprehension, attitude towards reading. The result showed that participation in literacy discussion groups significantly affect the students’ critical thinking, reading comprehension and attitude towards reading.

The above mentioned studies proved that participatory learning is very effective in enhancing life skills among students. It is advisable to learn and practice participatory learning strategies by prospective teachers to polish their life skills and in turn help them to develop these life skills among their students in future. Some studies conducted by Gupta (2005), Shen, Jia et al., (2004), Pai (2010), Chinelo (2010) revealed that participatory learning techniques were better than traditional methods among B Ed students.

The teacher’s role has changed at the present time, but the importance of teachers and their responsibility of personality building has become more relevant. Without the enhancement of all round abilities and life skills, it is very difficult to walk with the world and to sustain oneself. It is teachers who create such personalities. Teachers can use participatory learning in any age levels as it easily tracks the learner to the learning environment, so undoubtedly can say it is superior to the prevailing mode of instruction. The classroom is undergoing a drastic transformation to equip the learners with 21st century skills. Teachers should view participatory learning as a challenge and equip themselves with varied aspects of participatory learning to meet the changing needs and trends of education. So faculty development program should be arranged for teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills on different innovative approaches. Along with faculty development program, teachers also need to enhance their skills. Various skill development programs should also be arranged for teachers and prospective teachers. Teachers and prospective teachers should be given proper training to life skill education and to use participatory learning activities and approaches in the classroom.

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