YOUTH EDUCATION STATUS IN INDIA – NEED FOR INCLUSION OF LIFE SKILLS

[Dr. T. Yadagiri Rao]

Abstract— **India being the youngest nation of the world, this demographic dividend has raised high expectations in regard to the youth's meaningful participation in socio-political process; particularly civic engagement. The demographic dividend of youth with diverse needs and almost total absence of educational and skill development opportunities for them makes the youth education a most significant challenge at the present time. Youth is overburdened by a education system which is not much meaningful for them. The present education system does not align with the holistic approach towards understanding young people's lives.**

As the young people step into the threshold of the external world, they are increasingly influenced by their peers and by adults other than their parents. They begin to explore and experiment intellectually, ingeniously and socially through various activities. To support them in this sensitive and tender stage, they need to develop life skills – skills in negotiation, conflict resolution, critical thinking, decision making and communication. This would help them develop self-esteem, self-confidence, assertiveness, ability to work in teams and resolve conflicts in a rational manner. Life skills programme should be an integral part of the education system in order to transmit the accumulated resources of our cultural heritage to each new generation.

Youth has all the potential. Let us all provide rational education support to them so that they keep on growing in their knowledge and understanding and keep making a difference to the nation and to the world. Then they should be fully empowered to lead India into the future.

Keywords— **Life Skills, Education, Youth, Demography, Self Esteem**

I.   Introduction

The demographic dividend of youth with diverse needs and almost total absence of educational and skill development opportunities for them makes the youth education a most significant challenge at the present time. Youth is overburdened by a education system which is not much meaningful for them. The present education system does not align with the holistic approach towards understanding young people's lives. What is needed is an approach focusing on interest based learning within context and enhancing opportunities enabling them to construct knowledge and develop skills, thereby improving the quality of life.

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In India being the youngest nation of the world, this demographic dividend has raised high expectations in regard to the youth's meaningful participation in socio-political process; particularly civic engagement are raised. Today's youth are some intelligent, pragmatic and adept at career building.

The challenge of youth education is no less important than Universalisation of Elementary Education or National Literacy Mission. The special needs of this group have been time and again recognized in various forums like Goal three of the Dakar Education for All Goals emphasizing on meeting the learning needs of all young people and adults through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programme. Other UN agencies have also been piloting the need for attention to the youth, whereas the World Development Report 2007 has concentrated its attention on persons in 12-25 years age group referring to it as the critical input in economic and social development. In India, the special focus programmes of education for the youth got concrete shape with the adoption of National Youth Policy 2003.

Youth is a transitional phase from childhood to adulthood when young people, through a process of intense physiological, psychological, social, and economic change, gradually come to be recognized and to recognize themselves as adults. So it is more a stage in life than an age, full of great energy, enthusiasm, and creativity, developing interest in adult life and vocations. Youth is a phase of sentiments, rapid fluctuation of mood in which the world seems strange and new. There is need to assist youth to cope with whatever special stresses accrue to the period, since the nature of the experiences at this stage has vital significance for their total development. As they grapple with physical and emotional changes, today's youth must also cope with external forces over which they have little control. Demands of culture, gender, globalization and poverty have pushed millions of young people prematurely into adult roles and responsibilities.

A.   *Demographic and Educational Status of Youth in India*

There are now 1.3 billion young people in the age group of 12-24 in the developing world, a number expected to grow to 1.5 billion in 2035 and begin declining thereafter. As per the data of projected population by age, the proportion of Indian youth population in both the age groups increased from 2001 to 2006, thereafter there is a slight decrease in 2011 in the age

group 15-19 years whereas there is a slight increase of the age group of 20-24 years nearing to equivalence in the proportions during this period. Henceforth, the proportion of both these age groups remains to be almost the same.

".Age Groups	Table 1 : Proportion of Youth Population (15-24 Years) from 2001 to 2026					
	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021	2026
15-19 Yrs.	10.1	10.7	10.2	9.3	8.4	8.0
20-24 Yrs.	8.9	9.3	9.9	9.5	8.7	8.0

Source : Percentage distribution of projected population by age on March: 2001-2026, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Government of India.

The huge number of youth population estimating to about six crore are illiterates and have not completed primary education – is a serious concern and demands attention of policy makers and planners of education. Keeping in focus the right to education and knowledge-driven society, India cannot afford to waste so much of its human resources. The need to address youth issues now is ingrained in demographics, due to the economic demands of the steep number of today's youth and its share in the future labour force. This large number contributing a larger share in the working age population is an opportunity for India. In order to reap this demographic dividend, India should invest in the education of youth to build human capital for future.

Age Group	Table 2 : Estimates (Crore) of Educational Levels of Youth Population (15-24 Years)					
	Level	Urban	Per cent	Rural	Per cent	Total	Per cent
15-19 Years	Primary	0.48	13.3	1.48	17.8	1.96	16.45
	Upper Primary	1.07	29.8	2.53	30.4	3.60	30.22
	Secondary	0.97	27	1.44	17.3	2.41	20.22
	Higher Secondary	0.53	14.9	0.48	5.8	1.01	8.54
20-24 Years	Primary	0.37	11.4	1.02	14.5	1.39	13.52
	Upper Primary	0.65	20.2	1.40	20	2.06	20.06
	Secondary	0.43	13.3	0.75	10.7	1.18	11.52
	Higher Secondary	0.58	17.9	0.65	9.3	1.23	12.02
15-24 Years	Primary	0.84	12.39	2.50	16.29	3.35	15.09
	Upper Primary	1.72	25.22	3.93	25.64	5.66	25.51
	Secondary	1.40	20.47	2.19	14.28	3.59	16.18
	Higher Secondary	1.11	16.32	1.13	7.41	2.25	10.15

Source : Projected Population of Youth (15-24 Years) as per Population projections for India and states 2001-2026, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Government of India, New Delhi, 2006.

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Formulation of Programmes

Though there are some government and non-government programmes for the education of youth still we have such a large number of which is deprived of basic education. An area of concern is how to reach to them? Of the numerous reasons for being out of the education system, one of the major concerns pertaining to this is the coverage of the programmes. The programmes need to be expanded and strengthened for providing quality education to those young people. To encourage young people to stay in schools, they should have flexible schedules, strive to eliminate gender bias and be relevant to young people's daily lives, especially for the economically disadvantaged group who must combine economic activity with education. Education programmes should be so designed as to provide a second chance to those young people who have missed this opportunity and could not complete their education earlier, due to some unforeseen circumstances. This would help the youth to realize their full potential.

Another area of concern in the education of youth is – What should be imparted to the young people? As the young people step into the threshold of the external world, they are increasingly influenced by their peers and by adults other than their parents. They begin to explore and experiment intellectually, ingeniously and socially through various activities. To support them in this sensitive and tender stage, they need to develop life skills – skills in negotiation, conflict resolution, critical thinking, decision making and communication. This would help them develop self-esteem, self-confidence, assertiveness, ability to work in teams and resolve conflicts in a rational manner. Life skills programme should be an integral part of the education system in order to transmit the accumulated resources of our cultural heritage to each new generation.

When young people work, they not only generate income but also develop their skills, increase knowledge, build self-esteem and confidence and garner an optimistic outlook of what their future might hold. The launching of livelihood programmes would help the youth to develop an array of skills including literacy and numeracy, technical, entrepreneurial, practical, social, managerial and strategic skills. It is precisely at this stage when vocational maturity undergoes greater development and progress and it becomes more necessary since the students must engage in various academic and vocational decision-making processes which have important repercussions for the future.

Increase in the age of marriage, increased mobility and negative peer pressure make young people vulnerable to indulging in risky behavior. Over 35 per cent of all reported AIDS cases occur among the age group of 15-24 years. Therefore, to address the reproductive health and psychological needs of the youth there is need of introducing youth-friendly health services to provide a nurturing

environment, to enable these young people discuss freely without any fear and hesitation about the major apprehensions in their lives and seek professional and non-judgmental advice. The society's reaction to a; young lawbreaker can craft or shatter his future.

C. Life Skills – Need for Inclusion

World Health Organization (1997) defines Life Skills, as abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. In particular, life skills are a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner.

Life skills education has been introduced in different ways in formal schools: as a new subject or integrated to various degrees within the teaching practice and content of other subjects. Life skills education requires a conceptualization of the curriculum that includes not only knowledge and skills but also behaviour, attitudes and values. This has been a driver to use more participatory and interactive teaching and learning methodologies in the delivery of life skills education. These are difficult changes in traditional education systems.

The question of the link between life skills-based education and the adoption of positive and protective behavior is one of the important issues. The literature indicates that there is little evidence to suggest that teaching general life skills in schools will lead to desired behaviours. Yet the literature on HIV prevention programming, which takes a life skills approach, shows that people can be taught to adopt and sustain desired behaviours if certain criteria are adhered to. Many of them do not fit easily into school curricula. This should raise questions on how best to introduce life skills into Indian schools and programmes.

The adolescents face problems in certain areas of life such as parent-child conflicts, individual suffers role diffusion or negative identity, which results in mismatched abilities and desires, directionless, and are unprepared for the psychological challenges of adulthood. These internal stresses and social expectations lead to moments of uncertainty, self doubts and disappointment in the adolescent. It is at these situations that the young person takes risks and involves in risk taking behaviours. For these reasons, life skills education is important to help young people cope with challenges that they face in their day to day lives.

D. Life skills-based education in the context of education sector reform

When developing in-school life skills-based education, it is important to place it in the context of wider education sector reforms. Ultimately, to be effective, life skills must be taught in schools that are inclusive, child-friendly, adequately resourced and provisioned, staffed by trained and motivated teachers, and which utilize participatory and experiential methods (including continuous assessment). It should begin in the junior grades and continue through the higher ones, applying life skills, over time, to more sensitive and complex issues.

Recently, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) has appointed an 11 member committee to examine the introduction of Life Skills in technical curriculum. From this year, for the first, there will be a uniform curriculum for the entire country and all engineering colleges will have to adopt this. Ten per cent of the new curriculum will comprise humanities like interpersonal and life skills. The objective is to integrate humanities into engineering curriculum and to make engineers well-rounded individuals apart from making course-interesting.

Year	Table 3 : Growth of Degree Level Engineering Institutions (post-liberalization era 1991 onwards), updated from Chopra & Sharma 2009)		
	No. of Institutions	Students Intake	Intake per institution (Average)
1990	337	66600	198
2000	776	185758	240
2003	1208	359721	298
2004	1265	404800	320
2005	1346	452260	336
2006	1511	550986	364
2007	1668	653290	392
2010	>2000	10,00,000 approx	500

It is also important to note that many children and adolescents who are not in school in South Asia are neither highly vulnerable nor exposed to high levels of risk. For these children and adolescents, the best life skills strategy is to get them into school. An inclusive affordable and effective education can "inoculate" students against a host of vulnerabilities and risks, as well as provide them with access to in-school life skills programming.

The students are already under pressure from a packed curriculum and an exam-based assessment system. In response, some countries have made life skills an examinable

subject in order to signal its importance. Unfortunately, this may result in life skills becoming just another knowledge-based subject that students are required to memorize. In addition, life skills cannot be effectively assessed by written exams. There are also education sector "cultural" issues which can make teaching life skills unattractive.

Life skills are not static but evolving, with a dependence on family and gender; any measure therefore needs to take into account disparities in social background, gender and the labour market, as well as national and international cultural variations. Measuring the effectiveness of life skills education necessitates identified measurable outcomes. Moreover, monitoring and assessment has to be able to assess all the areas as well as the life skills education methodology, the context as well as the outputs.

E. Building acceptance of life skills programming

Creating a supportive environment for the practice of life skills; Building support in communities and schools for life skills programming

Life skills programming can play a role in "nudging" societies towards social inclusion and equality, creating a more beneficial teacher-student relationship, and promoting a public discourse on issues previously considered taboo. For this reason, deliberate efforts are required to build awareness and acceptance through advocacy and social mobilization.

F Creating a supportive environment for the practice of life skills

Children and adolescents are more likely to make good decisions if they can experience control over their lives; and gain a sense of self-respect and recognition from others, including teachers and parents. However, a lack of future prospects, little family support, low community status, and limited opportunities to play a role in community decisions, all serve to undermine life skills programming. To increase the likelihood of success, programmes need to create opportunities to practice life skills outside the classroom; question youth stereotypes; and, build support for the right to self-determination. Simply put, unless schools, families and communities are prepared to allow children and adolescents to play an active role in the decisions affecting them, life skills will remain confined to the classroom.

G. Building support in communities and schools for life skills programming

Orienting parents, local officials (i.e. school principals, district education officers, etc.), religious leaders, and teachers

(not teaching life skills) is something that many interventions identified as important for the creation of the necessary programming "space". This includes preparing people for the "subversive" nature of life skills-based education. India's Adolescent Education Programme provides programme orientations to parents and communities. Many stakeholders spoke of the value of teaching life skills to parents.

H. Conclusion

There is a need to build support for life skills based education among communities, schools, and families, through mobilization activities. There is also a need to confront complacency and denial about the risks facing children and adolescents, to build awareness of the benefits of life skills, and to reject the notion that it is a "foreign" concept intent on undermining traditional values. Youth has all the potential. Let us all provide rational education support to them so that they keep on growing in their knowledge and understanding and keep making a difference to the nation and to the world. Then they should be fully empowered to lead India into the future.

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Life skills programme should be an integral part of the education system in order to transmit the accumulated resources of our cultural heritage to each new generation. In this process culture should be considered as major tool to impart life skills.