

# Integrating Life Skills and Workforce Preparation Through Foreign Language Teaching

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## Abstract

In today's era of globalization, integrating life skills and workforce preparation have become the golden rule of higher education. Life skills not only make the students be future ready but it also opens the pathways towards a healthier way of life. Only the theoretical knowledge of the subject is no longer the only requirement of the world of work. Finding a job has become a difficult task and lack of life skills adds up to this difficulty as inadequate skills result in rejection. Knowledge of a foreign language is day by day becoming an indispensable component. However, in a foreign language class, most of the times, the focus is on making the learners master the language and integration of life skills and workforce preparation is often neglected. This happens because sometimes the teacher is not aware of this important part of language teaching and sometimes the heavy syllabi leaves no time and stands up as a hindrance. Although this part must be taught in early school but it equally plays an important role in higher education. Students with the knowledge of one or multiple languages and life skill and workforce preparation have bright chances to excel in life. Students must be taught how to deal with stress, manage time, work in team, and face challenges as well as changes. This kind of approach is entirely different from the traditional teaching methods and requires a different pedagogy. Through this paper, we will try to highlight how foreign language teaching can integrate life skills and workforce preparation to make the students future ready. We shall also focus on how such pedagogy can be effectively implemented in foreign language teaching.

*Keywords:* Life Skills, Workforce Preparation, Foreign Language, Communication, Pedagogy.

## Introduction

In today's era of globalization, integrating life skills and workforce preparation have become the golden rule of higher education. Life skills not only make the students be future ready but it also opens the pathways towards a healthier way of life. Only the theoretical knowledge of the subject is no longer the only requirement of the world of work. Finding a job has become a difficult task and lack of life skills adds

up to this difficulty as inadequate skills result in rejection.

Educating people in real terms is not just imparting information but to equip them to handle situations in an effective and positive manner. There are a number of activities through which a foreign language instructor can teach these life skills to the learners. Hence, they can help the learners to be able to tackle situations in life as they become self-dependant and confident.

Knowledge of a foreign language is day by day becoming an indispensable component. Knowledge of a foreign language is in itself a life skill and the other life skills taught in a foreign language class come as an added bonus. A multilingual is a better problem-solver and is a creative thinker. The teachers of foreign language must know what life skills are and through which activities they can make the students learn these life skills effectively. Moreover, candidates with workforce preparation skills have better hiring rates.

Teaching of Life skills and workforce preparation are two important pillars of education system and through our paper we shall try to focus on three aspects 'what', 'why' and 'how' i.e what are life skills and workforce preparation? Why to teach life skills and workforce preparation in class? How to teach life skills and workforce preparation in a language class?

### **What Are Life Skills And Workforce Preparation ?**

Life skills are the skills that we learn to live a happier and a more satisfying life. In other words life skills are a set of basic skills acquired through learning and/or direct practical experience that enable individuals and groups to deal effectively with issues and problems encountered in daily life. They allow us to better fit into our families and the communities in which we are born. Workforce preparation skills are generally needed to find and maintain careers.

Life skills can be best taught in early school. Integrating life skills which not only make the students be future ready but also open the pathways towards a healthier way of life are one of the priorities of education system at present. Life skills are a set of skills that helps us to make the most of life and its opportunities. These are the skills that one learns from different situations, both inside and outside the classroom i.e either in institutions or in society as general. These skills pave the way for a better future as they enable the individuals to take decisions and learn skills of adjustments, effective communication and many more.

Workforce preparation skills, which can be well taught at a higher level, prepare individuals to obtain or retain employment as they include the

knowledge, skills and competencies and abilities such as teamwork, collaboration, and customer service, critical thinking, strategic thinking, the ability to connect and cooperate. They also play a very important role in helping the individuals to advance in the workforce as they also include interpersonal skills, decision making, stress management, sense of organization. These skills are the ones which will help them in any career that they wish to pursue.

### **Why To Teach Life Skills And Workforce Preparation In Language Class?**

The teaching of language goes hand in hand with the development of thinking and concepts, and, simultaneously, with the development of different ways of thinking and understanding. Language learning is not limited to simple learning of vocabulary and grammar but it also includes methods of reflection, communication and understanding.

The most obvious contributions include the development of precise and specific scientific concepts, the analysis, the acquisition of systematic methods for the detection and analysis of problems, open-mindedness, and systematic organization of reflection. All these contribute to the personality development of the learner.

In today's time of globalization, confident and smart employees are the need of the hour. As we have stated earlier, knowledge of a foreign language is day by day becoming an indispensable component. However, in a foreign language class, most of the times, the focus is on making the learners master the language and integration of life skills and workforce preparation is often neglected. This happens because sometimes the teacher is not aware of this important part of language teaching and sometimes the heavy syllabi leaves no time and stands up as a hindrance.

Today, with globalization and mobility, employers are recruiting from an increasingly diverse and multicultural pool of workers. Students with the knowledge of one or multiple languages and life skill and workforce preparation have bright chances to excel in life. Students must be taught how to deal with stress, manage time, work in team, and face challenges as well as changes. This kind of approach

is entirely different from the traditional teaching methods and requires a different pedagogy.

In a language class, the students are taught the art of speaking which increases their confidence. Speaking with confidence is a desired quality in the world of work and this can be best taught in a language class. The language teacher can present a number of situations and the students are asked to enact a scene. They can also be asked to imagine as if they are appearing for an interview and act the scene.

It is important to make the students know how to cope up with life situations as only high grades will not help them to excel in the society. This helps to improve their mental well-being. Life skills and workforce preparations skills must be taught as when people learn essential life skills, they become engaged, educated and able to take responsibility for themselves and their communities.

### **Life Skills And Workforce Preparation Skills That Can Be Taught In A Foreign Language Class:**

Knowing a foreign language is in itself a workforce preparation skill as we have stated earlier that a bilingual or a multilingual candidate has bright chances of getting selected. There is utmost importance of skills in languages for various areas, such as personal development, participation in social life, communication and interaction with others in different social and cultural contexts.

Life skills is a dynamic teaching –learning process that has to take place in a systematic way. The objectives pursued in a foreign language class are practical and utilitarian. Below are a number of life skills and workforce preparation skills that can be taught in a language class.

#### **Critical thinking**

Integrating life skills in students is to let them be acquainted with the know-how in a relevant way in specific situations with problems to solve, tasks to perform or projects to achieve. This precision is important, because it refers to the strategies whose essential characteristic is knowing how to face the new and manage the unexpected.

It is difficult to dissociate language acquisition from reasoning, critical thinking as it involves the interpretation of various types of texts, awareness of genre and context, and the perception of the poetic and aesthetic aspects of language.

#### **Creative Thinking**

It is the ability to create new ideas, as well as the ability to analyse one's knowledge and consider its importance. This is also another important life skill that can be taught in a language class. The educator can involve the students in 'Best out of waste' activities and also ask them to describe their experience of creating in the target language.

#### **Empathy**

According to Brown (1994) empathy is "the projection of one's own personality into the personality of another in order to understand him or her better." According to him empathy is a very important factor that contributes in the peaceful co-existence of individuals together in the society. It is important to know yourself and to be able to put yourself in others' shoes as if their experiences were your own.

Empathy and emotional intelligence are two extremely useful skills. These two skills are very important to create lasting and fruitful relationships. Within the professional environment, these two assets will determine the quality of interactions with colleagues.

Learning of another language makes the learner more tolerant and open minded. They are more open to accept the change. Moreover, learning of a foreign language paves the way to get to know new culture and communities.

#### **Decision making**

Decision making refers to the skills needed to analyse problems, find solutions (alone or with others), and then act accordingly. This is a very important skill that is needed at every stage of life. This skill can be very well integrated in students in a foreign language class as a number of activities can be presented and practiced.

### **Management of emotions**

This is a very important life skill that can help the individuals to cope up in both their personal and professional life. Teacher can plan to ask students to make questionnaire and interview famous people and they can learn a lot by their experiences. It is the ability to bounce back from obstacles and view them as learning opportunities or simply as experiences.

### **Problem solving**

Competencies are abilities that help us accomplish tasks. These are vertical capabilities that allow us to perform a task in order to solve a specific problem. The educators must always encourage the learners to cross question and discuss the topics in class. A two way communication is always better and help the students to understand the concept better. This pedagogy ensures active learning.

### **Communication skills**

Communication skills are generally the abilities required to get along and work with other people, including the ability to send and receive written and verbal messages. Communication skills are among the most valued and easily transferable skills from one industry to another. Foreign language teaching makes the students learn how to stay connected and communicate effectively. This life skill is one of the most important life skill and can be best learnt in a language class.

Strong communication skills are required in almost all kinds of jobs and such strong skills can be best integrated by a language teacher. There are plenty of activities to make students learn how to communicate effectively. They can be given situations or the educator can play a round of rapid fire questions.

### **Positive self-image development**

The learners do not learn everything essentially either in the classroom or outside the classroom. It is always a better way to provide continuous training for better learning. A better involvement in the learning is always a good method to make the students learn. The educator must initiate a

comfortable learning culture for developing different life skills such as self-awareness, problem solving, decision making, creative thinking, and critical thinking.

Students can be asked to choose adjectives that can best describe them. They can further be asked to speak a few lines about themselves in the target language and also tell what role they can play in contributing for the development of the society.

### **How To Teach Life Skills And Workforce Preparation In A Language Class?**

What about goals for teachers? What skills should they develop? During the teaching phase, it is a question of ensuring an adequate didactic transposition, taking into account many didactic and pedagogical parameters specific to each class. The work of the trainer or the teacher consists in thinking about the activities that will offer to learners, in terms of objectives, content and regulations, the target knowledge and skills so that the learners see themselves progressing both in their academics and personality.

The modern workplace and employment landscape is changing dramatically as technology advances. Teachers can help students develop the mind set and workforce preparation skills needed for the modern technology-driven work environment by integrating technology-based activities into current curricula and everyday instruction.

Educators can use a number of teaching techniques to inculcate life skills among students. Such techniques involve role play, brainstorming, Pair work, Group work, Open discussion, Debates, games, social work, educational tours etc.

Communicative competence which is one of the most required skill in the world of work can be facilitated in the language class. The aim of these activities is first of all to reduce the anxiety related to speaking by de-dramatizing productions that do not conform to expectations and by working on repetition and automation. The activities are mainly done in groups, at the beginning so that the learners develop a certain confidence in themselves.

A foreign language teacher plays the role of a facilitator who creates an environment conducive to practice, collaboration between learners, ensures

that the target language is used most of the time. It is the teacher who takes into account the stage of development, the strengths and the elements to be worked on for each individual. Students can also be asked and encouraged to talk about what they feel. This can also serve as an added benefit as it will improve their language skills. This can even be done while playing a game in which one student enact what he is feeling and other students name the adjective.

The teacher can even project an emoticon/emoji on the board and students can narrate their stories related to that emoticon. This activity is considered to be one of the most interesting activity in a language class. Moreover, the teacher can include activities that allow learners to collaborate and solve problems together.

During the class, he can also motivate the students to recognize the emotions of others and show empathy. This can be done through another activity also. The teacher can show a poster to students where there are people depicting different emotions and can then ask the students to play the role choosing one of the people. This will not only help them to feel what the other person was feeling in that situation but it will also help them in expressing themselves in the target language.

## CONCLUSION

Education has experienced tremendous expansion around the world and skills acquired at school or during higher education is one of the priorities of educators. Skill based education is gaining more importance day by day. It is high time to reflect how we teach life skills in the classroom to get desired outcome.

Life skills serve as a guide to develop the right attitude to think smartly, act smartly and to live consciously. Such skills enhance the strength of a person to survive in the 21st century fast growing virtual world. These personal, interpersonal and cognitive psychosocial skills enable people to interact appropriately, help people to manage their own emotional states and help them live an active, safe and productive life.

Life skills are very important to be successful in life and these need to be learnt from early childhood. But it is equally true that the learning of these skills is a life-long process. Language teachers can contribute maximum in the learning of these skills. Along with the other activities that initiates these skills and workforce preparation, rewards and recognition in the class hold an equally important place. A positive reinforcement can encourage students to give their best in their efforts.

As a potential employee, it is better to take a step ahead to stand out in this interconnected world. Companies are looking for versatile people with multiple skills, able to adapt to different cultures, solve problems and perform simultaneous tasks – all qualities directly related to bilingualism. Apart from giving knowledge of a foreign language, the language classes also serve as a platform for integrating other skills such as workforce preparation and life skills.

A foreign language class aims to provide knowledge, skills, learning skills and knowledge. We wish to conclude by saying that the life skills must be taught from early childhood and workforce preparation at a later stage but both the skills are equally important to excel in life.

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