

Exploratory Study on Factors Affecting Life Skills Among Undergraduate Students in Rural Area of Nagpur

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Abstract

The present exploratory study analyses the reasons affecting the progress of life skills amongst under graduate students in the rural regions of Nagpur. Communication, decision-making, emotional control, problem solving and interpersonal skills are life skills which are very important in personal development, in school and in the labor market. What the research aims at is the part played by the demographic variables in the shaping of these competencies, namely gender, family income, parent education, and residence. Data pertaining to 200 undergraduate students was collected by the use of a structured questionnaires and descriptive research design by stratified random sampling. The results abide by the fact that socio-economic and educational backgrounds especially family income and level of education of the father have a major influence in determining the development of life skills. Although, there was no statistical significance in gender differences, the students in small towns rated themselves higher in life skills as compared to their village counterparts. The research determines that life skills can grow through a maze of family, social and institutional issues. It suggests to incorporate the life skills training in the rural education and carry out specific interventions of assisting students with low socioeconomic background.

Keywords: Life Skills, Rural Undergraduate Students, Socio-Economic Factors, Rural Education, etc.

1.1 Introduction:

Important competencies that assist people to respond well to necessities and issues in everyday life are what are referred to as life skills. The World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) defines the concept of life skills as a set of abilities for positive as well as positive adaptation to the changes and challenges of life at the ordinary level. Such abilities are especially essential at the stages of adolescence and young adulthood when individuals are entering the processes of getting a job and leading a life on their own. Life skills development or training is the key in acquiring personal, academic and professional success especially to the undergraduate students in India especially in the rural context.

In rural India, the fields of education usually suffer due to poor infrastructure, poor teacher training and lack of access to co-curricular and experience-based learning. These shortcomings may be quite imperative barriers to life skills, particularly in undergraduate students, who are at an eminent junction in their personal and professional life. In addition, rural students usually face socio-economic issues, digital divide, conventional social standards, and the lack of professional advice on building the necessary life skills, including decision-making, communication, interpersonal relationships, self-discovery, and critical thinking (Kumar & Nair, 2016).

The case in point because the Nagpur region in Maharashtra consists of an urban and predominantly rural society entails a totally different possibility to study the impact of environmental factors, familial factors, institutional factors, and individual factors on the development of life skills in case of a group of students continuing higher education in rural Maharashtra. This exploratory study is intended to determine and evaluate the major determinants of life skills of the undergraduate students on a rural area of Nagpur. The research is relevant to the efforts of the policymakers, teachers, and curriculum makers who are involved in empowering young people by means of providing them with education which is culturally and contextually appropriate to the specific spheres of life skills development.

2.1 Literature Review

The significance and factors that affect the life skills of the young people especially in school

settings have been studied on numerous occasions. Sharma and Yadav (2018) support the above reasoning and state that life skills represent a fundamental way of helping students to cope with any emotional tsunamis, interpersonal conflicts, and academic stresses, which would then create a well-being and employability landscape. When taught in academics, life skills have been revealed to greatly enhance self esteem of the learners, resilience and decision making capabilities of the students (Mangrulkar et al., 2001).

It is a well known fact that first among the critical factors that have an impact on life skills acquisition is the socio- economic status. The students who live in poverty tend to be deprived of the exposure to the environment that promotes social, emotional, and cognitive development. According to a study by Naik and Narayana (2019), students in the rural areas had lower communication and problem-solving skills in comparison to the ones in the urban areas, which was primarily because of the discrepancies in skills associated with family education, access to digital products, and extra-curricular activities. The same case has revealed that there is a great impact of parental education and parental involvement in the process of development of self-understanding, empathy, and social dexterity among children (Bharath & Kumar, 2010).

The contribution of educational institutions in developing life skills is also very significant. The attitude of teachers, instructional practices and the institutional encouragement of co-curricular activities can open up or block occasions in which students may develop in the field of life skills. According to Arora and Singh (2020), colleges in which the students can gain experience, interact with their peers, take part in workshops known to teach learned skills will be more prone to successfully educate graduates who will be more competent in their lives. Nonetheless, the inability to train faculty and resources to use such programs is widely seen in rural colleges.

The other important dimension in development of life skills is gender. Ghosh and Roy (2017) conducted a research showing that female participants in rural colleges claimed to feel less confident and assertive since they were led to believe that there was nothing wrong in being or sounding shy, and no one encouraged them to speak out publicly or to show leadership. Conversely, programs that focus on gender equality and leadership have reported great success in life skill indicators in the youth of the rural areas (Sundaram et al., 2012).

The beliefs of cultures and communities are those, which also determine the perception of life skills and their acquisition. In collectivistic cultures such as rural India, aspects of sense of life like decision-making and assertiveness could be limited by the views of societal systems and family identities. According to Singh and Kiran (2014), cultural congruency should be taken into account during the design of the life skills education program because one-size-fits-all model might not be relevant to the realities and experiences of the students who attend a rural school.

Digital literacy is another emerging element that has come to shape life skills. As having access to technology in the education sector has become vital, rural location and refusal to provide digital tools and the internet result in an inadequacy of access to modern approaches to the education in spheres of information management, online communication, and digital problem-solving as necessary skills of modern life. Patil and Kale (2021) note that despite this gap, the rural youth can be more employable through an integration of digital literacy with the education in life skills.

Although the body of literature has grown, little research has been done with regard to the rural areas of the Nagpur region on doing undergraduate studies. The majority of the currently available studies have generalized the results either between the urban and the rural environment or have concentrated on school level education. Thus, the proposed study may address this gap by carrying out exploratory study of the factors, viz., personal, institutional, socio-economic and cultural that impact on life skill development among under graduate students of rural Nagpur.

3.1 Research Objectives:

The research objectives are:

- To determine and discuss the main personal, socio-economic and institutional determinants that affect the progression of life skills in the undergraduate students in the rural regions of Nagpur.
- To evaluate the influence of demographic factors on developing the life skills competencies of undergraduate students in the rural areas.

3.2 Methodology:

The current research will use a descriptive research design to address the issue of determining the factors impairing life skills among the undergraduate students of the rural regions of Nagpur. Primary data was gathered by means of the questionnaire approach that took the form of a structured, pre-tested questionnaire that included both closed-end and the Likert-based questions to help pick up the data on the personal, socio-economic, institutional, and demographic variables. The sample of 200 undergraduate students was taken in different colleges who are located in the rural areas and are associated with RTM Nagpur University; thus representation in gender, stream of education and people having different socio-economic backgrounds were taken. The sampling was conducted as a stratified random sampling where the population was stratified in college and gender and participants were randomly sampled within the stratified in order to make the findings diverse and reliable.

4.1 Factors influencing development of life skills:

Various interdependent causes contribute to the development of the life skills in the undergraduate learners, especially in the rural places like in the Nagpur region. Students in these environments tend to have particular needs influenced by socio-economic dispositions, accessibility to quality schooling and culture, patriarchal family organizations, and conventions that, in turn, limit chances of development and free choice of will. Also, rural colleges may lack skill-based training, digital training as well as co-curricular education and activities, which would mean the inability to develop the whole person with regards to the development of the key life skills of communication, problem-solving, managing emotions and being a leader. Education of parents, peer pressure and academic environment supportiveness is also important in the development of the capacity of the students to be adjustable and to be able to perform in their personal and professional lives. It is critical to know such influencing factors in order to develop specific interventions that will both help close the gap in skills and enable the rural young generation to move to the adult and labor worlds with success.

A structured questionnaire was designed and applied on a sample of 200 students to provide an analysis of factors affecting life skills among undergraduate students in Nagpur in the rural area. The following domains including personal attributes, socio-economic background and institutional support, as well as the life skills scale based on the key competences (communication, decision making, interpersonal relationships, coping with stress, etc.) were addressed in questionnaire. To test the strength and direction of relationship between independent factors and life skills development, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (correlation and regression analysis were used to analyze data.

Table 1 Descriptive Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency (n=200)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	108	54.0
	Female	92	46.0
Family Income (Monthly)	Below ₹10,000	58	29.0
	₹10,001–₹20,000	74	37.0
	Above ₹20,000	68	34.0
Father's Education	Primary or below	62	31.0

	Secondary	74	37.0
	Graduate and above	64	32.0
Availability of Digital Tools	Yes	86	43.0
	No	114	57.0
Participation in Co-curricular	Yes	92	46.0
	No	108	54.0

The background survey was conducted among 200 undergraduate students in rural regions of Nagpur and the demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1. The gender distribution provided is very balanced in terms of gender representation with 54 percent males and 46 percent female respondents. Regarding family income levels, most of the students (37 percentage) are located in 10 001 to 20 000 rupees category and 29 percentage are located at the level below 10 000 rupees which emphasizes low-middle section. Education level of fathers indicates that (37 percent) have attained secondary education and (32 percent) are graduates and above with (31 percent) having just primary and below showing different level of influence of parents to the students academic and personal growth. It is important to point out that 57% of the students indicated that they do not have access to digital devices including smartphones or other devices with established internet access, and this means that digital divide remains wide in the rural areas. Moreover, 54 percent of the respondents did not engage in any co-curricular activity meaning that perhaps, there was no challenge or support within the institute regarding holistic growth other than academic work in the rural colleges. This result brings a contextual background of what affects life skills among the surveyed students.

Table 2 Factors influencing Development of Life Skills among undergraduate students

S. No.	Factor	Mean Score (Out of 5)	Interpretation
1	Supportive family environment	4.12	High influence
2	Participation in co-curricular activities	3.98	High influence
3	Access to digital tools and internet	3.84	Moderately high influence
4	Quality of teaching and mentoring	3.91	High influence
5	Peer interaction and group learning	3.76	Moderate influence
6	Socio-economic background	3.64	Moderate influence
7	Exposure to real-life problem-solving tasks	3.87	Moderately high influence
8	Gender equality in learning opportunities	3.70	Moderate influence
9	Institutional infrastructure and resources	3.55	Moderate to low influence
10	Career guidance and life skills training	3.92	High influence

The table lays emphasis that the main factors that impact the development of life skills among the undergraduate students in the rural regions of Nagpur are evaluated on the basis of the perceptions of the student using a five-point Likert scale. Supportive family environment (4.12) and career guidance and life skills training (3.92) recorded highest mean scores suggesting that both personal and institutional support greatly contribute to development of life skills in the students. The involvement in co-curricular activities (3.98) and the quality of teaching and mentoring (3.91) rates are high as well, indicating that a possibility of practical involvement

and effective teacher instruction promise a great increase in abilities of a student. Ability to access digital tools (3.84), exposure to real-life problem-solving tasks (3.87) may index the increased moment of technology and hands-on learning. In the meantime, peer interaction (3.76), gender equality (3.70) and socio-economic background (3.64) had moderate effect, implying, the factors play an important role but may be different by specific situation of individuals. The lowest score that was obtained amongst the mentioned factors is institutional infrastructure (3.55); an indication of a potential area that the rural colleges need to improve on in order to enhance life skills training. In general, the results make it clear that individual and institutional issues are equally important, and combined responses to them may result in the more rounded student growth.

Table 3 Personal Factors and Life Skill Scores

Personal Factor	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value	Interpretation
Gender (Male = 1, Female = 2)	0.142	0.052	Weak positive, not significant
Participation in co-curricular activities	0.458	0.000**	Strong positive, highly significant
Self-confidence (Self-rated)	0.421	0.001**	Strong positive, significant
Motivation to learn new skills	0.388	0.002**	Moderate positive, significant

To a great extent it is evidenced in the data that personal, socio-economic and institutional factors are found to be very influential in the development of life skills among rural undergraduate students in Nagpur. Under personal factors, there was a significant and strong positive correlation between the involvement in co-curricular activities and self-confidence and life skill scores which means that engagement and motivation in personal activities (co-curricular activities) and self-confidence is paramount in developing life skills.

Table 4 Relationship between Socio-Economic Factors and Life Skill Scores

Socio-Economic Factor	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value	Interpretation
Family Monthly Income	0.412	0.001**	Strong positive, significant
Father's Education Level	0.375	0.002**	Moderate positive, significant
Access to Digital Tools	0.439	0.000**	Strong positive, highly significant
Residential Area (village/town)	0.169	0.036*	Weak positive, significant

Access to digital tools was also found a significant factor in socio-economic domain with a high correlation ($r = 0.439$, $p < 0.01$) indicating that those students who have access to internet and are digitally literate are likely to demonstrate better skills in life such as enhanced capabilities to solve problems, communicate and adapt to situations. There is also substantial influence of family income and level of education of the parents, as it supports the opinion that a good environment back at home helps on developmentally positive notes.

Table 5 Relationship between Institutional Factors and Life Skills Score

Institutional Factor	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value	Interpretation
Quality of teaching and mentoring	0.391	0.001**	Moderate positive, significant

Availability of career guidance	0.445	0.000**	Strong positive, highly significant
Infrastructure & learning resources	0.347	0.004**	Moderate positive, significant
Opportunities for experiential learning	0.429	0.000**	Strong positive, highly significant

At an institutional level, career guidance and good teaching emerged as strongly correlated with the scores of life skills, and it shows the significance of institutional supports in the form of formal systems. Also the quality of infrastructure and the chances of gaining experience through practical learning, had a positive contribution but to a little lower extent than the rest of them.

In general, the findings indicate that the relationship should be multi-layered such that no matter which of the three categories (personal, socio-economic, and institutional) will improve, the consequence will impact the outcomes of life skills, but the most valuable are integrated approaches in all mentioned categories. These findings promote an ecosystem and holistic life skill development in rural higher learning.

4.2 Role of demographic variables in shaping the life skills competencies of rural undergraduate students

The demographic variables are important in the determination of life skills competencies among the rural undergraduate students since it determines the exposure level, experiences and the availability of developmental opportunities to the students. Age, gender, family relative income, education level of parents and residence among others contribute to the variation of how students develop and use key skills in life eg communication skills, decision making, controlling emotions, and interpersonal relationships. As an example, students who belong to upper-educated or better socio-economic families tend to have more resources and support mechanism that can encourage them develop life skills. In a related development, gender norms in the countryside can also influence the confidence, engagement in the leadership aspect and social relations among students which form part of life competencies. The impact of these demographic features is crucial in formulating specialized interventions and all-inclusive education policies that will take into consideration the special needs of rural youngsters in learning life skills that will help them succeed in both their personal and professional matters.

Table 6 Life Skills Competency by Family Income

Monthly Family Income	Number of Students (n)	Average Life Skills Score (out of 5)
Below ₹10,000	58	3.45
₹10,001 – ₹20,000	74	3.66
Above ₹20,000	68	3.81
Total	200	—

The statistics in the table 6 demonstrate an evident and positive correlation between the family income and life skills among the undergraduate rural students. The group of students whose families receive less than 10,000 rupees per month is the least, with 3.45 as the average of the life skills score, meaning that they are not exposed much and have less chance to develop life skills. Conversely, the average score of students with families that earn more than 20,000 rupees per month was much higher i.e. 3.81 which indicates that possible access to digital tools, quality education, involvement in co-curricular activities, and enhanced learning environments through positive financial conditions might be a reason. All of these leads to improved communication, decision making, problem solving and interpersonal competence. This trend reveals the significance of the socio-economic status as a factor in establishing the life skills and shows possible need of disadvantage in terms of life skills development in students belonging to low-income families.

Table 7 Life Skills Competency by Father's Education Level

Father's Education Level	Number of Students (n)	Average Life Skills Score (out of 5)
Primary or Below	62	3.42
Secondary School	74	3.68
Graduate and Above	64	3.79
Total	200	—

Table 7 brings out the interaction between the parental education mainly the father level of education in as far as affecting the life skill competencies of students. Students found who fathers had only primary education or less registered the lowest score in life skills of 3.42 as compared to the students whose fathers were graduates or had higher qualification of an education level of 3.79. This implies that an educated parent has increasingly high chances of providing academic support, fostering a decision-making, which emphasizes values, and participation in activities that contribute to development of emotional, cognitive, and social skills. Education of the parent is likely to indicate the intellectual and motivational support of the home environment, which consequentially influences confidence and communication skills, and adapting activities of a student. The findings reinforce the importance of family school level on youth readiness to deal with the real world challenges by developing life skills.

5.1 Conclusion

The current exploratory analysis shows that the evolution of life skills in the Nagpur undergraduate students in rural regions is greatly influenced by an intersection of the demographic factors which include gender, family income, education level of the father, and the area of stay. The results show that there is a stronger competence level in terms of life skills in students whose families have higher income level and whose parents are better educated, which indicates that socio-economic status and educational environs is a key determinant in developing the necessary personal and inter-personal skills. Although the differences in gender were insignificant, students in small towns performed better than their village counterparts thus showing that life skills acquisition is a factor of geographical and infrastructural disparities. Altogether, the study substantiates the idea that developing life skills may be not only an independent student concern, but the responsibility of the environment in which a person is in, the personal, social, and institutional ecosystem.

5.2 Recommendations

Colleges and policymakers should, according to the findings, frame all-inclusive interventions that meet the needs of life skills of students with disadvantaged backgrounds. Rural schools ought to incorporate well-structured life skills training in the curriculum particularly among schools in low income families and schools with a small support towards the educational direction of their parents. The government and non-government organizations are supposed to seek to increase their digital connectivity and co-curricular participation to the rural colleges. Also the topic of parental awareness programs can be created to sensitize the parents about the significance of life skills and how they can affect the growth of students. All these efforts will help not only in making people employable and individuals more developed but will also help in forming stronger, more confident and socially responsible youth in the rural areas.

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