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Students' Life Skills with Reference to the Socio-Economic Status and Discipline of the Study in the Context of NEP-2020

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Abstract

Objective: The main aim of this paper was to examine the relationship between life skills and the socioeconomic status of the students enrolled in different disciplines of study in universities and colleges of Punjab State.

Method: 600 students who were majoring in science, the arts, or business programs in the universities and colleges of Punjab State, India served as the sample. Modified Kuppuswamy (2022) Socio-economic scale (SES) was used. As per scale- families are placed into one of five categories: upper class, upper middle class, lower middle class, upper lower class, and lower class. A family's total score can range anywhere from three to twenty-nine points, and it can only be determined by combining information about the members of the family's education level, occupation level, and income level. Life skills were measured by self-developed tools. This test measures 10 life skills, including critical thinking, self-awareness, creativity, decision-making, problem-solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, empathy, stress management, and dealing with emotions. Each dimension has five statements, and a 5-point scale is used to rate each. **Findings:** It has been found in the present study that students of science disciplines have higher life skills in comparison to Commerce and Social science Streams. Similarly, students from higher SES backgrounds tend to have better Life Skills compared to those from lower SES backgrounds. **Novelty:** This research uniquely compares socio-economic status, academic discipline, and students' life skills within the NEP-2020 framework. It stands out by examining how these variables collectively impact life skills development, providing a nuanced understanding of their interdependence. By focusing on the diverse socio-economic backgrounds and varied academic disciplines, the study offers novel insights into tailoring educational strategies that foster essential life skills. In this research paper, an analytical approach has been applied to analyze the data as per NEP-2020's holistic and inclusive vision, aiming to bridge educational disparities and enhance student outcomes in a comprehensive manner.

Keywords: Life Skills; Socio-Economic Status; Science; Social Science and Commerce Disciplines of study; NEP 2020

1 Introduction

A fair and impartial society, the realization of human potential, and the advancement of public policy are all dependent on a good education system. Encouraging everyone to have access to high-quality education is the first step towards India's ascent to prominence in the global arena in terms of social protection and financial prosperity. It is expected that over the next ten years, India's youth population will be the highest in the world, and our ability to provide them with excellent educational opportunities will ultimately determine our nation's destiny. Providing them with quality education will certainly help them to grow and develop as per the demand of Mission Viksit Bharat 2047. The term 'life skill education' has only recently gained popularity. In the twenty-first century, it is anticipated that education will equip students with life skills. According to Nasheeda et al. (2019)⁽¹⁾, developed countries have better-organized life skills education initiatives that promote positive behavior, with studies outlining the outcomes for particular youth. To directly and swiftly support the student and improve his living circumstances, the taking-in measure was shifted from the study hall to the student's situational environment. People began to acquire greater life skills and careers at this time, which marked a turning point in education and proficiency.

In today's academic, cultural, and economic context, the term 'life skills' appears frequently and is used in a variety of contexts, including workplace, school, and college curricula, clinical interventions, personality development programs, lifestyle magazines, websites, newspapers, and self-help books. This is supported by the observation that the total number of life skill definitions equals the total number of thought leaders and educators worldwide (Dupuy et al., 2018)⁽²⁾.

Life skills are the abilities required to maximize life's opportunities without consciously trying. Life skills are the competencies we need to effectively handle the responsibilities and challenges we face in day-to-day life. Pandey et al. (2021)⁽³⁾ explain that life skills allow people to deal effectively and positively with carrying out daily tasks and ensure individuals' full participation. On that account, life skills refer to skills that enable individuals to deal with challenges and meet day-to-day demands accordingly. Gaining and using these skills can improve a person's interpersonal interactions in both their personal and professional life. They help us do almost everything better, including socializing and appropriately regulating our emotions. The life skills that are required may vary based on an individual's age or cultural background. The most crucial abilities for all students enrolled in academic and professional courses to acquire are life skills which make them capable in industry ready and also help them to grow professionally.

As one of the most crucial components of curricula to be established among instructors, who can then further transfer these abilities to their students, NEP 2020⁽⁴⁾ emphasizes the teaching of life skills is necessary at every educational level. Similarly, NCERT has developed a number of manuals and programs of action for successful implementation of the NEP2020⁽⁴⁾.

NCFSE 2023⁽⁵⁾ suggests that including the activities in the classroom to develop and enrich the life skills of students will make them future-ready. The WHO's (2001)⁽⁶⁾ definition of life skills education includes abilities that help instructors become more flexible and positive role models.

According to NEP 2020⁽⁴⁾, it is essential to build and instill skills like critical thinking, communication skills, cooperation, teamwork, empathy, etc. in the current teaching community to improve their competency and adaptation to changing scenarios. In addition to helping students' study, life skills help them become competent, independent, and skilled individuals, all of which will improve their ability to meet the

skill requirements of their future careers. (Pachauri and Kumar 2024)⁽⁷⁾.

Several institutions offer many courses in different programs to develop the life skills of their students. These Programs comprised a series of developmental sessions consisting of communication skills, assertiveness, anger management, decision-making, and creative and critical thinking skills (Naseri & Babakhani, 2014)⁽⁸⁾; (Parvathy and Pillai, 2015)⁽⁹⁾. Home and family environments also influence the student's development in their economic standing in society. It is an established fact that advantaged children have higher levels of educationally relevant socio-emotional skills (Gruijters, Raabe, and Hubner 2024)⁽¹⁰⁾. One common way to predict someone's living circumstances is by looking at their financial status which is responsible for individuals' overall growth. Over the course of a person's lifetime, the environment they are in at home has a significant impact on their physical and mental health. One's chances of succeeding in life are increased when they lead a higher standard of living at home. The significance of the home environment for children's all-around development, especially throughout adolescence, is being increasingly recognized by researchers and theorists. Emotions play a major role in behavior during adolescence, and behavior in turn affects psychological and mental health.

A person's or family's socio-economic status (SES) is a comprehensive measure of their employment experience, social standing in comparison to others, and financial access to resources. A family's SES is determined by looking at the combined income, earners' education, and occupation in addition to the household income; in contrast, an individual's SES is determined just by looking at their characteristics. According to studies, perceived financial stress may be defined as the "balance between income and necessary expenses a less well-known characteristic of SES. It is well-established that parental influence remains important during middle and late childhood as well as adolescence (Singla et al., 2020)⁽¹¹⁾.

The ability to convert information, attitudes, and beliefs into practical abilities in a demanding and stressful world makes life skills essential. Effective behavior, emotional control, and stress management are critical for success in both personal and professional spheres. Through promoting mental wellness and a feeling of community, life skills help people respond to life's challenges in a productive way. "Life skills" are a set of basic abilities that help people lead fulfilling lives and effectively handle the obstacles of daily life. In today's connected and dynamic culture, the need for life skills has never been greater. These skills encompass a wide range of social, emotional, and practical competencies that are critical for both personal development and success. They go beyond what is frequently taught in the classroom. The need for life skills stems from the need to give people the means to overcome challenges in both their personal and professional lives. The fast advancement of technology and the dynamic nature of the job market have made flexibility and critical thinking more important than ever. Individuals possessing robust problem-solving, decision-making, and creative skills may confidently take on novel difficulties and devise innovative solutions. These skills come in handy not only in the profession but also while managing the complexities of relationships, money, and health.

2 Methodology

600 students who were majoring in science, the arts, or business programs in the universities and colleges of Punjab State, India served as the sample. Modified Kuppaswamy (2023)⁽¹²⁾ Socio-economic scale was used to study the SES of the sampled population. As per scale- families are placed into one of five categories: upper class, upper middle class, lower middle class, upper lower class, and lower class. A family's total score can range anywhere from three to twenty-nine points, and it can only be determined by combining information about the members of the family's education level, occupation level, and income level.

Life skills were measured by self-developed tools. This test measures 10 life skills, including critical thinking, self-awareness, creativity, decision-making, problem-solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, empathy, stress management, and dealing with emotions. Each dimension has five statements, and a 5-point scale is used to rate each.

Objectives of the study

1. To Compare the life skills of the students as per their Socio-economic Status.
2. To Study the life skills of the students enrolled in the Science, Commerce, and Social Sciences discipline.

Hypothesis

- H_1 : The undergraduate students with above-average socioeconomic status (AA-SES) would have significantly higher Life Skills than students with average (A-SES) and below-average socioeconomic status (BA-SES).
- H_2 : The undergraduate students with Science Discipline would have significantly higher Life Skills than students with Social Sciences and Commerce Discipline.

3 Results and Discussion

To test the hypothesis-1 the mean, SD, and F-value of Life Skills between the students of below average, average, and above average with respect to the socioeconomic status of parents were obtained and presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation, and F-value of Life Skill of the Students with Respect to socioeconomic status (SES) level of parents

Above Average SES (N= 191)		Average SES (N=307)		Below Average SES (N=102)		Results	
Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sum of the squares	F-value
						Between groups	Within groups
219.04	5.564	214.23	5.843	203.45	4.339	8104.368	30.536
Note: df (2,597), p=.001							265.403

Table 1 shows the mean of students in different categories such as Above Average, Average, and Below Average of SES of parents were $M=219.04$, 214.23 , and 203.45 , respectively. It also indicates that the result of a one-way analysis of variance, was used to test the differences among students of Above Average, Average, and Below Average with respect to socioeconomic status level of the parents for Life Skill. The table shows that the F- value 265.403 for the degree of freedom $2, 597$ is Significant at the .05 level ($p > .05$).

Thus, the hypothesis that undergraduate students with above-average socioeconomic status (AA-SES) would have significantly higher Life Skills than students with average (A-SES) and below-average socioeconomic status (BA-SES) of parents is **Accepted**.

The data and statistical analysis show that there are significant differences in Life Skills scores among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Students with above-average SES have higher Life Skills scores than those with average and below-average SES. The ANOVA results support the hypothesis that higher socioeconomic status is associated with better Life Skills among undergraduate students. Therefore, the findings of the present study are going in the same line as the findings of Zaman Sher, Dar Hina, and Arshad Shamas Suleman (2023)⁽¹³⁾ they found that family is the most important and influential source of learning self-awareness, coping with emotions, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, decision-making, and creative thinking.

Further investigations were conducted through post hoc tests related to emotional Life Skills to find out the significant difference between students with different levels of SES of parents is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Multiple Comparisons of Life Skills of the Undergraduate Students with Respect to Socioeconomic Status (SES) of Parents

(I) SES-Above Average Status	(J) SES-Above Average Status	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Above Average SES	Average SES	4.809*	.509	.001
	Below Average SES	15.586*	.678	.001
Average SES	Above Average SES	-4.809*	.509	.001
	Below Average SES	10.777*	.632	.001
Below Average SES	Above Average SES	-15.586*	.678	.001
	Average SES	-10.777*	.632	.001

* Significance at 0.05 level, $p=0.001$

The post hoc test Table 2 shows the difference between total students according to their socioeconomic status (SES) of parents i.e., above average, average, and below average. The difference between above-average (AA-SES) and average (A-SES) of students in terms of life skills was found significant at a .05 level ($p < .05$). Similarly, the difference between average (A-SES) and below-average (BA-SES), and between Above average (AA-SES) and Below Average (BA-SES) of students for Life Skill were also found significant at .05 level ($p < .05$) for this mean difference is less than 0.05 of significance. Overall, the post hoc analysis reinforces the finding that socioeconomic status (SES) is a significant factor influencing Life Skill scores among students. Each comparison between the SES categories (AA-SES vs. A-SES, A-SES vs. BA-SES, and AA-SES vs. BA-SES) shows a significant difference at the .05 level, confirming that students from higher SES backgrounds tend to have better Life Skills compared to those from lower SES backgrounds. The findings of the present study are supported by Agadi V S (2022)⁽¹⁴⁾ who found a positive significant relationship between Life Skills and the Socio-Economic Status of Students.

These findings from the post hoc analysis underscore the significant impact of socio-economic status on Life Skills development among the students. Addressing these disparities requires comprehensive interventions aimed at providing equitable access to quality education, enhancing parental awareness and involvement, improving extracurricular opportunities, and ensuring better healthcare and nutrition. By bridging the gap in Life Skills development, we can promote holistic growth and empower all students to succeed in their personal and professional lives, irrespective of their socioeconomic background.

H₂: The undergraduate students with Science Discipline would have significantly higher Life Skills than students with Social Sciences and Commerce Discipline.

To test hypothesis 2, the mean, SD, and F-value of Life Skills between the students with Science, Social Sciences, and Commerce Discipline as subjects of study were obtained and presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean, Standard Deviation, and F-value of Life Skill of the Students with Respect to Discipline of Study

Science (N= 150)		Social Science (N=150)		Commerce (N=300)		Results	
Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sum of the squares	F-value
						Between groups	Within groups
220.61	4.726	210.91	4.929	214.95	6.075	7155.165	17982.793
							118.770

Note: df (2,597), p=.001 (p<.05)

hows the mean of students in different categories such as Science, Social Sciences, and Commerce Discipline as the subject of study were M=220.61, 210.91, and 214.95, respectively. It also indicates that the result of a one-way analysis of variance was used to test the differences among students of Science, Social Sciences, and Commerce Discipline as subjects of study for Life Skills. The table shows that the F- value 118.770 for the degree of freedom 2, 597 is Significant at the .05 level (p < .05).

Thus, the hypothesis that undergraduate students with science as a discipline would have significantly higher Life Skills than students with Social Science and Commerce is Accepted.

The data and statistical analysis show that there are significant differences in Life Skills scores among students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Students with Science have higher Life Skills scores than those with Social Science and Commerce discipline backgrounds. The ANOVA results support the hypothesis that higher Science is associated with better Life Skills among undergraduate students. The findings of the present study are supported by the findings of Shankari D S and Eagavalli K (2019)⁽¹⁵⁾. They found that there is a significant difference in the life skills of arts and science college students. T

Further investigations were conducted through post hoc tests related to Life Skills to find out the significant difference between students with different Discipline is given in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Multiple Comparisons of Life Skills of the Undergraduate Students with Respect to Science, Social Sciences and Commerce Discipline as Subjects of study

(I) Discipline Chosen /Subject of Studies	(J) Discipline Chosen /Subject of Studies	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Science	Social Science	9.700*	.634	.001	8.21	11.19
	Commerce	5.660*	.549	.001	4.37	6.95
Social Science	Science	-9.700*	.634	.001	-11.19	-8.21
	Commerce	-4.040*	.549	.001	-5.33	-2.75
Commerce	Science	-5.660*	.549	.001	-6.95	-4.37
	Social Science	4.040*	.549	.001	2.75	5.33

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level. Note: Significance at 0.05level, p=0.001

The post hoc test Table 4 shows the difference between total students in Science, Social Sciences, and Commerce Discipline as subject of study of the students in terms of life skill was found significant at .05 level (p< .05). Similarly, the difference between Science and Social Science, between Social Science and Commerce, between Science and Commerce of students for Life Skill were also found significant at .05 level (p< .05) for this mean difference is less than 0.05 of significance.

The findings that the differences in life skills between students from different educational backgrounds (Science, Social Sciences, and Commerce) are significant, justified, and well-explained based on several possible reasons:

Different academic disciplines emphasize varied skills and ways of thinking. Science students often engage in rigorous problem-solving, analytical thinking, and practical experiments, which can enhance their critical thinking and technical

skills. Social Sciences students focus on understanding human behavior, societies, and interactions, which can improve their communication empathy, and interpersonal skills. Commerce students are typically involved in learning the strategies of business, finance, and economics, which can develop their organizational, managerial, and numerical skills. The unique demands and learning outcomes associated with each discipline can lead to the development of distinct sets of life skills among students. Besides, Curriculum Structure, Assessment Methods, extracurricular, Activities and Opportunities, Peer Influence, and Learning Environment also may be the reason.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the significant differences in life skills among students from various educational backgrounds are influenced by several key factors. The nature of the disciplines plays a crucial role, as each field of study emphasizes different skill sets and competencies. Students in humanities may develop stronger communication and critical thinking skills, while those in sciences might excel in analytical and problem-solving abilities. Curriculum structure also contributes to the differences in life skills. Therefore, disciplines with a more flexible and interdisciplinary curriculum may allow students to explore diverse areas, fostering a broader range of life skills. In contrast, highly specialized programs may limit this exposure, focusing intensively on discipline-specific skills. Assessment methods further shape life skills development. Traditional exams may prioritize memorization and individual performance, whereas project-based assessments can enhance collaboration, creativity, and practical application of knowledge. The variety in assessment strategies across disciplines thus leads to distinct skill sets. Students' interactions with their peers within a particular discipline can shape their attitudes, behaviors, and skills as it has been found that science discipline students have better social skills in comparison to other disciplines (The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.). Collaborative learning environments, common in certain fields, encourage the development of social and interpersonal skills which is very prominent in the school environment.

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