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UTILIZING 'EBASTA' AND 'EPATHSHALA' INITIATIVES FOR PROMOTING LIFE SKILLS AMONG SCHOOL STUDENTS: STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Promoting life skills among students is a priority these days. Both national and international agencies are urging governmental and educational institutions to help school students to master different set of life skills for their own and societal benefits. There are many ways to learn life skills and using ICT is one of them. Besides helping teaching-learning processes, ICT supported education initiatives can also be employed to orient learners about different life skills, practice them, and making them part of their day-to-day activities and experiences. And to make this happen, teachers have to play a vital role. Extending this argument, present paper defines life skills, details about promises offered by 'eBasta' and 'ePathshala' initiatives to promote life skills, and suggests useful strategies for teachers to utilize both these initiatives for promoting life skills among students.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of life skills is of prime importance these days. These skills are supposed to help individuals to work effectively, productively and be open minded to varying ideas and values. The attainment of certain skills such as shared decision making, information sharing, collaboration, innovation and flexible problem solving, etc. are the prerequisite to be successful in work and life (Pacific Policy Research Centre, 2010). In addition to these traditional skills, new skills such as digital literacy are also in demand. A report entitled 'Skills for a digital world' (OECD, 2016) states:

To ensure that individuals can engage in digital activities and adapt rapidly to new and unexpected occupations and skills needs, a stronger emphasis has to be placed in promoting strong levels of foundation skills, digital literacies, higher order thinking competencies as well as social and emotional skills

These set or group of skills is generally referred as 'life skills.' The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined life skills

as 'abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.' WHO has given ten core life skills necessary and desirable to face the realities of life: Self awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, problem solving/ decision making, critical thinking, creative thinking, coping with emotions and coping with stress. Akfirat and Kezer (2016) stated that life skills are skills and knowledge that are necessary for an effective life and different from academic skills. It is the need of the hour to focus on the promotion of life skills among school students. In fact, the purpose of education is to empower the individual with life skills to lead a successful and meaningful life, as highlighted in a report from Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD, 2016):

Education has all through been considered a key driver of national development; an essential condition for building a humane society. However, the core objectives of education in the coming years should encompass four essential components – i.e. Building values, awareness, knowledge and skills (p. 24).

Basically, education is about imparting the skills needed to succeed in the present times and rendering help to increase the

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confidence to practice these skills (Watson, 2016). The four pillars of learning given by UNESCO's Report '*Learning: The treasure within*' (UNESCO, 1996) primarily aims to help learners to develop a set of life skills. A closer look to these four learning principles and targeted outcome makes it clear:

- **Learning to know:** To better comprehend the world and its complexities in this rapid revolutionizing century one needs to acquire certain skills like critical thinking and creative thinking to survive in the changing times.
- **Learning to do:** To participate effectively and productively in the society the most essential skills of problem solving and decision making skills are needed.
- **Learning to live together:** To understand the diversity and differences in the society in real. The learning has to enable the individual to build human relationship coherent with peace and harmony which directly depends on the co-operation, collaboration and effective communication skills.
- **Learning to be:** To develop psycho-social, affective and confidence of the individual the learning has to be such which develops the self management, self monitoring and coping skills of the learner.

Extending this discussion, following figure depicts the presence of various life skills among the four pillars of learning.

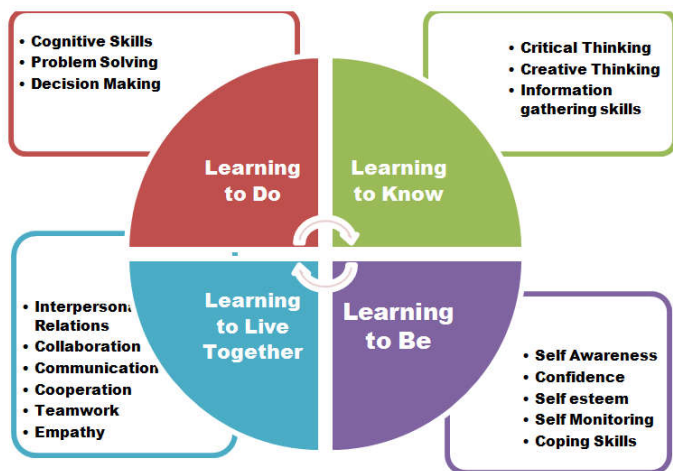


Fig. 1. Four Pillars of Learning and Life Skills

Promoting life skills among school students: Challenges and potential solution: It is expected that enhancement of life skills will directly influence the desired learning outcomes. In other words, educational systems across the world are expected to develop certain life skills among learners. Although, promoting life skills among learners is not an easy task. There exist several challenges that cast a negative shadow in developing the required life skills among learners. The first among them is paradigm shift in the societal structure. Emergence of 'nuclear families' and 'both parents working' culture make it very difficult for a child to start learning various life skills from their homes. The other prominent challenge is tying life skills with curriculum. Sensing the reality of the changing situation, policy makers tried to introduce life skills education in the curriculum. But the burden of the already wide curriculum has restricted the administration to allot few periods only in the time tables.

Moreover, the life skills are not measured quantitatively hence there is hardly any emphasis on the teaching of life skills (Josephine, 2011). As resultant, teaching of life skills has been given least importance in comparison to the other quantifiable subjects. Wrong perception of life skills is other challenge. Life skills education is mainly perceived as moral education. Telling moral stories can help to achieve certain life skills but some important skills such as problem solving and collaboration cannot be propagated through this method. In fact, school students are in great need to acquire the life skills as they are in the phase of transition from childhood to adolescence and adolescence is a turning point in one's life as today's adolescent are the tomorrow's adult (Nagarjuna, 2016). Therefore, there is a need to rethink and redesign the teaching learning processes to achieve the desired learning outcomes means improving life skills. To make it happen, continuous and committed stimuli are needed to bring the desired level of outcome in the learner. In addition to parents, teachers, and peer groups who bear influence in the development of certain skills in the learner, ICT can also play a significant role to support life skills learning. This argument is supported by the observations that students are digitally minded in this era of digitalization (Emesini, 2011), ICT enhances educational processes (Ukwungwo & Oyedepo, 2012), and ICT has the potential to transform the roles of teachers and students in the learning process (Abdulla et.al, 2008). Extending this discussion, it can be said that ICT initiatives in education can be helpful in promoting various life skills among school students.

Promoting life skills by using 'eBasta' and 'ePathshala' initiatives: Promises offered: The traditional classroom comprises of books, notebooks, blackboard and other teaching aids. The life and activities of teachers and students mainly revolve around them. The inclusion of ICT in age old education system has brought a new dimension to support teaching learning processes and practices. In other words, use of ICT in education has the potential to impact teaching learning practices in many ways (Somekh, 2008). Realizing this potential, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India has launched several initiatives such as NROER, OLab, eBasta, ePathshala and SWAYAM etc. to facilitate ICT supported education. Among these, eBasta and ePathshala initiatives mainly cater to the needs of school education.

eBasta: e-basta is one of the innovative project which has been created in line with the government's Digital India initiative. The project aims to make school books accessible in digital form as e- books to be read and used on tablets and laptops. It serves as a single platform for the publishers and the schools to come together. The teacher can logically organize the eBooks and other contents in the eBasta. Moreover, the teacher can access to variety of resources and can choose from review, comment, and rate on the portal. eBasta gives the platform to teachers nationwide to contribute content and also to generate more relevant collections to be visible to everyone on the portal.

ePathshala: ePathshala, a joint initiative of (MHRD), Govt. of India and NCERT has been developed for showcasing and disseminating all educational e-resources including textbooks, audio, video, periodicals, and a variety of other print and non-print materials for students, teachers, parents, researchers and educators. It provides access to digital textbooks for all

classes, learning materials and enables participation in exhibitions, contests, festivals, workshops, etc. As per the newsletter issued by CIET, (CIET, 2017), the portal has 1,621 audios and 1,431 videos, 650 e-books (e-pubs) and 504 flip books. The user can comment, rate and participate in the online contest and assessment tests. Considering the argument that ICT helps in enhancing creativity, communication skills and thinking capabilities (Kila, n.d.), it can be said that both eBasta and ePathshala offer several opportunities to promote life skills among students. The eBasta and ePathshala initiatives present following opportunities before teachers:

- Relieving teachers and students from the formalities and conventional method of acquiring knowledge.
- Providing multiple instructional material on the portal available free of cost.
- Offering alternative books from different publishers on the portal.
- Accessing hundreds of audios, videos, and multimedia accessible in one click.
- Presenting interesting fun based activities for teachers and students.
- Having opportunity to email the content before hand for the students to prepare.
- Helping to have innovative content related discussions among teachers and peers.

But only availability of ICT opportunities is not enough, the thing that matters most is its proper and effective utilization. ICT is a valuable tool for pedagogical development but its impact is dependent on how it is used (Punie *et al.*, 2006). And teacher can play a important role in it, as observed in the draft report of National Policy on Education (MHRD, 2016, p.184), "It is critical to recognise the teacher as the key driver of change in the education system. In an increasingly digital world, the teacher will have to play the role of a guide and a facilitator." It is expected that teachers must embrace e-changes (Cornu, 2010) and use digital technologies, tools and resources for pedagogical enrichment. Khoroshilov (2010) who has analyzed the dynamics of the knowledge Society and come up with a conclusion that development depends on many factors but most important among is level of teacher competencies and their skills. In other words, teachers are expected to play a very important role to utilize these e-initiatives for promoting life skills learning among students.

Utilizing 'eBasta' and 'ePathshala' initiatives to promote life skills among school students: Suggested strategies for teachers: Among all the stakeholders in the system of education, the key role is that of a teacher. Teacher serves as a catalyst to accomplish educational aims through the correct means and approaches. The teacher is the main actor in executing the desired roles and responsibility, serves as an agent of change in this time of rapid revolution. Teachers have also been considered as the most important link in the transmission of knowledge to the next generation, and crucial players in the process of teaching and learning (Sangra and Sanmamed, 2010). Teachers are not only knowledge transmitters, but the actors of changes in the system of education. Teachers are responsible for new roles and therefore teaching is becoming a new profession (Cornu, 2010). Teachers need to adapt to new trends and resources with enriching the learning and life skills simultaneously (Parr and Ward, 2011). Therefore, it can be argued that following innovative and strategies will help teachers to make proper use

of eBasta and ePathshala initiatives for promoting life skills among students.

Strategy 1: The classroom comprises of varied students differing in terms of intelligence, learning capacity and learning interests. This situation makes it difficult for a teacher to focus on the individual needs of each student. The teachers are forced to give same content to all students in the classroom irrespective of their learning capacity and interests. But taking help of eBasta, teacher can organize, create and distribute multiple contents taking care of individual differences and needs of the children. For example, the eBasta of slow learners will explain simple concepts through animations, videos and easy examples, while eBasta of gifted learners will contain complicated quizzes and brainstorming sessions. This identification of individual differences and providing eBasta supported remedies will not only enhance cognitive skills but also help students to develop coping skills, an essential component if life skills.

Strategy 2: Teachers can take help of eBasta to overcome the monotony created by the contents of selected books prescribed for a certain class. The teachers can ask the students to choose the contents and activities of their choice and interest and fulfilling the requirements and prescribed learning objective for their class level by using eBasta. This exercise will help the students to develop different life skills in many ways. For example, students will learn decision making (selecting material), self-confidence (creating own learning), co-operation and collaboration (helping each other to select and share material), etc.

Strategy 3: The teacher can use ePathshala to browse and choose useful e-content and e-resources according to the needs of the students. After choosing the content, the lesson can be divided into several small parts and different parts can be given to different group of students. Each group will be asked to create notes and observation on the allotted portion of the lesson taking help of ePathshala content. Later, the groups will be asked to share their notes with each other to get the knowledge of the lesson as a whole. This kind of activity will infuse problem solving skills among students and more importantly also help them to work as a team. In nutshell, this practice will be helpful to promote collaboration, interpersonal relations and cooperation skills among students.

Strategy 4: The online discussion forum in the ePathshala can be very helpful to improve the cognitive skills, social skills and emotional skills of the students. To fulfill this purpose, teachers will be required to introduce different topics and ask students to involve in the online discussions. The teacher will also play the role of facilitator during these discussion sessions. It is expected that this initiative will immensely help students to freely share their views, and will also be helpful in boosting confidence, critical thinking and effective communication skills among school students.

Strategy 5: ePathshala portal have different e-content and resources supported by interesting individual and team based activities. Instead of engaging the students to traditional monotonous way of learning, teachers can use this portal to give different activities related to each topic to students. Even, teachers can also ask students to upload their activities and solutions on the portal. These types of activities will support our critical and creative young minds to blossom further, and

also help them to boost their self confidence and decision making skills.

Strategy 6: By using eBasta and ePathshala initiatives, teachers can select various e-resources and multimedia to make the lessons more interesting and appealing to the students. The students can also be asked to give their feedback and reflections on the provided materials and activities. This measure is expected to promote participatory process of learning resulting in formulating a special bonding among teachers and learners. And this bonding will definitely help them to develop different psycho-social skills.

Conclusion

Teachers are expected to play a pivotal role to get students involved with the digital learning resources and platforms and as byproduct help them to inculcate different life skills. Teachers are also required to use different e-initiatives to mould teaching learning activities such a way that besides mastery of content it will also help students to improve their life skills. Keeping these expectations in view, this paper has highlighted various strategies for teachers to use eBasta and ePathshala initiatives to promote life skills among their students. It is hoped that interested teachers will come forward to use the suggested strategies at individual level. Besides, the suggested strategies need to be empirically tested on a wider group of students and teachers. And if suggested strategies are found really effective, in-service teacher training programmes for school teachers should be redesigned to make teachers aware and competent to use emerging technologies effectively and efficiently for promotion of life skills among school students.

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