

SPORT EDUCATION

Empowering Students: Developing Life Skills through School Sports Coaching

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of coaching strategies in fostering student life skills through school sports programs. This study used a case study design, which is a qualitative method, and thematic analysis. Subjects were 13 physical education teachers with at least five years of teaching experience and relevant educational background, who were selected using a purposive sampling method. The findings were organized into three overarching themes. 1) Supportive Environment and Social Development: This theme emphasizes creating a respectful and accepting atmosphere that fosters psychological and social support. Coaches focus on teamwork and collaboration, enabling students to feel valued and develop strong relationships while learning to resolve conflicts effectively. 2) Personal Skill Development: This theme highlights the role of sports coaching in equipping students with critical life skills such as goal setting and

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planning, stress and emotional management, and problem-solving. Structured plans and consistent feedback help students build resilience, manage challenges, and make sound decisions both in and outside sports. 3) Bridging Sports and Daily Life: This theme underscores the importance of transferring skills learned in sports, such as teamwork, leadership, and reflective feedback into everyday personal, academic, and social contexts. By practicing leadership, communication, and teamwork, students enhance their ability to navigate real-world challenges effectively. In brief, the study concludes that intentional and structured coaching approaches are pivotal in not only improving students' athletic performance but also equipping them with essential life skills. These skills, when transferred into daily life, contribute to students' holistic development, preparing them for future academic, personal, and professional success.

Introduction

Among the most popular extracurricular activities in schools, sports offer a perfect opportunity for the development of life skills. These activities can potentially enhance social, psychological, and emotional skills in students, especially during adolescence, and prepare them to face current and future challenges in life (Camiré & Kendellen, 2016). Participation in sport provides students with many experiences and opportunities for developing life skills such as teamwork, responsibilities, dealing with stress, and solving problems, which are useful not only within sport itself but in life generally. In this context, life skills developed from participating in sports can have several effects on the student.

In broad terms, life skills can be defined as an ability that each one possesses in relation to increasing potential successes or achievements in different contexts and environments in and outside the sphere of school (Danish et al., 2004). Research shows that coaches can lead in developing participants' life skills by fabricating quality relationships and meeting basic psychological needs (Bailey et al., 2009; Carson Sackett & Gano-Overway, 2017). The coach is important in creating the right psychological environment and context for transferring skills and developing them further in students. Martin et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of coach education in enhancing youth development, showing that coaches can strengthen

athletes' life skills through purposeful and structured approaches. More specifically, coaches can transfer these life skills to students by creating a supportive environment or using diverse teaching methods. Moreover, studies indicate that coaching approaches can influence the transfer of life skills beyond sports, especially when coaches create a supportive environment intentionally and purposefully (Pierce et al., 2024). More targeted approaches would provide a better chance of successfully transferring skills into lives beyond sports.

The theory of Positive Youth Development (PYD) provides grounding to suggest that participation in sports activities can further develop key life skills for youth to succeed. This PYD theory has been embraced to highlight that sports can inherently cultivate strengths, rather than focusing on skill development as emphasized in the traditional 'deficit' model (Lerner et al., 2009). Indeed, life skills that the youth learn in the process of communication, time management, setting goals, and conflict resolution within a sports environment affect personal and social development (Pierce et al., 2017). However, these skills are considered complete life skills only when transferred to the outside world and applied in everyday life (Weiss et al., 2014). One of the difficulties in teaching life skills is that coaches may not have the training to deliver such skills. Researchers proffer that coaches can use two methods in delivering life skills: implicitly and explicitly.

An implicit approach refers to instances when the coach does not make an explicit focus on the development of life skills. Conversely, an explicit approach is when the coach makes a conscious effort to focus on the development of the life skills of the athletes (Bean et al., 2018). Research shows that using an explicit approach can increase the likelihood of success in transferring life skills from sports to other environments (Turnnidge et al., 2014). Since coaches are at the epicenter of this process, their education on how to transfer life skills is crucial. MacDonald et al. (2020) demonstrated that coaches who implement training programs using a life skills approach are often more effective at transferring these skills compared to those who do not. Therefore, developing educational tools and providing learning opportunities for coaches may have a considerable effect on enhancing the outcomes of PYD and translating these skills into

the daily lives of athletes (Camiré et al., 2021). In particular, models of Life Development Intervention and Coaching emphasize the development of life skills regarding psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Hodge et al., 2013).

One of the gaps in the literature is a lack of detailed studies regarding how coaching approaches and implicit-explicit modes add to students' life-skills development and how important coach education is with respect to that. Additionally, many studies have also not been conducted with a specific focus on how to employ targeted methods in order to use coaching for transferring skills. The aim is to fill the gaps that have been left behind, looking into coaching methods and coach education that have presented strategies for effectively transferring life skills from sport into life outside of sport. More specifically, this research examines explicit and implicit coaching methods in light of developing life skills, ways of transferring them, or failing to do so within students' lives, making up for existing gaps. Therefore, the main research question is: How can life skills be enhanced in school sports through effective coaching approaches and transferred to students' lives beyond sports?

Methods

A case study was adopted since it would provide a thick description of a phenomenon being studied within its specific context. This research employed a case study design, a qualitative research method, to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon within its specific context. The case study approach was chosen as it allows for a comprehensive exploration of the influence of coaching strategies in school sports on students' life skills development (Camiré et al., 2013). By focusing on participants' experiences and the interplay of these experiences within a structured environment like school sports, this design supports a detailed and nuanced examination. The main objective of this research is to try to establish the influence of coaching strategies in school sports on developing the life skills of the students. To achieve the study's objectives, multiple data collection methods were utilized, including semi-structured interviews. This facilitated a rich contextual understanding and enabled the findings to be substantiated through thematic analysis. The research is grounded in the PYD theoretical framework, which emphasizes

a thorough examination of the implementation processes and outcomes related to students' growth.

Given these requirements, the case study approach was deemed the most suitable methodology. The study adopts a qualitative approach with thematic analysis as the primary method for analyzing data. This inductive process is particularly well-suited for uncovering recurring patterns or themes, offering a nuanced interpretation of complex and subjective topics (Naeem et al., 2023). By eschewing preconceptions, this method allows the investigation to faithfully represent participants' real experiences. Such an approach is especially effective for exploring intricate areas like the role of coaching strategies in fostering life skills development through school sports (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research will adopt a qualitative approach, including thematic analysis—a qualitative data analysis approach—to identify and analyze the regularities in the data having an inductive approach, which is especially effective and ensures a deep and nuanced sense of the data, from which the detection of somewhat invisible patterns or themes then becomes possible. Using this approach, the goal was to investigate the themes from the data that could underpin the findings of real participants' experiences without predisposing ideas. It helps in the analysis of particularly complex and subjective areas such as life-skills development through coaching strategies in sport at school (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Participants

All participants were physical education teachers in Iran, selected through purposive sampling. Eligibility criteria included a minimum of five years of teaching experience and a relevant educational background in physical education or sports sciences. Participants were recruited until theoretical saturation was achieved, resulting in a total of 13 participants, ensuring no new information emerged during data collection.

Table 1 displays the participant demographic information, which included: field of study, years of work experience, gender, and level of tertiary education obtained. The list includes professionals from different dimensions of sports and physical education working with various qualifications, a number of whom are PhDs, Masters, and postgraduates. These are years of experience ranging from five to 17, thus showing the highly diverse expertise levels in this group. Most

Table 1*Demographic Information of the Research Participants*

Field of Study	Experience (years)	Gender	Education Level
Motor Learning and Behavior	17	Male	PhD
Sport Management	12	Male	PhD
Sport Management	16	Male	Master's Degree
Sports Pathology	9	Female	PhD
Physical Education	12	Male	Bachelor's Degree
Sport Psychology	8	Male	Master's Degree
Sport Management	15	Male	Ph.D. Candidate
Motor Behavior	6	Female	Ph.D. Candidate
Exercise Physiology	5	Female	Master's Degree
Physical Education	12	Male	Bachelor's Degree
Sport Management	14	Male	Master's Degree
Exercise Physiology	13	Male	Master's Degree
Sports Pathology	9	Male	PhD Candidate

of the participants are male, although there is some representation from the female gender in such fields as sports pathology and motor behavior. This, therefore, constitutes a complete demographic representation to ensure that various subfields in the sports sciences are well represented.

Data Collection Tools

Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured in-depth interview is a qualitative research methodology which gives flexibility to the exploration of chosen areas under discussion. In this method of interviewing, the set of predetermined questions needs to be used by a researcher while the conversation goes in a free-flowing way to allow the responding participants the opportunity to illustrate their answers in a rather expansive and comprehensive manner.

Interviews conducted in the study, under the control of sports psychologists and coaching specialists, were done by each interviewed participant in a 30- to 60-minute talk. The interviews had

been recorded using audio; others also used a written form of documentation. The nature of the interview questions was open-ended to dig into how coaching within sports relates to developing life skills. These questions were then grouped into five key themes: 1) How do you create a supportive and positive environment for students, and what do you do to enhance their self-confidence and sense of worth? 2) What methods do you use to teach social skills, such as teamwork, stress management, and problem-solving, to students? 3) How do you help students set both short- and long-term goals, and assess and give feedback on progress? 4) How do you teach leadership and decision-making skills for sport and non-sport situations? 5) To what degree do the skills learned by students in sport transfer into life, and what strategies were employed to facilitate the transfer process? These questions were elaborated in order to grasp valid data in detail about the impact of sports coaching on developing life skills in students.

Data Collection Process

Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews with physical education teachers, having started the material collection in the summer and autumn of the year 2024; it was implemented face-to-face with informants, taken into consideration online through information platforms to ensure even more plural diversity and variant variation across respondent answers. To enhance internal validity in this study, the findings from the subjects were considered at different phases while obtaining feedback. The patterns deduced in each interview, for example, were once again represented at the interviews' end, and those with any discrepancy were reviewed, re-checked, and re-discussed. This eliminates response biases and guarantees there are no fallacies or inaccuracies in the research data collection.

Complementary Actions for Trustworthiness

To enhance the validity and accuracy of the results, several complementary measures were taken: (i) data collection from various sources; (ii) review of the data by a research assistant; (iii) involvement of an expert in thematic analysis and the research topic; and (iv) repeated questioning to identify biases and reduce potential influences during data analysis. The interview transcripts and initial

interpretation of participants' responses were presented to them for review and verification. This allowed the participants to ensure that their views had been accurately recorded, and misrepresentation did not occur. Besides that, expert reviewers who understand qualitative research and the substantive area being investigated reviewed the process adopted and preliminary findings from this study. They reviewed and gave useful feedback for refinement of the data analysis and interpretation (Nowell et al, 2017; Karimi & Soltanian, 2024).

Reliability of the Coding

Reliability could be ensured in the process of coding as inter-rater reliability was considered as a quality indicator of the performance of the coders. The two independent coders reached an 85% agreement, which indicates a high consensus with appropriate reliability in the coding process (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Data Analysis Method

Thematic analysis is the approach to data analysis in this research. This is one of the most common methods used in qualitative research to interpret meanings and hidden patterns across the data (Karimi & Soltanian, 2024). Initial coding of meaningful segments of text was performed, then categorized and organized into similar codes (Karimi et al., 2024).

Results

This study explores the development of life skills in students through coaching strategies in school sports, categorized into three overarching themes. The first theme, Supportive Environment and Social Development, focuses on creating a respectful and accepting atmosphere that fosters psychological and social support while emphasizing teamwork and collaboration. The second theme, Personal Skill Development, highlights the importance of equipping students with essential skills such as goal setting and planning, stress and emotional management, and problem-solving and decision-making to support their growth and resilience. The third theme, Bridging Sports and Daily Life, underscores the transferability of skills learned in sports, such as teamwork, leadership, and evaluative feedback, to everyday personal, academic, and social contexts. These themes and their associated categories collectively provide a holistic understand-

ing of how sports coaching can prepare students for success both within and beyond the sports field.

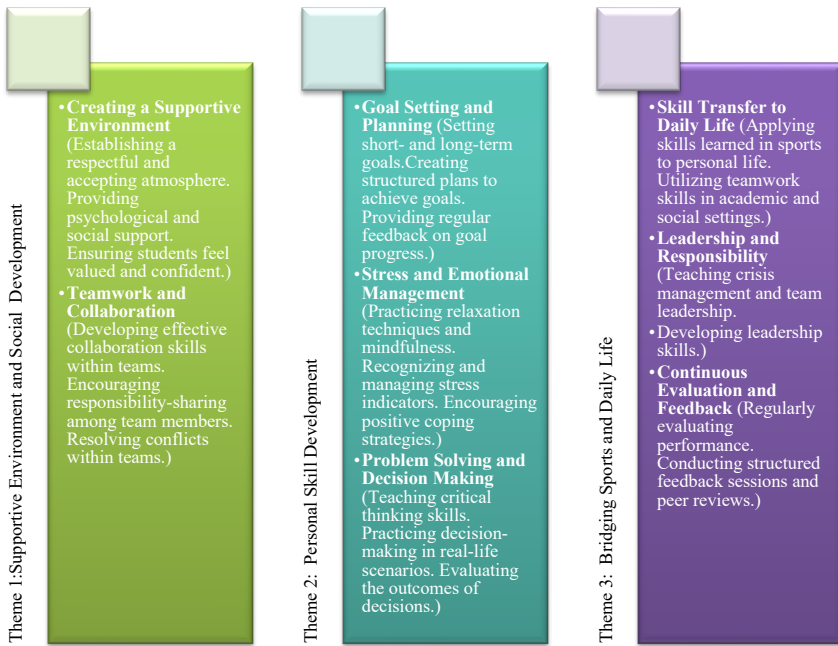
Table 2
The Results of Extracting Themes from Research Interviews

Overarching Themes	Organized Themes	Foundational Themes
Creating a Supportive and Positive Environment	Mutual Respect and Acceptance	Creating an environment based on respect and mutual acceptance.
		Ensuring students feel valued and confident.
		Providing psychological and social support.
	Social and Emotional Skill Development	Teaching teamwork skills.
		Training stress management techniques.
		Enhancing problem-solving skills.
Teaching Goal-Setting and Planning	Short-Term and Long-Term Goals	Encouraging students to set short- and long-term goals.
		Helping students design detailed plans to achieve their goals.
		Motivating students through goal achievement recognition.
	Progress Evaluation	Regularly assessing students' progress toward their goals.
		Providing constructive feedback to guide improvement.
		Revising plans to ensure continued growth and success.
Enhancing Teamwork Skills	Collaboration and Responsibility	Teaching effective collaboration within groups.
		Encouraging responsibility sharing among team members.
		Resolving team conflicts effectively.
	Leadership Development	Offering opportunities for students to lead teams.
		Teaching how to guide groups during critical situations.
		Involving students in managerial tasks within sports environments.
Teaching Problem-Solving and Decision-Making	Critical Thinking Skills	Encouraging students to think critically about challenges.
		Teaching students to analyze potential outcomes.
		Helping students evaluate decisions and learn from mistakes.
	Real-Life Problem Scenarios	Simulating real-life situations for decision-making practice.
		Encouraging reflection on problem-solving strategies.
		Reinforcing effective solutions through discussion.

Table 2 (cont.)

Enhancing Communication Skills	Verbal Communication	Training students to express their ideas clearly.
		Teaching the importance of active listening.
		Practicing conflict resolution through communication.
	Non-Verbal	Highlighting the role of body language in effective communication.
	Communication	Encouraging students to maintain positive non-verbal cues.
		Developing skills for understanding others' non-verbal signals.
Stress and Anxiety Management	Relaxation Techniques	Teaching deep breathing and relaxation exercises.
		Practicing mindfulness activities.
		Applying relaxation methods during stressful situations.
	Emotional Regulation	Helping students recognize signs of stress and anxiety.
		Teaching strategies to manage emotional responses.
		Encouraging positive coping mechanisms.
Enhancing Self-Management Skills	Time Management	Teaching students how to prioritize tasks effectively.
		Encouraging the use of planners and schedules.
		Helping students balance academic, personal, and sports commitments.
	Self-Evaluation	Training students to assess their own performance.
		Encouraging reflection on achievements and areas of improvement.
		Setting realistic and measurable self-improvement goals.
Developing Leadership Skills	Role Modeling	Encouraging students to take on leadership roles in teams.
		Teaching responsibility and accountability in leadership.
		Providing feedback to enhance leadership abilities.
	Decision-Making in Leadership	Training students to make decisions under pressure.
		Encouraging group involvement in decision-making processes.
		Building confidence in guiding teams effectively.
Transferring Skills from Sports to Daily Life	Skill Application	Demonstrating the real-life application of sports skills.
		Encouraging students to use communication and problem-solving skills in personal settings.
		Teaching the value of teamwork in academic and social environments.
	Practical Exercises	Assigning tasks to practice skills outside the sports setting.
		Monitoring and evaluating the transfer of skills.
		Encouraging feedback on skill application in daily life.
Regular Evaluation and Feedback	Performance Monitoring	Continuously evaluating students' performance in sports.
		Providing feedback to address weaknesses.
		Recognizing and celebrating successes.

Figure 1
Themes



Theme 1: Supportive Environment and Social Development

According to teachers, a supportive environment and social development are critical to supporting students' learning. Accordingly, the effects of creating a supportive atmosphere that makes students feel valued and confident are emphasized. Supportive classroom environments can also increase teamwork and collaboration, allowing students to work effectively with their peers, resolve conflicts easily, and build strong relationships with each other.

Category 1: Creating a Supportive Environment

Creating a supportive classroom environment can foster mutual respect, acceptance, and physical safety for students. When students feel supported and valued in the classroom, they are more likely to participate actively, express themselves, and be confident, which can help them navigate challenges. Examples of quotations related to this are as follows: "Mutual respect and acceptance are key to creating

an environment where students feel valued and confident.” “When students feel that they are treated fairly, with respect, they can easily apply their powers and participate in activities motivatedly.”

Category 2: Teamwork and Collaboration

Creating an environment of cooperation and teamwork among students seems to be very important in terms of improving their communication skills and taking responsibility. Increasing cooperation opportunities is also very important in terms of resolving disagreements and increasing trust among students. Here are some quotes about this: “Teaching teamwork skills and how to divide responsibilities effectively among team members.”

“I ensure that responsibilities are shared in group activities, so everyone gets involved, which enhances the team spirit and collaboration.”

Theme 2: Personal Skill Development

This theme focuses on the importance of providing students with basic personal skills such as goal setting, stress management, and decision making. These skills are very important for students to cope with problems both in the sports environment and in their daily lives.

Category 1: Goal Setting and Planning

It is very important for students to set achievable short- and long-term goals, and to make plans to achieve these goals. Well-structured plans and goals can motivate students while providing feedback on these goals can support them to monitor their progress. Here are some examples of quotes: “Helping students design detailed plans to achieve their goals and revising them for continuous improvement.” “I encourage students to set both short-term and long-term goals. These goals help them see their progress and stay motivated.”

Category 2: Stress and Emotional Management

Having stress and emotional management skills seems to be very important to help students cope with pressure and maintain focus in high-stress situations. Mindfulness, breathing techniques, and relaxation exercises can be effective in supporting students in their stress and emotional management. Here are some examples of quotes: “Teaching students to recognize signs of stress and practice

mindfulness activities to stay calm and focused.” “I teach stress management techniques such as deep breathing and relaxation exercises to help students manage their emotional responses during stressful situations.”

Category 3: Problem Solving and Decision Making

Problem solving and decision-making skills are also very important for students, as are other skills. These skills can provide the ability to critically analyze different situations, produce creative solutions to problems, and analyze results. By applying these skills to real-life scenarios, students can effectively and safely deal with challenges. Here are some examples of quotes related to this: “Encouraging students to think critically about challenges and analyze potential outcomes.” “I inspire students to brainstorm different solutions and select the best option when faced with a problem.”

Theme 3: Bridging Sports and Daily Life

This theme focuses on transferring what they have gained from sports to their daily lives. By integrating teamwork, leadership, and evaluative feedback from sports into their daily lives, students develop the skills to cope with challenges in various contexts.

Category 1: Skill Transfer to Daily Life

Transferring skills from sports to daily life enables students to apply teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills to real-world situations. This approach effectively prepares students to handle academic, social, and professional challenges. Examples of quotations related to this are as follows: “Demonstrating the real-life application of sports skills, such as teamwork and communication, in academic and social settings.” “I always encourage students to reflect on how they will apply these skills in their personal life.”

Category 2: Leadership and Responsibility

Leadership development emphasizes teaching students to take responsibility for their actions and manage teams effectively. Leadership development focuses on teaching students accountability and effective team management. These skills, as well as the ability to make decisions under pressure, prepare students to become responsible leaders in sports and life. These skills and decision-making under pressure help students become accountable leaders in sports and

life. Examples of quotations related to this are as follows: “Offering opportunities for students to lead teams and teaching how to guide groups during critical situations.” “Whenever students take up leadership roles, they’re responsible not only for their actions but also for the consequences of the entire team.”

Category 3: Continuous Evaluation and Feedback

Continuous evaluation and structured feedback sessions are essential for helping students identify areas of improvement. Peer reviews and reflective feedback encourage self-awareness and collaborative growth, ensuring ongoing development. Examples of quotations related to this are as follows: “Regularly assessing students' progress toward their goals and providing constructive feedback to guide improvement.” “Conducting structured feedback sessions allows students to reflect on their progress and identify areas of improvement.”

Conclusion

The current research study highlights the pivotal role of coaching strategies in driving meaningful development of students' life skills, particularly within the context of sports. As such, creating a positive environment develops student self-esteem and therefore fulfills one of their significant social-emotional development features. With such promotion of mutual respect and acceptance among peers, a student is more likely to feel valued, confident, and interested in the learning process; it covers all aspects of general psychological well-being, further developing a positive attitude towards his or her personal development. It goes on by intentionally focusing attention on imparting the vital social-emotional skills in life that include teamwork, managing stress, and finding solutions to the different types of problems a student faces within academic and living environments. Moreover, these techniques will help these students perform successfully in pressurized situations, besides making them more resilient during various situations of life that they may experience.

Additionally, the introduction of such strategies as goal setting and planning proves to be very important for stimulating students and enhancing the development of self-management skills. By helping the students set both short- and long-run goals and providing them with tools to make structured action plans to achieve those

objectives, students are empowered to own their growth and success. With this, ongoing progress assessment with ensuing constructive feedback allows students to feel where they need to go to improve and observe themselves growing over some time. This continuous feedback loop, combined with revisions of their own action plans, helps students work out the confidence and competence that, in turn, positively reinforces their motivation and drive to achieve personal and academic goals.

Finally, the transfer of skills acquired through the practices involved within sports to other aspects, such as social relations in academia and future professional contexts, is relevant. Key competencies, such as leadership, problem-solving under pressure, and communicative skills developed with sport can be applied later and in real life. While students practice team leadership, critical decision-making, and effective communication in sports, these qualities are transferred into daily life for positive contributions to the community and workplace. This research underlines that coaching approaches should be supported by continuous assessment and relevant feedback, enabling students to reflect on their progress, set new targets, and continually strive for improvement. This dynamic and supportive process allows the students to apply the skills they have acquired in life better, hence personal growth and long-term success. This is advantageous not only in developing athletes but also in improving students' life skills, which will be helpful for them in the future.

This study highlights the critical role of coaching strategies in fostering the holistic development of students through school sports. By establishing a Supportive Environment, students gain confidence, feel valued, and learn to collaborate effectively, creating a foundation for social development. The emphasis on Personal Skill Development equips students with practical tools such as goal setting, stress management, and decision-making, enhancing their ability to navigate challenges in sports and life. Furthermore, the theme of Bridging Sports and Daily Life demonstrates the significant impact of transferring sports-acquired skills, such as leadership, teamwork, and reflective feedback, to real-world contexts. These findings underscore the importance of intentional and structured coaching approaches to develop athletic performance and empower students with essen-

tial life skills that prepare them for future academic, professional, and personal success.

In the future, research and practice need to be focused on broadening the evidence base that informs how coaching strategies within school sport could be best optimized to support life skills development. For example, a study can be done to ascertain the long-term effects of those skills in personal growth, career preparedness, and mental well-being. Moreover, exploring the possibility of applying life skills training to the physical education context in various educational systems across the world might provide a pragmatic avenue to further the search for best practices in nurturing students' all-rounded development. Future interventions would also consider the use of technology and digital platforms, coaching strategies, and virtual groupings that enhance the practice of life skills among students. Further, detailed study in the areas of diverse needs of students from different socio-economic backgrounds or learning styles will help devise inclusive and effective life skills training for all.

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