

Developing Life Skills and Tolerance among School Students towards Accelerated Digitalization

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Abstract: *The radical transformation of the education system to the sudden shift of accelerated digitalization is leading to psychological, sociological and emotional instability among school students across the globe. Students are facing several challenges in life-related to online teaching at the time of risk and uncertainty as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. In this pandemic period, life skills and tolerance will act as vital tools for school students to achieve personal and educational success. Schools are considered to be the prime settings for implementing life skills education for enhancing tolerance which is necessary for peaceful co-existence in this contemporary world. The objective of this paper is to reflect upon the need and significance of life skills and tolerance among students due to the impact of accelerated digitalization in the whole system of education during the pandemic COVID-19. The purpose is to support school authorities, teachers and parents in implementing appropriate interventions to reduce various risk factors among school students in this modern world. It provides guidelines to schools on facilitating students with relevant knowledge, attitudes, abilities, skills and values for becoming responsible citizen of the nation for creating a peaceful, healthy, safe and harmonious environment.*

Keywords: Tolerance, Life skills, Pandemic, COVID-19, Digitalization, Education

1. Introduction

The disruptive strategies of education have evolved because of pandemic COVID-19 which has brought in great impact on the educational output of especially school students at a global level. The pandemic crisis has compelled many nations to shut down schools, colleges, universities to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. The predominant virtual teaching-learning process has brought a paradigm shift in the ongoing educational system. The deterioration of socialization is affecting the mutual relationships of family members, teachers, parents and children. The sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has given immediate virtual learning task to students without any preparation, training and guidance to get acquainted with the whole online system of teaching methodologies. The resurgence of the coronavirus has forced a few students to leave their schools because parents stopped paying fees due to job loss from private sectors as they do not have any alternative source of income. Non-payment of salaries in many private companies is not only posing issues for people but also it affects the well-being of family members. Such problems or issues of individuals must be addressed by themselves for which they need to be trained for fostering their life skills and tolerance. Life skills and tolerance will play a vital role in the overall development of their personality. Creating an interactive, participative, experiential and collaborative learning environment with effective technological strategies will support sustaining zeal among students of the 21st century.

School authorities should strengthen the support systems especially for students, teachers and parents to successfully and safely use technology in the teaching-learning process. COVID-19 has affected the most marginalized and vulnerable group of individuals globally who are deprived

of attaining educational goals satisfactorily. This is the most appropriate time when parents, teachers should help and support students by providing a conducive environment so that they prosper in their studies with the right attitudes and behaviours. In the current scenario, the home environment should be built with the bedrock of freedom and flexibility so that children develop tolerance by having the essence of patience, forbearance, openness, readiness, love, care and concern for others. Effective pedagogical learning practices and fully skilled with digital tools are essential for children in virtual learning. Students' tolerant attitudes and behaviours towards online learning are the driving force for regular academic achievements. Life skills education programmes for enhancing tolerance among school students are the most effective way to influence their positive attitudes as well as behaviours towards the increase of digitalization.

Life Skills and Tolerance: Unique Positive Forces in the Digital Age

Life skills and tolerance are the most vital agents which are essential to nullify the conflicts, violence, stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination occurring among students based on religion, race, socio-economic status, ethnicity and culture while they are interacting through online mode in virtual classrooms. Life skills are defined as "the adaptive and positive behaviours that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (World Health Organization, 1994). Ten core life skills which are categorized into thinking skills, social skills and emotional skills are self-awareness, critical thinking, creative thinking, problem-solving, decision making, effective communication, empathy, interpersonal relationships, coping with emotions and coping with stress. Tolerance is "respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures,

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our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace. Tolerance is not concession, condescension or indulgence. Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. It means accepting the fact that human beings, naturally diverse in their appearance, situation, speech, behaviour and values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are. It also means that one's views are not to be imposed on others" (Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, UNESCO, 1995). The high pace digital transformation from face-to-face interaction of teachers and students.

The face-to-face interaction between teachers and students has been transformed to the high pace of digital usage through an online mode of interaction. In this virtual model of the teaching-learning process, life skills will enable students to develop self-confidence, manage emotions, deal effectively with grief and anxiety, cope up with stress or trauma, actively gather relevant information, analyze to resist peer/media influences, time management and conflict resolution skills. At the same moment, tolerance will help in recognizing, understanding, accepting, respecting and appreciating others' contributions and presentations while attending online classes by encouraging teamwork through cooperation, support and motivation. Also, tolerance will enhance the flexibility in thoughts and actions of students if they are encountering problems while dealing with their digital tools. Tolerance will encourage students to suggest alternatives to their peer group in pleasing and convincing ways if they approach them with their difficulties. Tolerance will enable students to focus on gender sensitization related to content, method and language when designing, preparing and submitting school assignments to teachers.

Online Learning Challenges in School Education Sector

Despite the consequential overwhelming of the COVID-19 pandemic, this global crisis has been converted into an extraordinary learning scenario for all humans. The rapid change in the role of technology in the teaching-learning process has to become much more adaptable and resilient to students. The educational systems, policymakers, teachers and families need to be supportive for students to overcome the online challenges. The role of students during the COVID-19 pandemic is making them difficult to cope up with the sudden online mode of learning. The success of school children depends on equipping them with life skills and tolerance to amalgamate the qualities of creativity, innovation, resilience, flexibility, maturity, conflict resolution and management. Life skills and tolerance are the cornerstones for the personal and social development of an individual for utilising any type of knowledge, skills, values and beliefs. But, in the present scenario, school children burn out with several problems in

virtual learning home environment during the lockdown period which includes socio-economic stress, poor living conditions, domestic violence, cyber bullying, low level of parental education, risky behaviours, accessing unsafe online materials, sleep dysregulation, addicted to video games, excessive use of social media, overeating, obesity, sedentary, lack of digital skills and slow internet connectivity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, rapid technological changes in e-learning have hampered the communication skills of parents, children and teachers because there is no face to face contact among them. At times, when students try to access the online mode for learning purpose, they encounter numerous issues such as the technical difficulties which hinder the whole process.

There is a high increase in physical and mental illness due to prolonged use of electronic gadgets by children which can even lead to internet gaming disorder. Eyesight deterioration is affecting the learning standard of school children. The loss of interest of learners or no digital gadgets at home due to many personal and family reasons, children are unable to attend the online classes is leading to high rates of absenteeism. Another challenge for educational institutions that there are no appropriate governmental stipulations in the policies of the education sector for the dissemination of learning through e-platform. There is a lack of standardised e-resources, digital tools and e-learning programmes in many schools of the country. Living in an increasingly globalised world, as individuals are highly challenging for school children due to the vast increase of digital technology, competitive educational forces, internal or external threats, risks and peer pressure. Life skills and tolerance are the vital tools that are essential for empowering and enriching today's school children by providing them with unprecedented and extraordinary opportunities for effective use of the accelerated digitalisation and remarkable reach of internet connectivity for multimedia learning in all spheres of life. Pedagogical adaptations are pivotal for students which can be developed through the inculcation of life skills and tolerance. It is critical to empower students by investing life skills and tolerance in them which is necessary for their capacity building. The students are motivated to explore the fullest potential of technological advancements through remote and blended learning.

Collaboration of educational institutions with the EdTech companies can resolve many challenges related to technological disruptions. EdTech will provide enormous opportunities to teachers to bring in quality in teaching, learning, assessment and evaluation. According to Dhawan S. (2020, p.11), "EdTech companies can prove to be of great help to students (Brianna et al., 2019). According to the reports by KPMG and Google, the EdTech sector will boom and is likely to reach around 2 Billion Dollars by 2021. Some of the famous EdTech start-ups include Byju's, Adda247, AloLearning, AptusLearn, Asmakam, Board Infinity, ClassPlus, CyberVie, Egnify, Embibe, ExtraaEdge, iStar, Jungroo Learning, GlobalGyan, LidoLearning, Pesto, Vedantu, Edubrisk, ZOOM Classroom, ZOOM Business, Toppr, Unacademy,

Coursera, Kahoot, Seesaw, Khan Academy, e-pathshala, GuruQ, and the list is long. SWAYAM portal is an interesting educational program that is initiated by the government of India to achieve three important objectives of our educational policy, that is, access, equity, and quality. The main objective of SWAYAM is to provide online learning and reduce the digital divide. It provides a large number of free courses for school, distance, graduate, and postgraduate education. During the COVID-19 crisis, SWAYAM is of great help for students across the country. The application of EdTech with the development of life skills and tolerance in the e-learning process will help in the exponential growth of students in this fully digitalised globe. Students will get ample scope to practice technology and upgrade themselves with recent digital advancements. Confidence, determination, commitment, time management and flexibility in mind and actions play a vital role in the smooth functioning of innovative pedagogical approaches in online learning. Training students with life skills and tolerance is crucial for the avoidance of stress, fear, anxiety, aggression, frustration and confusion, uncertainty and distractions.

Fostering Life Skills & Tolerance for Effective Digital Learning

Online learning is becoming a significant tool to sustain life skills development during this pandemic period. Developing life skills and tolerance towards online learning will surely enable students to overcome most of the challenges. Nurturing life skills and tolerance will increase the adaptive and positive attitudes or behaviours of students towards online learning which will result in academic excellence as well as showing improvement in other co-curricular activities. Students' attitudes or behaviours are highly influenced by the atmosphere facilitated by the family members, teachers and other members. School authorities should strengthen the relationship between teachers and parents to provide proper guidance, information and training for effective monitoring of school children to leverage at maximum.

Life skills and tolerance will enable children to develop certain characteristics which are necessary at the time of COVID-19 pandemic when they are engaged with the digital tools such as: being aware of their strengths / weaknesses / opportunities / threats / values / rights, building self-esteem, to think critically / creatively, solving problems on their own, finding alternative solutions to problems, making informed decisions, maintaining interpersonal relationships assertiveness in communication, empathizing with others and having stress/emotional resilience. Life skills and tolerance are essential for enhancing students' ability and quality of self-evaluation/assessment/monitoring while engaging in online classes. Students will develop recognition, understanding, acceptance, appreciation and respect towards the whole system of virtual learning under all circumstances in life. Equally significant is to provide freedom to students and encourage them to take up all kind of technological task needed in effective learning. The COVID-19 pandemic and the extended online mode of the educational system have drastically changed the role of

students. Most of the students are not fully prepared for such unexpected changes, so training on life skills and tolerance by incorporating a comprehensive strategy is very essential for their psychological, social and emotional support to ensure their overall well-being.

Strategies Needed for Increasing Digital Competencies of School Students

The World Health Organisation has recommended that children in the age group 6-17 years need at-least one hour of moderate or vigorous daily physical activity. The relaxation technique will help students to remain focused on their day-to-day work or activities. Individual or group digital learning activities offer opportunities for presenting key messages on life skills and tolerance, practising and demonstrating life skills as well as tolerance. Indeed, life skills and tolerance development will enable students to apply concepts and principles in their day-to-day routines of life to share them with wider society. Recreational activities during a COVID-19 pandemic for children to foster life skills and tolerance such as indoor games, Radio/TV shows/movies, bird watching, story-telling, role-play, reading books/magazines/newspapers, solving puzzles/riddles, poster making, listening to melodies, singing, dancing, cooking, art/craftwork, clay modelling, gardening, yoga, meditation, jogging/jumping and skipping. The technological use while imparting online education among students through blended learning and flipped classroom strategy with the integration of brainstorming, case study, gamification, drills, project work and many more activities will surely create interest, curiosity and enthusiasm among learners. Promoting digital literacy and digital equity among students in every educational institution will help to cover the school curriculum in the most effective way. Developing and integrating digital competencies enables school children to get equipped with digital learning by ensuring that all students have a fundamental awareness and understanding of digital safety, device security and protection of data. It is necessary to make students more proactive and independent for applying and practising digital choices for harnessing the available technological resources in this digital age.

Education on life skills and tolerance will enable students to become much more flexible and adaptable towards the rapid changes and development which is taking place in the spheres of digitalization. They should be equipped with varied roles and responsibilities related to the recent advancement of information and communication technology. The students should be tuned to work efficiently in an environment of ambiguity in emerging technologies. The students should be mentored for self-monitoring about their digital understanding as well as needs. Supporting the students to extend their basic mastery of technological skills for exploring and expanding digital learning by finding various opportunities to procure expertise in technology. Training students to practically exhibiting digital skills from the initiative to advance levels to reach the professional level is required for reducing their fear or anxiety. Making students realise that commitment towards the enhancement of digital skills

will help them for long term productivity gains to attain collaboration while working with others. The students should be encouraged to leverage the collective bits of intelligence of different groups of teachers whenever necessary. All these aspects will help the students to bridge the gaps, if any, in technology for promoting innovation and quality in education.

2. Conclusions

In the present era, it is high time for the government and educational authorities, teacher educators to implement appropriate strategies among school students for enhancing their life skills and tolerance which are the most essential elements to survive as an accomplished leader in these challenging world situations. The need of the hour is to bring quality in the field of education through the development of life skills and tolerance because it is essential for the growth and progress of the nation among school children who are the future leaders of the country. So, there is an urgent need to foster life skills and tolerance among 21st-century school students to completely eradicating technophobia from their life for their psychosocial and emotional well-being in the world of digital competence. So, it is high time to humanize our students through the development of life skills and tolerance for preparing them well to get rid of all kinds of chaos related to information and communication from their life.

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