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## **IMPLICATIONS OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION ON CHARACTER**

### **DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN: A CASE OF HILL SCHOOL**

**Daniel Otieno Okech\***

Africa Nazarene University  
P.O. Box 53067-00200, Nairobi

**Elizabeth M. Role**

University of Eastern Africa, Baraton  
P.O. Box 2500 – 30100, Eldoret

\*Corresponding Author Email: dotieno@anu.ac.ke

#### **Abstract**

The world today is facing numerous challenges such as indiscipline in schools, civil strife and social deprivation. Life Skills Education (LSE) is an intervention. This program is meant to equip the youth with life skills. The purpose of this study was to investigate the development of LSE amongst primary school children in Kenya. The major research objective was to determine whether LSE contributes to character development. The research addressed these research questions: What is the status of LSE in Kenya; how is LSE implemented; to what extent has LSE contributed to development of psychosocial competencies; what are the challenges facing the implementation of LSE? The research design was descriptive survey. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews and focused group discussions. Quantitative data was analysed using Pearson Product moment correlation coefficient, multiple regressions and Kendall's Tau (t) coefficient. Qualitative data was coded and under themes. Results revealed a significant correlation between teaching of LSE and development of character. Teachers and pupils acknowledged the importance of LSE in the development of character. The study identified challenges facing the implementation of LSE. This study is relevant to teachers, parents, educators, policy makers and stakeholders in education.

**Key words:** Life Skills Education, Character development, Primary schools

#### **Introduction and Literature Review**

The World Health Organisation (1993) views Life Skills as abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that equip people to deal with the demands and challenges of daily life. Solomon and Fataar (2011), describe the importance of moral education in a country that is experiencing a “fractured moral landscape” (p. 224). According to UNICEF (2012), Life Skills ‘refer to a large group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills that can help people

make informed decisions, communicate effectively and develop coping and self-management skills that may help them lead a healthy and productive life” (p. 1). Life Skills Education is not a new concept. It has been implemented in several countries in the world and has been a crucial component of international declarations including the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All (EFA) and the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV and AIDS. A number of countries have integrated LSE in their national sectorial policies (UNICEF, 2012).

There is a dearth of literature focusing directly on Life Skills Education (Yankah & Aggleton, 2008). Bruce contends that, “a student reviewing the literature on a topic about which very little has been written may need to broaden the search to examine analogous research in other fields or topics” (as cited in Boote & Beile, 2003, pp. 3-15). For this reason, it was inevitable to review literature from other fields and extrapolate the theoretical underpinnings to the current research study. A recent development agency report suggested that, “the concept of Life Skills Education is difficult to grasp in program documents” and that “the term Life Skills remains imprecise and even unclear to most actors” (Tiendrebeogo, Meijer & Engleberg, 2003, p. 11). Solomon and Fataar (2011) acknowledge that conceptual definitions of values-related terms are contextually determined. In essence Life Skills Education can be conceptualized as a variant of values education or character education because psychosocial competencies are essentially desirable attributes which are ‘valued’ by people. Arthur and Revell (n.d.) posit that, “character education is ultimately about who we are and who we become, good or bad. It constitutes an interlocked set of personal values which normally guide our conduct, but these values are not a fixed set easily measured or incapable of modification.” (p. 4).

LSE was first mooted in Armenia in the mid -1990s. The Life Skills Project was initiated as a stand-alone subject taught in 16 pilot schools for grades 1-7, whose aim was to build a range of psychosocial skills and used an interactive learning methodology. In 2000,

the project expanded to incorporate 100 schools and training of 192 teachers. In 2008, the MES moved LSE from a stand-alone project to an integrated modality in national curricula and standards to be taught in all national schools nationally. LSE focuses on four broad themes – *Myself, Relationships, Community and Environment*. The programme faces challenges of adequate resources and support especially for teacher professional development.

LSE in the school curriculum follows the Caribbean curriculum framework for Health and Family Life Education (HFLE). The HFLE curriculum includes four themes: 1) Self and interpersonal relations; 2) sexuality and sexual health; 3) healthy eating and fitness; 4) managing the environment. It is intended to be delivered as a stand-alone subject and part of the core curriculum. The areas it addresses are challenges of social norms and behaviours, providing young people with options for positive behaviour and encourages the development of self-esteem confidence and informed decision making. LSE has been integrated in some of the subjects.

In Malawi, a similar program that preceded the Kenyan experience has been implemented since 2001. Kalanda (2010) emphasises that the purpose of Life Skills and Sexual/Reproductive Health Education in Malawi was to empower children and teachers with skills for HIV prevention and to deal with sexuality issues. In this study, Kalanda (2010) evaluated the levels of knowledge of Life Skills amongst primary and secondary children. The findings of the study indicated that Life Skills Education increases knowledge levels and leads to behaviour change amongst teachers and children. However, knowledge levels are higher amongst secondary students as opposed to primary children. This is attributed to the duration of exposure to Life Skills Education.

Other studies (Buthelezi et al. 2000; Boler & Carroll, 2003; Meyers, 2011) concluded that selective teaching is another challenge facing the implementation of Life Skills

Education. Teachers in most schools prefer to spend their time on academic teaching and preparing the students for examinations. The role of teachers in the development of psychosocial competencies is critical. Teachers provide support and encouragement by reinforcing initiative in young children. This support is necessary as young people move into adolescence. During this transitory period, they need teachers who are empathetic, caring and supportive (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010). It is recognised that the character of the teacher is important in defining that of the pupils. “Pupils will acquire the habits of good character directly from teachers who embody the ideals of character to which they expect their students to aspire” (Arthur & Revell, n.d. p. 9).

In order to mitigate the spread of HIV/AIDS infection in Kenya, the AIDS Education Programme for Youth in and out of school was launched in November 1992. The overall aim of the programme was to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS among the youth, through the development of Life Skills leading to attitudinal and behavioural change. This was followed by the curriculum revision in 2003, which infused and integrated Life Skills Education into the curriculum. The mainstreaming of Life Skills Education into the core curriculum was in tandem with the Education Sector Policy on HIV and AIDS (GOK, 2004). In 2006, the Life Skills Stakeholders Forum reached a consensus on the need for LSE to be taught as a stand-alone subject (UNICEF, 2012). The introduction of Life Skills Education as a stand-alone subject in 2009 replaced the integrated approach to Life Skills Education. This approach integrated Life Skills into curriculum and co-curriculum subjects, whereas in the stand-alone approach, Life Skills are taught as a main subject by a regular teacher. The LSE syllabus was rolled out in 2008 and focused on three main areas: knowing and living with one’s own self, knowing and living with others and making effective decisions.

The status of LSE in primary schools in Kenya has not yet been fully documented. The objective of this study is to describe the status of Life Skills Education in Kenya.

Granted the great emphasise attached to performance in examinable subjects, most teachers prefer to utilise the lesson allocated to LSE to teach these subjects. In schools where Counselling Departments exist, the teaching of LSE has also been relegated to these departments. The inadequate time allocated to the teaching of LSE has compromised on the content coverage (Kawira, 2012). As a result, learners are inadequately trained in developing the psychosocial competencies.

Several studies report that the implementation of Life Skills Education has faced numerous challenges. Chirwa (2009) refers to these constraints as both social and structural contextual factors. In a study conducted in Trans Nzoia District, Abobo (2012) identified inadequate teacher training, negative teacher attitudes, inadequate teaching and learning resources and use of inappropriate teaching methods. Training of teachers in Life Skills Education has not been part of the teacher training curriculum in Universities and teacher training institutions. In essence, teachers who are expected to teach Life skills Education are not fully equipped with the relevant skills to handle the subject, thus rendering them ineffective in their delivery of subject content. In Malawi, teachers who teach LSE are trained for two days only (Chirwa, 2009). The recruitment of adequate numbers of qualified teachers has been a perennial problem in Kenya. Siringi (2012) reported that Kenya's Education system faces a teacher shortage of about 80,000 teachers. This poses a major challenge in the successful implementation of any school curriculum, not to mention LSE.

The inadequacy of teaching and learning resources is a common challenge for curriculum implementation in most public schools in Kenya. This affects the effective delivery of LSE in schools. The methods used to teach LSE are unsuitable. Meyers (2011) reported that teachers were not prepared to teach LSE and implemented LSE on a limited basis. Due to lack of training, most teachers approach the teaching of LSE education in the same way they teach other subjects. Since the teaching of values appeal to the heart, rather

than to the head, there is a dichotomy between precept and practice. Chirwa (2009) posited the issue of absenteeism and its effect on schooling.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As a non-examinable subject, there hasn't been any formal evaluation to determine the effectiveness of LSE in developing the desired competencies in the pupils. There are growing concerns amongst educators about the implementation of Life Skills Education in schools and whether it is achieving the intended learning outcomes. Few studies have been conducted to address these concerns. This justifies the need for a research study to assess the program outcomes and determine the extent to which it has achieved the intended objectives (Clark, 2009).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of Life Skills Education in the development of character of primary school children in Hill School. The study assessed the relationships between Life Skills Education and the development of psychosocial competencies while controlling for extraneous variables such as previous learning experiences and socialization. The study addressed the following research questions:

- (i) What is the status of Life Skills Education program in the school?
- (ii) How is Life Skills Education implemented?
- (iii) To what extent have the children developed psychosocial competencies from Life Skills Education?
- (iv) What are the challenges facing the implementation of Life Skills Education in Hill School?

## **Research Methodology**

In cases where the study intends to accurately describe a phenomenon or clarify the relationship between variables, such studies are termed as being descriptive studies (Kothari, 2004). This study was a descriptive survey because it aimed at describing the implementation of Life Skills Education in schools and how it has influenced the development of psychosocial competencies. The data obtained from the study was both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Qualitative data was obtained through interviews while quantitative data was collected through questionnaires. Qualitative data was coded and organised into emerging themes while quantitative data was analysed using inferential statistics. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation coefficients and Kendall's tau (t) coefficient was used to measure the association between teaching of LSE and character development.

The research study was conducted in Hill Primary School. The school is the largest public primary school within Eldoret Municipality. It is a mixed day and boarding school and is easily accessible by road from the town centre. The target population was the entire pupil and teacher population and children at Hill primary school. The sample size represented 30% of the total population (Creswell, 2008). Purpose sampling technique is useful in identifying a sample whose elements possess unique characteristics that are important to the researcher (Manion, 2011). Participating pupils were stratified into two groups – lower primary and upper primary. Lower primary pupils included pupils from Class 1-3 while those from Class 6-8 comprised the upper stratum. From each stratum, participants were selected using simple random sampling. The sample size was maintained at 30% of the target population (Creswell, 2008). Sample size was determined based on the characteristics of the target population, cost and time available to conduct the study. The sample of participating teachers was purposive selected from teachers who teach LSE education in Classes 1-3 and 6-8.



### Results

The role of the teacher in teaching LSE is very important in its successful implementation. Analysis of the data depicted in Table 1 revealed that there is a positive, significant and moderate correlation between the teachers’ opinions regarding whether they must teach LSE and the need to practice the skills that they teach ( $P=0.002<0.05$ ). The teachers felt that when they teach LSE, it is important that they practice the skills that they teach their pupils ( $R=0.659$ ).

Table 1

*Correlation Between Teacher’s Opinions Regarding Whether They Must Teach LSE and the Need to Practice the Skills*

		Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Asymp. Std. Error <sup>a</sup>	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.659	.184	3.717	.002 <sup>c</sup>
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.608	.177	3.247	.004 <sup>c</sup>
N of Valid Cases		20			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Table 2 depicts a moderate positive and significant correlation between the modeling of good character and teaching of LSE ( $P=0.001<0.05$ ). Teachers opine that when they teach LSE, they should also be models of good character ( $R=0.673$ ). The pupils' opinions regarding the status of LSE in the school varied slightly from those presented by their teachers. Unlike their teachers, the pupils minimally agree that the textbooks and other materials provided for LSE are adequate ( $\bar{X} =2.96$ ). Despite their interest and enjoying to participate in LSE lessons ( $\bar{X} =4.35$  and  $\bar{X} =4.56$ ), the pupils indicated that teachers do not always attend the LSE lessons during scheduled time ( $\bar{X} =3.60$ ). Although they feel that the LSE syllabus is minimally covered within the time provided for ( $\bar{X} =3.05$ ), the pupils strongly agree that the teachers always teach LSE during the scheduled time ( $X=4.00$ ) and it has helped them understand themselves ( $\bar{X} =4.60$ ).

Table 2

*Correlation Between the modeling of Good Character and Teaching of LSE*

		Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Asymp. Std. Error <sup>a</sup>	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.673	.127	3.856	.001 <sup>c</sup>
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.647	.151	3.601	.002 <sup>c</sup>
N of Valid Cases		20			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

This study set out to determine the extent that the teaching of life skills education in the school has contributed to these competencies. Ninety-two (92) pupils were asked to rate their responses to questions regarding whether LSE had assisted them in developing competencies such as self-knowledge, self-esteem, coping with stress, better relationships, communication etc. The mean rating of their responses was computed and summarised in the Table 3. Regarding the importance of LSE, the pupils were strongly in agreement that LSE is vital in the school ( $\bar{X} = 4.85$ ).

Table 3

*Pupils' Opinions Regarding the Status of LSE*

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The textbooks and other materials for LSE are adequate	2.9674	.79076
I participate in all LSE lessons.	4.2979	.87780
I enjoy participating in LSE lessons.	4.5652	.68427
I am interested in LSE lessons	4.3516	.95886
LSE has helped me understand myself.	4.6383	.78769
My teachers always attend LSE lessons	3.6087	.99401
My teachers always teach LSE during the time scheduled is the timetable	4.0000	1.09741
The LSE covers the entire LSE syllabus within the time provided	3.0532	1.16736

To investigate the relationship between how often pupils have LSE lessons and their mean rating of development of psychosocial competencies, Kendall's tau-b was used (Table 5).

Table 5

*Relationship Between Frequency of LSE Lessons and Mean Rating of Development of Life*

*Skills*

		Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Asymp. Std. Error <sup>a</sup>	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by	Phi	.687			.072
Nominal	Cramer's V	.687			.072
Ordinal by Ordinal	Kendall's tau-b	-.062	.085	-.718	.472
N of Valid Cases		94			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Kendall’s tau-b indicated a weak negative association between the frequency of LSE lessons and mean rating of development of psychosocial competencies (tau = 0.062,  $p > 0.050$ ). This means pupil’s development of psychosocial competencies is not influenced by the number of LSE lessons they have.

In order to establish the relationship between how long the pupils have studied LSE and their mean evaluation rating of development of Life Skills, Kendall’s tau-b was computed (Table 6).

Table 6

*Relationship between the duration of studying LSE and the mean ratings of development of Life Skills*

		Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Asymp. Std. Error <sup>a</sup>	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	1.164			.022
	Cramer's V	.672			.022
Ordinal by Ordinal	Kendall's tau-b	.161	.079	2.044	.041
N of Valid Cases		93			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Kendall's tau-b indicated a weak association between the duration of studying LSE and the mean ratings of development of Life Skills ( $\tau = 0.161$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This implies that pupils' development of Life Skills is slightly influenced by the duration that they have studied under a Life Skills Education programme.

Teachers felt that the teaching of life skills education in school was not given adequate time. Teaching materials are critical in the teaching of LSE. These resources include teachers' and pupils' books and other resources. In Kenya, there is a major emphasis on examinations. Most school require teachers to teach students so that they can perform excellently in national exams. This study established that 29% of the teachers have a negative attitude towards LSE.

## **Discussion**

Most teachers felt that the time allocated for the teaching of Life Skills Educations was sufficient. However, a small proportion of teachers felt that the time allocated is insufficient to complete the syllabus. Teacher training is a critical factor in the implementation of LSE. The study established that the majority of the teachers are not

formally trained to teach the LSE curriculum. The attendance of teachers to their lessons is equally paramount to the implementation of the LSE curriculum. The study established a moderate and positive correlation between teaching of lessons and teaching effectiveness. When teachers attend to their lessons, it improves the quality of teaching.

Eggan and Kauchak (2010) also found out that teacher's support of the learners is important in the learning process. The teachers who are uphold these ideals are committed to their work and cover the syllabus within the allocated time. Closely related to the above factors is the teachers' attitude. Successful implementation of the LSE curriculum depends on the teachers' attitude. Teachers with a positive attitude are able to cover the curriculum within the stipulated time. The findings further revealed that pupils support the teaching of LSE in the school. They also felt that the program assisted them to develop various competencies that helped them to deal with challenges of modern living. They reported that the program had assisted them most in understanding themselves while it had done the least in helping them developing the ability to communicate. Durlak et al. (2011) reported similar findings in the study. In their meta-analysis of reported studies on the effects of school-based social, emotional and learning interventions, they established that several studies indicated a positive association between these interventions and improved psychosocial competencies such as improved attitude, self-esteem and emotional distress.

The teaching of Life Skills Education has been buffeted by numerous challenges since its inception in 2009. Teachers felt that teaching of LSE was not given adequate time in the timetable. The usual time allocated for the teaching of LSE is one 35 minute lesson during the week. The research revealed that in all the classrooms where LSE was taught, only the teacher's guide was available. Pupils were not provided with textbooks. Not a single classroom had a visual aid to supplement learning of LSE. The training of teachers is very important in the implementation of any curriculum. The teacher training curriculum in these institutions does not include the pedagogy of LSE. This renders teachers inept and incapable of teaching LSE effectively. The teachers have to rely on their general knowledge and expertise to implement the curriculum. Some teachers have little experience and are very incompetent in teaching LSE. Teachers and pupils are driven to become exam orientated. Teachers teach-to-the-test and pupils are drilled to memorize facts and excel in examinations. A heavy curriculum load forces teachers to utilise every available time including mid breaks and lunch breaks to teach. Curriculum elements which are non-examinable such as LSE and PE suffer detrimentally because the time allocated for their lessons is used to teach other examinable subjects. The teachers attitude affects how they teach the subjects and also influences the attitude of the learners towards the subject, teachers with a positive attitude will normally attend all their lessons and will influence their pupils to like their lessons. Conversely, those with a negative attitude will have the opposite effect. Most of the teachers in the school perceive LSE positively. A few consider it as a duplication of the pastoral programme and do not see its need in the curriculum.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study are very significant to teachers, parents, curriculum planners, school administrators other interested readers. The importance of LSE in the primary curriculum is a very important component whose presence cannot be gainsaid. Schools have implemented the subject in the curriculum in varying levels of success. The teachers' role in its implementation is important for the programme to be successful. Their attitude and commitment influences the success of the programme because it affects the learners' attitude and perspective towards the programme. The presence of adequate resources to teach the subject is another vital component which cannot be neglected and left to chance.

The findings of this study revealed vital information regarding the status of LSE, its implementation, challenges facing implementation and the relationship with character development in children. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are put forth.

The role of the teachers in the teaching of LSE cannot be gainsaid. There is need to employ teachers so that adequate teachers are available to teach all curriculum subjects including LSE. Teachers need to be well trained and equipped to teach LSE. The foundations and pedagogy of LSE has to be included in the teacher training curriculum in the teacher training colleges and Universities. This will adequately prepare the teachers to deliver the LSE content in schools. Currently, teachers are not trained to teach LSE and this is a major handicap in its implementation. Teachers of LSE need to develop a positive mind-set. They must believe that LSE is a major component of the curriculum and plays a huge role in the development of the child. This will enhance the teaching of LSE.



The successful teaching of LSE requires adequate resources. Schools need to be equipped with enough textbooks and other supplementary resources for the teaching of LSE. Currently, there are few textbooks available for the pupils and the teachers have to rely on a single teachers guide. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) should encourage the production of other supplementary resources like audio-visuals, board-games for use in teaching of LSE. This will make the teaching more interactive and interesting to the learners.

The pedagogy of LSE needs to be reconsidered. LSE is not a subject that appeals to the cognitive domain alone. Indeed, it is a subject that appeals more to the affective domain of the child's development. The current techniques used by teachers are more directed to teaching LSE like an intellectual exercise. The end result is that learners have an intellectual understanding of the LSE content without necessarily imbibing the values inherent in the lessons. Teachers need to approach the subject from a non-cognitive angle and develop learning outcomes that appeal more to the affective domain of the learner's personality. More interactive and developmentally appropriate activities need to be included in the lessons so that learning of LSE becomes fun for the children and they can look forward with great anticipation to the next LSE. The school heads need to be more actively involved curriculum supervision to ensure effective delivery of content.

Finally, the program outcomes need to be well documented. There is need to conduct continuous monitoring and evaluation of the program outcomes. Baseline data needs to be collected of the learners' psychosocial development before the LSE intervention. This will help researchers in conducting well informed assessment of the effects of LSE on character development. Further longitudinal and experimental studies need to be conducted to provide knowledge of the extent to which LSE contributes to development of character in the learners.

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