

Evaluating the Role of Universities in Promoting Life skills among Young Students

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to examine the role of universities in promoting life skills among the youth to live and work in the 21st century. It was a descriptive study and adopted the survey approach of the social sciences. The population of the study consisted of students and faculty (of bachelor studies programs) of the final semester in general universities in Pakistan. A multistage sampling technique was used. Five universities were selected randomly, one from each province and one from the capital territory of Islamabad; one faculty was taken as a cluster; and then finally, ten (10) faculty members and eighty (80) students were contacted prospectively by each of the sampled universities. The total samples were thus comprised of 50 university teachers and 400 students. The researcher, after the literature review, prepared two questionnaires on a five-point-likert-scale: one for university teachers and one for the students. After piloting, the tools were administered with the help of two data collectors who were trained for the purpose. Out of 50 and 400 questionnaires, forty-four and 382 questionnaires of the university teachers and students, respectively, were completed and returned. As the study was of descriptive nature and explored the role universities in promoting life skills among the youth/ students in Pakistan; hence, descriptive statistics i.e. percentage and mean score(s) was used to analyze the data and demonstrate the situation. On the basis of the data analysis, the study concluded that universities have a prime responsibility in promoting life skills among youth and students by offering properly designed co-curricular activities. The universities are promoting life skills among the youth, including IT skills, communication skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity & innovation through co-curricular activities.

Keywords: IT Skills, Communication Skills, Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, Collaboration, Diversity, Social Responsibility

Introduction

Knowledge generation and its dissemination is one of the prime roles of universities. New knowledge is generated through research and it leads towards innovations and inventions in areas of the life. Generally, the universities had been/ and are addressing different issues and presenting solutions even to the complex social problems through research. The history of the mankind witnesses it through development –innovation and invention in science and technology, medicine and surgery, aviation and astronautics and society and culture and alike. Besides, the universities also train youth for the life –to live and work peacefully and productively.

Pakistan is a developing country with its youth as the prime capital which according to United Nation's Population Fund Report (2017) is 63% of the population. Youth is future of a country and it becomes more significant for developing countries like Pakistan where more than half of its population is youth. If the youth is equipped with necessary skills which are often referred to as the life skills it becomes the most beneficial asset of the country. This youth needs to be nurtured to be productive and tolerant individuals of the society by learning life skills. In this regard universities are the prime social institutions which work to equip the youth with life skills to live and work peacefully in the world.

The term "*Life Skills*" is a generic concept which is ascribed to the situations and circumstances to be handled through such skills. These are the phenomenon "*what is necessary to teach young people in order to live life well*" (DeJaeghere, & Murphy-Graham, 2022); and according to Chetri (2020) the "*Life skills education helps in empowering the youths to act responsibly in the society*" (p.6117). In a general perspective, these can be developed through constructivist approach by coming across such situation or putting the youth in such situations (Quane, 2002). Here education and training plays an important role in promoting life skills among the university youth (Nair, 2010). Life skills are regarded the behaviors of the youth learnt through social training and demonstrated in the alike situations. By learning life skills an individual become able to demonstrate his/her knowledge and information through his/her attitudes, values doings. The UNICEF (2002) labels "*knowledge, attitude and skills*" as the life skills. According to World Health Organization (1996) there are three components of the life skills. These are the thinking skills - critical and creative thinking, goal setting, decision making and problem solving, social skills –self-awareness, empathy, communication and negotiation skills, and coping skills – managing and coping with stress and emotional conditions.

According to Minsi and Guha (2014), the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All –EFA (1990) acknowledged life skills important for "*better survival, better aptitude development and a better life*" (p.94). Therefore, developing and promoting life skills among university youth facilitates them to lead a balance peaceful life (Umesh & Kaur, 2019) ahead in their future. Universities are expected to provide social training to their students along with equipping them with knowledge. The university graduates who were provided training of life skills or who were equipped with

life skills appeared to demonstrate enhance critical thinking and they involved themselves actively in life affairs being responsible to their work (Aishwarya, & Arora 2006). The life skills training also appeared to increase the physical and mental health of the students by developing pro-social behaviors among them. It decreased their social problems and self-destructive behaviors as well (Ramesh & Farshad, 2004). Similarly, the promotion of life skills through training demonstrated a positive impact on human relationships by reducing aggression (Smith, & Swisher, 2004) flexibility and positivity (Tuttle, 2006), enhance psychosocial Competencies (Vranda & Rao, 2011), promote self-confidence and self-esteem and prevent “*substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, violence and bullying*” (Puspakumarag, 2013), improves “*social development, emotional and social adjustment*” (Roodbari, Sahdipoor, & Ghale, 2013) among the students. The instructional strategy appeared to be effective in terms of developing life skills and students’ achievement on criterion test (Nitin, 2016).

Objectives of the Study

The present study was conducted to (a) evaluate the role of universities in promoting life skills among university students; (b) identify activities offered to the university students for promoting life skills; and (c) find out the main life skills promoted by the universities among the young students.

Research Methodology

It was a descriptive study and adopted survey approach of the social sciences. The population of the study consisted of the students and faculty members (of the bachelor studies programs) of the final semester in general universities of Pakistan. Multistage sampling technique was used. Five universities were selected randomly one from each province and one from capital territory – Islamabad; one faculty was taken as cluster; and then finally ten (10) faculty members and Eighty (80) students were contacted purposive-conveniently from each of the faculty of the sampled universities. The total samples thus comprised of 50 university teachers and 400 students.

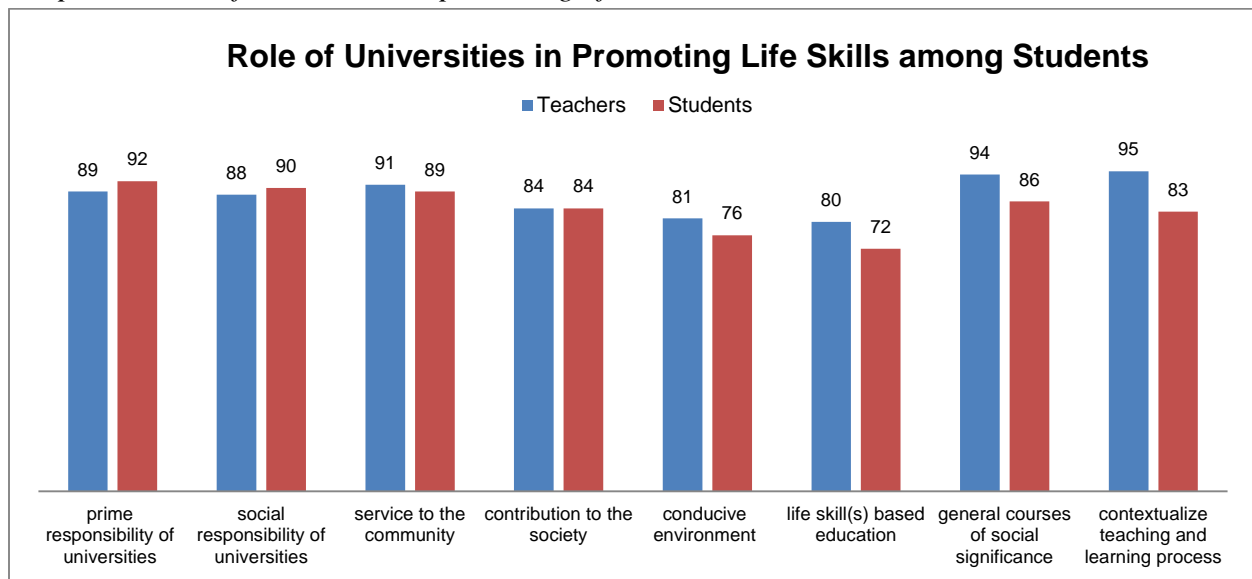
The researcher after the literature review prepared two questionnaires on five-point-likert-scale and used as research tools: one for university teachers and one for the students. The researcher piloted both of the tools five university teachers and 20 students at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur. Both of the research tools were finalized in the light of the results of the piloting. During the process of pilot testing, two data collectors were trained. They were trained in “*how to observe research ethics, patience and administer research tools for data collection*”. The finalized tools were administered with the help of the data collectors who were trained for the purpose. Out of 50 and 400 questionnaires; 44 and 382 questionnaires of the university teachers and students respectively complete in all respect were received back. As the study was of descriptive nature and explored the role universities in promoting life skills among the youth/

students in Pakistan; hence, descriptive statistics i.e. percentage was used to analyze the data and demonstrated the situation.

Data Analysis and Results of the Study

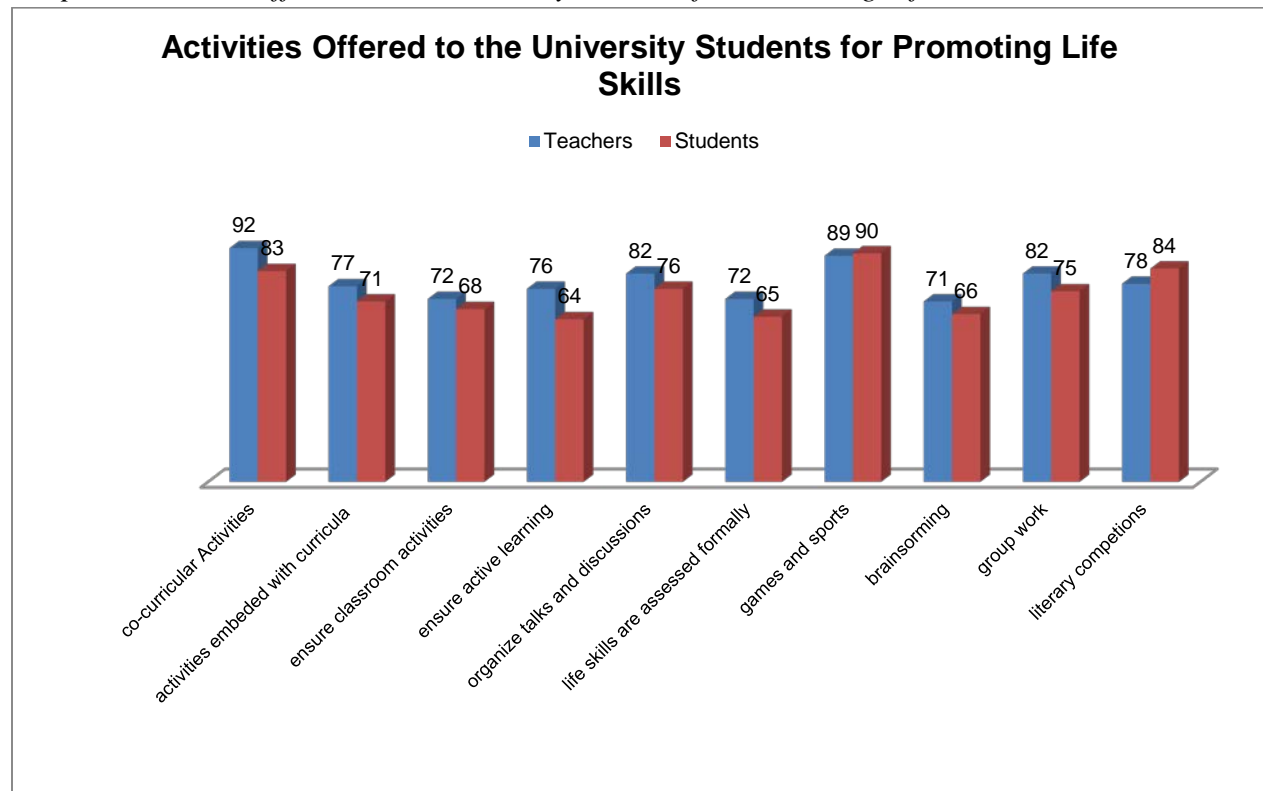
The data collected by administering both of the research tools was analyzed through MS Excel in terms of percentage. The results were presented in graphical form as given below.

Graph-1: Role of universities in promoting life skills



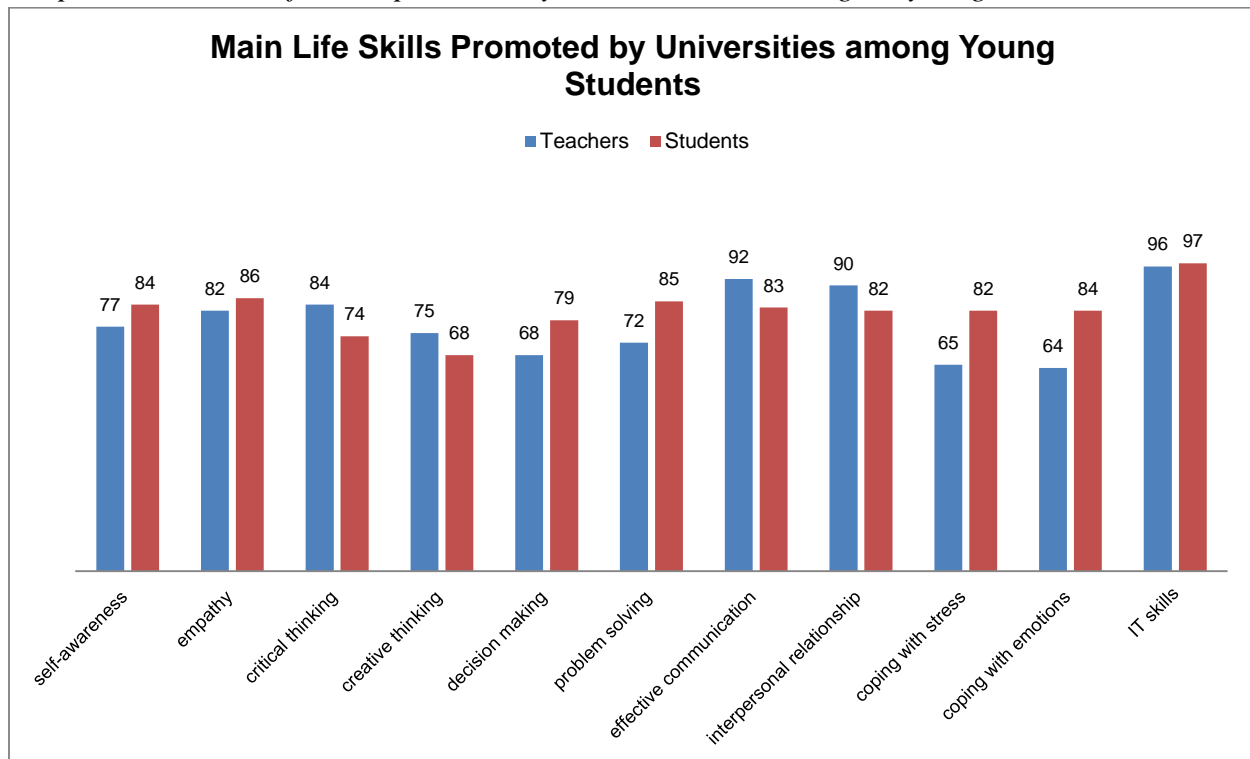
The graph-1 demonstrates that 89% of the university teachers and 92% of the students were of the view that promoting life skills among students is the prime responsibility of universities. Similarly, 88% of the university teachers and 90% of the students regarded it to the social responsibility of universities. According to 91% & 84% of the university teachers and 89% & 84% of the students it is service to the community and contribution to the society respectively. Even so, 81% & 80% of the university teachers and 76% & 72% of the university students were of the view that universities should provide conducive to learning environment and life skill(s) based education respectively to the students. However, 94% & 95% of the university teachers and 86% and 84% of the students affirmed that universities offer general courses of social significance and contextualize teaching learning process for promoting life skills among university students.

Graph-2: Activities offered to the University Students for Promoting Life Skills



The graph-2 shows that 92% and 77% of the university teachers and 83% and 71% of the students affirmed that university offer co-curricular activities and activities embeded with curricula respectively. Similarly, 72% and 76% of the university teachers and 68% and 64% of the students were of the view that universities ensure classroom activities and ensure active learning of the students respectively. Even so, according to 82% and 72% of the university teachers and 76% and 65% of the students, universities/ departments organize talks and discussion regularly and life skills are formally assessed respectively. Likewise, 89% of the teachers and 90% of the students acknowledged the role of games and sports in promoting life skills which are regularly by the universities. However, 71% & 82 % of the university teachers and 66% & 75% of the university students apprised their universities in organizing brainstorming sessions and offering group work respectively. Whereas, 78% of the teachers and 84% of the students were of the view that universities organize literary competions for promoting life skills like public speaking & communication skills and personality development.

Graph-3: The main life skills promoted by the universities among the young students



The graph-3 indicates that 77% & 82% of the university teachers and 84% & 86% of the students acknowledged that they are equipped with self-awareness and empathy/ responsiveness respectively in/ by the universities. Similarly, 84% & 75% of the teachers and 74% & 68% of the students affirmed that their universities make them learn critical thinking and creative thinking respectively. According to 68% & 72% of the teachers and 79% & 85% of the students, universities equip their students with decision making and problem solving skills respectively. However, 92% & 90% of the university faculty members and 83% & 82% of the university students were of the view that their universities make their graduates learn effective communication skills and promote and maintain interpersonal relationship respectively which are necessary to live a productive life. Human life is associated with life situations and emotion which need to be expressed in reasonable ways. In this regard, 65% & 64% of the university teachers and 82% & 84% of the students affirmed that their universities equip their students with the skills to cope with stress and manage their emotions respectively. Likewise, 96% of the university teachers and 97% of the students affirmed that universities equip their students with information and communication technology (ICTs) skills which are necessary to live and work in 21st century.

Conclusion(s)

In the light of the results, the study concludes that promoting life skills among students is the prime and social responsibility of universities. They also regarded it service to the community and contribution to the society. Universities offer general courses of social significance and contextualize teaching learning process for promoting life skills among university students. Universities provide conducive to learning environment and life skill(s) based education to the students. It is evident from the results that universities offer co-curricular activities and activities embedded with curricula by ensuring classroom activities and active learning of the students. The universities/ departments organize talks and discussion regularly for promoting life skills; and life skills are formally assessed in each semester. Games and sports play an important role in promoting life skills which are regularly organized by the universities. Universities also organize brainstorming sessions and offer group work to their students. Both types of the respondents – teachers and students were of the view that universities organize literary competitions for promoting life skills like public speaking & communication skills and personality development. The students are equipped with self-awareness and empathy/ responsiveness in/ by the universities. Universities make students learn critical thinking and creative thinking, decision making and problem solving skills. Universities make their graduates learn effective communication skills and promote and maintain interpersonal relationship respectively which are necessary to live a productive life. Human life is associated with life situations and emotion which need to be expressed in reasonable ways. In this regard, university teachers and students affirmed that their universities equip their students with the skills to cope with stress and manage their emotions. Likewise, university teachers and students affirmed that universities equip their students with information and communication technologies (ICTs) skills which are necessary to live and work in 21st century.

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