



Integration of Core Life Skills in Pakistan Studies Textbook Grade IX

Dr. Muhammad Jamil^{a*}, Faiza Arif^b, Dr. Uzma Shahzadi^c

^aLecturer, Department of Education, GC Women University Sialkot.

^bM. Phil Education, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore.

^cDirector Academics, University of Sargodha.

*Email: m.jamil@gcwus.edu.pk

Abstract: This qualitative study examines the integration of UNICEF MENA's 12 core life skills in the Pakistan Studies textbook, grade 9. The textbook was selected for analysis through purposive sampling. The study employed qualitative content analysis, facilitated by NVivo 14 software, to identify and categorize content related to each life skill. The analysis of the textbook shows that life skills are presented somewhat incoherently in the textbook. Critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills are well-covered through analyzing questions and tasks. The text also raises topics concerning regional differences and social issues and calls for respect for diversity and empathy. To foster participation and cooperation, emphasis is given to group work and discussions. However, specific skills such as creativity, negotiation, and self-management are not given much attention. The textbook is not geared toward skill development in these content areas and is more of a knowledge-delivery text. However, looking at all the twelve core life skills, the textbook could have provided more comprehensive coverage. This research suggests a need to work towards the importance of all functional life skills in developing future curricula.

Key words: Life skills, Pakistan studies, Textbook, Qualitative content analysis

1. Introduction

Education has always been regarded as the key to the future of any country like Pakistan. While the country is working towards achieving the goals and objectives of the 21st century, there is an increased focus on ensuring that the students are trained in academic achievements and other life skills. These skills become essential to assistance, interpersonal relations, and success in a complex and diverse society and the global environment (Newman, 2020). According to the UNICEF MENA report 2017, twelve life skills are vital for youth development: creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, cooperation, negotiation, decision-making, self-management and resilience, effective communication, civility, empathy, and participation (UNICEF, 2017). It is worth highlighting that curricular and co-curricular skills are desirable and essential components of the educational process as a holistic approach to learning prepares students for real life.

Generally, the education system in Pakistan has been characterized by rote learning and knowledge transmission. Still, there has been a slow but progressive transition to a more constructive approach that combines skills training with curriculum subject matter. It has been discussed in the national curriculum (Jamil, Aslam, et al., 2024; Jamil, Bibi, et al., 2024; Jamil, Bokhari, & Ahmad, 2024; Jamil, Bokhari, & Iqbal, 2024; Jamil, Bokhari, & Rafiq, 2024) and consequently in the textbooks (Jamil, Bibi, et al., 2024; Jamil, Bokhari, & Ahmad, 2024; Jamil, Mehmood, et

al., 2024) used in schools all over the country. Specifically, the grade 9 Pakistan Studies textbook is particularly informative. Pakistan Studies helps students understand the history, geography, culture, and political system of the country and the world. It is also a subject that can promote many of the core life skills outlined by UNICEF MENA. Understanding how these skills are incorporated into the Pakistan Studies curriculum will provide a window into a broader perspective of life skills education in Pakistan secondary schools.

The significance of this study rests in its ability to contribute to the understanding of educational policy and practice. To that end, understanding how life skills are currently incorporated into Pakistan's educational curriculum may be useful as the country continues to work toward reformation and improvement of its educational system. It may assist with determining which strategies work well and where more attention should be paid, as well as how to improve the incorporation of life skills into every learning subject. Furthermore, this research is relevant as there is a global shift towards skills-based education (DeMark et al., 2022; McGrath & Yamada, 2023). Formal education and bookish knowledge are insufficient to equip learners for the contemporary world. Critical thinking, problem-solving, effective oral and written communication skills, and teamwork are highly sought in universities and the job market today (Asefer & Abidin, 2021; Binti Ab Aziz & Balraj, 2022). Analyzing how the Pakistani education system is dealing with these skills will help understand the compatibility with international trends in education and its ability to prepare students for the future.

The emphasis on the Pakistan Studies textbook is rather timely. Given the fact that Pakistan Studies is a subject that focuses on national identity, citizenship, and socio-political issues, the subject has the potential to develop many of the core life skills (Naseer et al., 2021). For instance, critical thinking can be fostered in the context of historical events, empathy concerning cultures across Pakistan, or problem-solving in the context of current issues in the country (Khalid et al., 2022; Rauf et al., 2024).

1.1 Objective of the Study

To analyze the level and disposition of incorporation of the UNICEF MENA (2017) framework's 12 core life skills in Pakistan Studies textbook Grade IX.

2. Review of the Literature

The incorporation of life skills into educational systems has received a lot of attention all over the world in the recent past. It is valuable to note that the definition of life skills education has changed dramatically within the past few decades. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), life skills are "the capacities for integrating, learning, performing and coping successfully in the face of adverse situations in daily living." Closely related to this, UNICEF's 2017 report on the MENA region outlined 12 key life skills through which young people can be equipped to successfully navigate the world (UNICEF, 2017). For example, there has been a growing trend of integrating these skills into education systems worldwide. Nasheeda et al. (2019) observed that although the implementation strategies for life skills education may vary, there is an increasing understanding of the need for students to acquire life skills. It also revealed the importance of appropriately delivering life skills education in multicultural societies. Prajapati et al. (2017) reviewed and synthesized life skills education programs in developing countries. They discovered that despite the awareness of life skills in many countries, its implementation has numerous problems and barriers, such as inadequate teacher education, the absence of resources, and culture.

Moreover, in the international context, Tikly and Barrett (2011) highlighted learner autonomy issues in education for low-income countries. They emphasized the contextual nature of reforms like teachers' adoption of life skills in education. Other international studies have also noted the role of textbooks in facilitating life skills education. For example, Akcaoglu and Green (2019) discussed how problem-solving skills were integrated into the context of mathematics instruction in Turkey, noting that although there were possibilities to promote skill development, they mainly can be regarded as unrelated to the practical context.

Pakistan Studies is perhaps one of the most important subjects taught in secondary schools in Pakistan. It is aimed at the development of patriotism and civic engagement together with the understanding of the history, geography, and social-political conditions of the country. In a study conducted by Muhammad and Brett (2015) employed content analysis on Pakistan Studies textbooks with an emphasis on the construction of national identity. The study explored textbook writers' interpretations and enacted policy objectives related to Pakistani national identities and internal ethnic and cultural diversity with a global perspective per the 2006 curriculum. In a study by Naseer et al. (2022), critical thinking skills were explored in a Pakistan studies textbook. Similarly, Jamil, Aslam, et al. (2024) conducted a study regarding the critical thinking skills development in Single National Curriculum (SNC) 2020 for

Social Studies at the primary level. A recent study by Jamil et al. (2024) explored life skills in the Physics textbook grade IX. All the education policy documents focused on critical thinking skills development, with suggestions for practical implementation through pedagogy and assessment. Integrating life skills within the Pakistan education system has been progressive. In their research by Svanemyr et al. (2015), a case study was conducted regarding scaling up life skills-based education in Pakistan from 2004 to 2013. The main challenge regarding the conservative operative environment was addressed through media and advocacy activities in the community. Maqsood et al. (2022) investigated secondary school students based on gender and school life skills development. Most participants had a positive perception of life skills. On the other hand, a significant difference between gender and school was found.

3. Research Methodology

The research design for the current study used qualitative content analysis to analyze the extent of integration of core life skills in the Grade 9 Pakistan Studies textbook. Content analysis is one of the usual procedures in qualitative research that enables the analysis of textual information (Krippendorff, 2018). This method is especially appropriate when working with textbooks due to the possibilities provided to a researcher to define and classify certain thematic lines, concepts, or skills encompassed in each educational content (Mayring, 2014). Thus, the research process consists of several stages. The Pakistan Studies textbook for grade 9 was selected through purposive sampling because this age group is very important in the development of life skills as well as teaching topics that could easily incorporate aspects of life skills in their curriculum. The textbook was downloaded from the website https://pctb.punjab.gov.pk/download_books. Qualitative content analysis was facilitated with the help of NVivo 14 software. NVivo is a common software used for qualitative data analysis that provides an efficient way of coding, storing, and creating a data retrieval system (Jackson et al., 2019). Coding included reading through the textbook's content to determine areas that address any of the twelve life skills in some way or another. This coded data was then examined for patterns, frequency, and context where those life skills are incorporated into the textbook. Thus, the present paper intends to synthesize the literature on the given subject matter to gain a more elaborate understanding of how life skills are currently used in the context of the Pakistan Studies textbook.

4. Findings of the Study

The findings of the study are described under the core 12 life skills of the framework:

4.1 Creativity

The textbook does not explicitly focus on developing creativity skills. However, some activities at the end of chapters provide opportunities for creative expression, such as:

"Ask the students to prepare charts on the tips for preventing various types of pollution and display them in the classroom." (p. 94).

It allows students to creatively present information on pollution prevention.

4.2 Critical Thinking

The textbook encourages critical thinking through analysis questions, such as:

"Analyze 1970 elections and their aftermath." (p. 18)

It requires students to critically examine the historical events and their consequences.

4.3 Problem-solving

Some discussion questions promote problem-solving skills. For example:

"Discuss the causes of separation of East-Pakistan." (p. 18)

It encourages students to identify problems and analyze potential solutions.

4.4 Cooperation

Group activities foster cooperation; in the textbook, it has been described in the following way:

"Discuss the topic 'women protection against violence'." (p. 95)

4.5 Negotiation

Negotiation skills are not explicitly addressed in the textbook content.

4.6 Decision-making

Some questions require decision-making, such as:

"Explain the concept of Pakistan ideology in the light of the pronouncements of Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah." (p. 1)

It requires students to make decisions about which information to include.

4.7 Self-management

Self-management skills are not directly addressed in the textbook.

4.8 Resilience

The textbook highlights examples of resilience in Pakistan's history, such as:

"Pakistan had to face many difficulties soon after its establishment. Some of them were..." (p. 32)

It demonstrates national resilience in overcoming challenges.

4.9 Communication

Communication skills are developed through writing exercises and presentations, such as:

"Conduct a speech competition regarding the ideology of Pakistan." (p. 17)

4.10 Respect for Diversity

The textbook promotes respect for diversity through content on different regions and cultures of Pakistan. For example,

"Pakistan can be divided into five regions by natural topography..." (p. 81)

4.11 Empathy

Discussions on topics like women's rights in the textbook aim to build empathy. For example:

"Violence against Women (VAW) is a form of gender based violence. It has adverse effects on women's physical, mental and reproductive health." (p. 102)

4.12 Participation

The textbook encourages participation through activities and discussions, such as:

"Organize a dialogue between students on the causes of the separation of East Pakistan." (p. 58)

5 Discussion

The textbook analysis revealed that life skills are partially integrated into the textbook. Certain skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication, are featured prominently, while other skills, like creativity, negotiation, and self-management, are hardly addressed. This shift indicates a pattern in the curriculum development process across the countries. For example, in an OECD study by Ananiadou and Claro (2009), the authors discovered that, although many countries acknowledge the significance of 21st-century skills, they are only implemented partially and piecemeal. The focus on critical thinking and problem-solving issues in the Pakistan Studies textbook is compatible with the global trends in education. These skills are universally appreciated for productivity today (Jamil, Anwar, et al., 2024; Jamil, Aslam, et al., 2024; Mehmood & Saleem, 2024). However, it is worrisome that skills such as creativity and self-management are given little attention compared to others. Creativity is essential in the current globalized and competitive environment and is the key to innovation (Kozbelt et al., 2010). Notably, these skills are discussed only occasionally in the textbook; thus, students might be unprepared for some aspects of their academic and professional lives.

The second major conclusion is that even when life skills are addressed in the textbook, the coverage tends to be more inferential rather than direct. While this may be helpful in some circumstances, it leaves the students wondering how to apply these skills in realistic scenarios. Malik et al. (2022) recommend that there is a need for innovations to be made in the current educational policies. The lack of direct emphasis on teaching life skills in the textbook also questions how students can generalize the acquired skills. Integration of learning is an important component of skill development, and it has been found that instructional procedures that facilitate the application of knowledge across domains promote transfer. In this aspect, the textbook does not pay much attention to life skills. Hence, students may be unable to identify the various instances in which these skills can be applied.

The analysis also shows that when presenting life skills in the text, the strategies applied in teaching them are somewhat narrow. Although it is possible to see interactive exercises and case scenarios, more elaborate and effective approaches to developing such skills are possible. This finding is consistent with Jamil's (2021) assertion that to teach 21st-century skills, curricula, instruction, and assessment must be modified. It is also possible that the lack of a more diverse set of approaches presented in the textbook may indicate other issues with the education system. Things like teacher training, resources, and traditional teaching methods can affect diversity and interaction in teaching. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), teacher preparation is crucial when implementing a skills-based curriculum. It indicates that reforming the educational knowledge and the textbook's content will have to go hand in hand with the reconstruction of teacher education and continuous professional development.

Any assessment of life skills in the Pakistan Studies textbook must be made in light of these facts. The textbook is centered around the themes of national identity, citizenship, and socio-political matters, which can be highly beneficial for the formation of critical thinking, empathy, and respect for the diversity of individuals. However, there might be cultural differences and expectations that may affect the presentation of these topics. Durrani and Halai (2018) examine the construction of citizenship education in Pakistan, given the country's national identity and religion. This complexity could be an advantage or a disadvantage in integrating life skills. On one hand, discussions of national identity and diversity can enable such skills as empathy and respect for diversity. However, political and socially sensitive issues may hinder the extent to which critical thinking and free speech are allowed.

The small amount of direct coverage of life skills in the text also indicates that it would be beneficial to have more intentional skill-building approaches. It may require making more explicit in the textbooks what life skills mean, how they can be properly applied, and how practice in using these skills can be enhanced. It aligns with theory and research on skill acquisition and transfer (Halpern & Hakel, 2003). Moreover, it is recommended that more diverse methods of teaching and representation be included in textbooks and classroom settings. It might mean more opportunities for learners to engage in discussions, authentic problem-solving activities, and group assignments. Approaches like these are closer to constructivist learning theories and can successfully enhance the development of complicated cognitive and social skills (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012).

6. Conclusions

The study's findings suggest that certain life skills are covered adequately in the Pakistan Studies textbook grade IX, and some aspects do not receive much attention. The skills most closely correlated with analytical questions and tasks aimed at comprehensive involvement in historical and modern problems – critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication – are still quite transfixed. The textbook also encourages cultural understanding and tolerance to some degree but not as a broad overarching theme. However, it does mention the ethno-geographic political and cultural provinces of Pakistan. However, the study wishes to underscore the following areas of concern in this regard: Reflection, communication, and interpersonal skills, which are some of the skills that are missing within the textbook content. This disparity points clearly to the fact that there is a cavity in the importance of life skills inculcation within the Pakistan Studies curriculum. The study also shows that when taught life skills, they are disguised more often than taught outright. Although this model may work for some types of academic assignments, it may fail to equip learners with the appropriate knowledge of such skills and how they can be utilized in practice. The lessons tend to be more direct instruction and modeling of life skills; many of these need to be woven more consistently through the text. Moreover, it also reveals that the textual teaching strategies applied to introduce the life skills within the textbook are somewhat restricted. Although there are examples of students providing exercises or participating in cases, there is a chance for other effective approaches to teach such skills.

6.1 Recommendations

Keeping in view the findings of the study, the following are the recommendations:

- a) The curriculum of Pakistan Studies should be improved to include all aspects of the core life skills in the textbook, especially neglected aspects like creativity, negotiation, and self-managing.
- b) Introduce more direct teaching of the specific skills to be learned and explain the life skills in the textbook. It should clearly describe each skill, explain why the specific knowledge is relevant for professional growth, and provide examples of how real-life situations may be approached using the specific skill. This explicit approach is useful for helping students realize and recall these skills in the future.
- c) Increase the variety of teaching practices in textbooks to develop people's skills for life. This may

involve using exercises and questions that promote teamwork, additional case studies, role-playing, and project-based exercises where the skills can be applied in different settings.

- d) Design long-term and short-term professional development of teachers to enhance teaching aspects involving life skills education. It should help arm and prepare the teachers with the knowledge and tools for incorporating life skills into teaching Pakistan Studies and other subjects. Reasonable consultation should also occur, including offering consistent professional development and support.
- e) Incorporate these changes as follows: Modify the traditional assessment techniques used to suit the goals and objectives of the life skills development program. It could relate to having more performance standards, portfolios, and projects focused on assessing life skills rather than solely tests.

References

- Akcaoglu, M., & Green, L. S. (2019). Teaching systems thinking through game design. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 67, 1-19.
- Ananiadou, K., & Claro, M. (2009). 21st century skills and competencies for new millennium learners in OECD countries. OECD education working papers, no. 41. *OECD Publishing (NJI)*.
- Asefer, A., & Abidin, Z. (2021). Soft skills and graduates' employability in the 21st century from employers' perspectives: A review of literature. *International Journal of Infrastructure Research and Management*, 9(2), 44-59.
- binti Ab Aziz, N. S., & Balraj, B. M. (2022). Soft Skills for Employability from Academics Perspectives. *Journal of Advances in Humanities Research*, 1(3), 16-36.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Learning policy institute
- DeMark, S., Hobbs, D., Thorne, K., & Young, K. (2022). Charting a future with skills: The need for a skills-based education and hiring ecosystem. In *New Models of Higher Education: Unbundled, Rebundled, Customized, and DIY* (pp. 61-80). IGI Global.
- Durrani, N., & Halai, A. (2018). Dynamics of gender justice, conflict and social cohesion: Analysing educational reforms in Pakistan. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 61, 27-39.
- Halpern, D. F., & Hakel, M. D. (2003). Applying the science of learning to the university and beyond: Teaching for long-term retention and transfer. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 35(4), 36-41.
- Jackson, K., Bazeley, P., & Bazeley, P. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis with NVivo*. Sage.
- Jamil, M. (2021). *An analysis of education policy and science teachers' practices for developing critical thinking skills in secondary school students, [PhD dissertation, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan]*.
- Jamil, M., Ain, Q. u., & Chohan, I. R. (2024). Integration of core life skills in Physics textbook grade X: A qualitative content analysis. *Pakistan Journal of Law, Analysis and Wisdom*, 3(6), 119-131.
- Jamil, M., Anwar, M., & Ali, M. J. (2024). Developing critical thinking skills in English classrooms at the secondary level: Teachers' perspective. *Journal of Social Sciences Development*, 3(1), 76-85.
- Jamil, M., Aslam, M., & Ali, S. (2024). Single National Curriculum (SNC) for Social Studies (2020): Document analysis for development of critical thinking skills at the primary level. *Pakistan Journal of Law, Analysis and Wisdom*, 3(2), 67-74.
- Jamil, M., Bibi, T., & Shahzadi, U. (2024). Critical thinking skills development among secondary school students: An analysis of Chemistry textbook grade X (2020). *Research Journal for Societal Issues*, 6(2), 1-11.
- Jamil, M., Bokhari, T. B., & Ahmad, D. (2024). Evaluation of critical thinking elements: A qualitative content analysis of physics textbook grade IX. *Qlantia Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(1), 344-350.
- Jamil, M., Bokhari, T. B., & Iqbal, J. (2024). Incorporation of critical thinking skills development: A case of mathematics curriculum for grades I-XII. *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, 13(1), 375-382.
- Jamil, M., Bokhari, T. B., & Rafiq, M. (2024). Critical thinking skills development for 21st century: An analysis of Biology curriculum (2006). *Voyage Journal of Educational Studies*, 4(1), 127-138.
- Jamil, M., Mehmood, W., & Shah, F. u. H. (2024). Development of critical thinking skills among secondary school science students: An analysis of Chemistry textbook grade IX (2020). *Global Educational Studies Review*, 9(1), 13-20.
- Khalid, T., Muhammad, Y., & Siddiqui, M. (2022). Cultivating global citizenship among secondary school students: Pre-service teachers' beliefs. *Global Social Sciences Review*, 7(2), 326-337.

- Kozbelt, A., Beghetto, R. A., & Runco, M. A. (2010). Theories of creativity. *The Cambridge handbook of creativity*, 2, 20-47.
- Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Sage publications.
- Malik, M. F., Manzoor, H., Manzoor, H., Kumar, H., Channa, S., & Raza, T. (2022). Critical analysis of educational policies of Pakistan. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(11), 1762-1778.
- Maqsood, F., Malik, S., & Jumani, N. B. (2022). Role of Life Skills Education in Empowering Secondary School Students: An Explanatory Study. *International Research Journal of Education and Innovation*, 3(1), 200-213.
- Mayring, P. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: Theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution. In *Approaches to qualitative research in mathematics education* (pp. 365–380). Springer.
- McGrath, S., & Yamada, S. (2023). Skills for development and vocational education and training: Current and emergent trends. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 102, 102853.
- Mehmood, M. J. W., & Saleem, A. (2024). Biology textbook grade X (2020): Analysis for the development of higher order thinking skills among secondary school science students. *Global Regional Review (GRR)*, 9(1), 29-35.
- Muhammad, Y., & Brett, P. (2015). Beyond binary discourses? Pakistan studies textbooks and representations of cultural, national, and global Identity. *IARTEM e-Journal*, 7(3), 74-101.
- Naseer, H., Muhammad, Y., & Jamil, M. (2022). Critical thinking skills in Pakistan studies textbook: Qualitative content analysis. *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*, 4(3), 744-755.
- Nasheeda, A., Abdullah, H. B., Krauss, S. E., & Ahmed, N. B. (2019). A narrative systematic review of life skills education: effectiveness, research gaps and priorities. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 24(3), 362-379.
- Newman, T. J. (2020). Life skill development and transfer: “They’re not just meant for playing sports”. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 30(6), 643-657.
- Prajapati, R. K., Sharma, B., & Sharma, D. (2017). Significance of life skills education. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, 10(1), 1-6.
- Rauf, A., Muhammad, Y., & Masood, S. (2024). Citizenship Education in Elite Schools of Pakistan: Examining Requisite Skills for Civic and Political Participation in History Textbooks. *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, 13(1), 1069-1088.
- Svanemyr, J., Baig, Q., & Chandra-Mouli, V. (2015). Scaling up of life skills based education in Pakistan: a case study. *Sex Education*, 15(3), 249-262.
- Tikly, L., & Barrett, A. M. (2011). Social justice, capabilities and the quality of education in low income countries. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31(1), 3-14.
- UNICEF. (2017). Analytical Mapping of Life Skills and Citizenship Education in the Middle East and North Africa. *Jordan: UNICEF MENA Regional Office*.