

# The Level of Attention to Life Skills in the Social Sciences Curriculum of Elementary School from the Perspective of Teachers in Sothern Iran

Tayebe Piri<sup>1</sup>, MSc;  
Maryam Sahraei<sup>2</sup>, MSc

<sup>1</sup>Master of Clinical Psychology,  
Islamic Azad University, Boroujerd  
Branch, Boroujerd, Iran  
<sup>2</sup>Master of Curriculum Planning, Islamic  
Azad University, Marvdasht Branch,  
Marvdasht, Iran

**Correspondence:**  
Maryam Sahraei, MSc;  
Master of Curriculum Planning, Islamic  
Azad University, Marvdasht Branch,  
Marvdasht, Iran  
**Tel:** +98 9171103463  
**Email:** msahra1980@gmail.com  
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## Abstract

**Background:** Life skills help the individuals in different situations to communicate with others desirably and appropriately and to learn how to access social services, environment, and participation in life-making decisions and activities. The aim of this study was to investigate the level of attention to life skills in the social sciences curriculum of elementary schools from the perspective of teachers in Sothern Iran, Shiraz, in the academic year 2017-2018.

**Methods:** In this descriptive-analytical cross-sectional study, we selected 315 fourth, fifth, and sixth grade primary school teachers in Shiraz by stratified random sampling method. A researcher-made questionnaire with two dimensions of purpose and content of the curriculum with 26 questions was used. Subjects were asked to rate their views on each of the questions based on a five-point Likert scale. The results were analyzed through one-sample t-test, independent t-test, and ANOVA analysis using SPSS22 software.

**Results:** Based on the results, the educators believed that the level of attention to life skills in the goals and content of the curriculum was above average ( $P=0.001$ ). Also, there was no significant difference between the views of male and female teachers on the level of attention to life skills in the social sciences curriculum in terms of objectives ( $P=0.793$ ) and content ( $P=0.484$ ).

**Conclusion:** Since the main purpose of education is to help students adapt to different living environments, the development of applied life skills curricula is essential for all students.

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## Introduction

The subject of education has been considered for a long time and has been of great importance in human life at all times. From time immemorial, the institution of education has been considered the main and official pillar of education and is almost certainly considered the most appropriate means for social, cultural, religious, economic, and political development.<sup>1</sup> Any effort to develop and nurture social and communication skills - whether in the formal curriculum or extracurricular activities - cannot be without considering the growth

of students in various developmental dimensions. School, as the first official place of children's social experience, can play a decisive role in strengthening shyness, aggression, and social isolation or developing communication and social skills.<sup>2</sup> Our society, according to Islamic-Iranian culture, requires the teaching of etiquette in the light of Islam and those skills that, on the one hand, help students to lead a religious and balanced life between the material and spiritual aspects of life in this world, and, on the other hand, help people to cope.<sup>3</sup> Familiarize yourself with the challenges of everyday life, so that people can enjoy a happy and successful life.<sup>2</sup>

At least some of what has entered the world curriculum today with the name of life skills has been considered in religious and Islamic education with other names.<sup>4</sup> Lotfabadi and colleagues said that “Education in Iran, if it wants to strengthen the national identity and value system and citizenship skills of children and adolescents, must change its attitude towards curricula and classroom and school activities in public education. Consolidation of human, religious, and national identity and value system; citizenship education; and individual, social, economic, scientific and cultural life skills should also be included in educational programs.” Life skills are a set of abilities that provide the ground for adaptation of positive and useful behaviour, so that a person can accept the responsibilities of his social role without hurting himself and others, with desires, expectations, and problems, and facilitate daily communication, especially in interpersonal communication.<sup>5</sup> Fundamental analysis of these skills shows that some of them can be used as a basis for mental health promotion activities in schools.<sup>6</sup> Social sciences are among the courses that include skills and concepts from the fields of history, geography, political science, economics, anthropology, psychology, and sociology, and the impact of science and technology on society and how to be a good citizen.<sup>7</sup> Researchers have confirmed the positive effect of life skills in reducing substance abuse, capacity utilization and intelligence actions, prevention of violent behaviours, strengthening self-reliance, and strengthening self-concept. Life skills enable a person to turn knowledge of attitudes and values into real and objective abilities.<sup>8</sup> Now that the changes and complexities of society and the expansion of social and interpersonal relationships cannot be prevented, we have no choice but to prepare individuals to face the difficult situations of new life, arguing that psychologists support the organization. National and international organizations have begun teaching life skills around the world and at the school level to prevent mental illness and social ills. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the level of attention to life skills in the social sciences curriculum of elementary school from the perspective of teachers in Shiraz.

## Methods

This is a descriptive-analytical cross-sectional study. The statistical population in this study included all fourth, fifth, and sixth-grade elementary school teachers in Shiraz, (no=1256) in the academic year 2017-2018. To estimate the research sample, we used Cochran (1976) Sampling Techniques; based on 0 and 1 code, 315 fourth, fifth, and sixth-grade teachers were selected by stratified random sampling method based on area, sex, and educational base. First, from 1 and 3 areas of Shiraz, which is considered a cluster, the public elementary schools were selected. Then, 48 elementary schools and 320 elementary school teachers (190 women and 130 men) who were teaching

three educational bases (fourth, fifth, and sixth-grade elementary school) were randomly selected. Inclusion criteria were an age range of 26-40 years, elementary school teaching, and teaching in the schools in Shiraz. Unwillingness to participate in the study and retired teachers were the exclusion criteria.

### *Measuring Tools*

**Researcher-made questionnaire:** To make this questionnaire, we used the interview data and theoretical foundations of the research. This questionnaire has two dimensions of purpose and content of the curriculum with 26 questions. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the research components. The subjects were then asked to rate their opinion on each of the questions based on a five-point Likert scale of 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). In the five-point range, each option had a special scoring scale, based on which the code is analyzed. Given that the subject of this study is the level of attention to life skills in the social sciences curriculum of elementary school from the perspective of teachers, the criterion 3 was considered as the basis for determining the level of attention to life skills and scores below 3 were considered lower than average and a score higher than 3 was considered above average.

Content validity was used to assess the validity of the questionnaire. To assess the content validity of the questionnaire, first, we first prepared a preliminary questionnaire; then, the questionnaire was distributed among 5 professors and 13 teachers who were part of the statistical population of the study, and their opinions on the items were examined in terms of ambiguity or other issues. Finally, after modifying the questionnaire, according to the opinions of the supervisors and consultants, the final form of the questionnaire was developed. For construct validity, factor analysis was used. The factor analysis score of 26 items of life skills has a score ranging from 0.65 to 0.85, so factor correlation was approved for two dimensions (content and goal). The reliability of this questionnaire was estimated to be 0.93 using Cronbach’s alpha method, which indicates the high reliability of the measurement tool.

### *Research Implementation Process*

After obtaining the necessary permits, identifying the sample members, and reducing the subjects’ sensitivity to the questionnaires, we provided them with necessary explanations on how to complete the questionnaire.

### *Data Analysis*

In this study, statistical methods of one-sample t-test, independent t-test, and ANOVA analysis were used through the SPSS version 22 statistical software package.

### Ethical Considerations

To assure the subjects that their answers were confidential, we recorded no personal names and details. At the time of distribution of the questionnaires, they were assured to provide their answers without any stress. The Ethics Review Board of Marvdasht Azad university approved the present study with the following number: 2206.

### Results

In this study, 63% of the teachers were female and 37% were male. The teachers' level of education was a Bachelor's or Master's degree. The study showed that there was a significant difference between the level of attention to life skills in the goals domain and an assumed mean of 3 ( $P=0.001$ ). Thus, the teachers believed that the level of attention to life skills in the goals of the curriculum was above average. The study showed that there was a significant difference between the level of attention to life skills in the content domain and an assumed mean of 3 ( $P=0.001$ ). Therefore, teachers believed that the level of attention to life skills in the content of the curriculum was above average (Tables 1 and 2).

According to the results shown in Table 3, in both dimensions, there was no significant difference between the degree of attention to life skills in the social sciences curriculum in the goal domain, and the level of attention to life skills in the social sciences curriculum in content domain. Thus, teachers in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades had the same views about the questions.

Also, the results showed that in the fourth grade of elementary school, a total of 12.15 percent paid attention to life skills and the component of coping with changes in life and (paid the least attention to

the components of overcoming shyness (7.01 percent). Also, the praise and admiration of others received the least attention (0.79 percent). In the fifth grade of elementary school, a total of 5.69 percent paid attention to life skills, and the component of the ability to reason and examine situations was paid the most attention with 9.16 percent; also, the component of accepting criticism from others with 0.83 percent received the least attention. In the sixth grade of elementary school, a total of 10.41 percent paid attention to life skills, and the component of respect for different people, views, races, and religions with 8.85 percent was paid the most attention; the component of wearing appropriate and reasonable clothes (0.73 percent) received the least attention.

### Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the level of attention to life skills in the social sciences curriculum of elementary school from the perspective of teachers in Shiraz. Findings showed that educators believed that the level of attention to life skills in the goals of the curriculum was above average. This finding is consistent with those of Yar Ali and colleagues<sup>9</sup> and does not agree with the findings of Dehghani and colleagues.<sup>10</sup> In these findings, the level of attention to life skills was lower than average. This may be because in these studies, life skills were studied from the perspective of the Prophetic tradition, but in the present study, life skills was examined in general. To explain this hypothesis, Mirjalali and colleagues<sup>11</sup> and Mehta and colleagues<sup>12</sup> have also stated that school and textbooks are important factors that can be used in the life and socialization of learners. Therefore, paying attention to life skills in the goals approved by the curriculum helps to develop the student's personal and social lives and is a step towards

**Table 1:** Mean and standard deviation of the attention to life skills in goals and content domain

	Mean	Standard deviation
Attention to life skills in the goal's domain	3.27	0.758
Attention to life skills in the content domain	3.14	0.682

**Table 2:** Comparison of the teachers' views based on gender in terms of attention to life skills in the curriculum

	Domain	Gender	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error	T	sig
Attention to life skills	Goal	Male	3.25	0.71	0.067	-0.263	0.793
		Female	3.27	0.76	0.057		
	Content	Male	3.10	0.67	0.064	-0.701	0.484
		Female	3.16	0.68	0.050		

**Table 3:** The level of attention to life skills in the social sciences curriculum in the content and goal domain

		Total squares	df	Average of squares	F	Sig
Goal's domain	Between groups	1.165	2	582	1.01	0.365
	Intragroup	167.93	292	572		
Content domain	Between groups	1.03	2	0.518	1.11	0.330
	Intragroup	135.82	292	0.464		

the development of cultural and social skills in the society because life skills are the abilities that cause behaviors to become useful and acceptable to society.<sup>11</sup> These skills can have positive and successful results in the students' relationships with others and lead to greater adaptation and appropriate and desirable impact on the behavior of other people in the community with whom students live in the community.<sup>3</sup> The life skills training program can also improve the students' information, beliefs, and behaviors of self-esteem, self-efficacy, general health, and assertiveness, so that they can change their perspective, build interpersonal relationships and skills, and strengthen their social skills. For this reason, it is necessary to pay special attention to these skills in the objectives of the curriculum.<sup>5</sup>

In this study, it was found that educators believed that the level of attention to life skills in the content of the curriculum was above average. This finding is consistent with those of Yar Ali and colleagues<sup>9</sup> and Qaltash and colleagues.<sup>13</sup> As an explanation for this finding, it can be said that family and school play the most important role in transferring life skills. Life skills are an important factor in choice of real goals in life, emotional independence from family, establishment of healthy relationships with others, and a good predictor of acquiring the necessary social skills in life and an important factor in recognizing a healthy life.<sup>14</sup> Today, society faces many problems in issues related to people's relationships, which has caused the efficiency of people at home and work, and outside to be minimized. Therefore, solving these problems requires life skills and the use of knowledge and behavioral sciences, especially psychology. Poverty and knowledge related to behavioral sciences in the society have caused the planners to plan properly to improve the quality level of life in the community.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, developing educational content helps grow and develop the skills needed for a better life, build, or increase confidence in dealing with problems and solving them, as well as helping people grow and develop the social skills necessary for successful adaptation to the social environment. In each society, it seems to be necessary.<sup>16</sup> Mehta et al.<sup>12</sup> believed that school is a factor in socializing the individual and learning love, empathy, loyalty, and cooperation with others. Today, life skills have received more attention in schools than in the past, based on the principles of living and using the knowledge of psychology and educational sciences to teach life skills to children and adolescents.

The present study showed that there was no significant difference between the views of male and female teachers on the level of attention to life skills in the social sciences curriculum. As to this finding, no consistent and inconsistent research was found. Male and female teachers in schools use the same textbook to teach the social sciences at each

grade level and use an approved goal because their judgments are based on what is stated in the textbooks. Therefore, it is justified that there is no significant difference between their views on the level of attention to life skills. Dehghani et al.<sup>10</sup> showed that there was no significant difference between the opinions of teachers at different educational levels regarding life skills. In explaining this finding, it can be said that life skills are a necessity of life; since the choice of life skills is related to the development of the child, it is necessary to pay attention to different skills for the students, so that they learn them as they develop their cognition. In addition, given that students have not reached the stage of abstract thinking until the sixth grade of elementary school and are in the stage of objective thinking, the skills taught in elementary school are more objective, and there may be a reason why there is not much difference between the types of skills taught in this course.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, it is justifiable that teachers in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades of elementary school have given the same opinion on the level of attention to social skills.

This study showed that in the fourth grade of elementary school, the component of coping with life changes was given the most attention, and those of overcoming shyness and praising others were given the least attention. In the fifth grade of elementary school, the component of the ability to reason and examine situations carefully was given the most attention, and the component of accepting criticism from others was given the least attention. In the sixth grade of elementary school, the component of respect for different people, views, races, and religions was given the most attention, and the component of wearing appropriate and reasonable clothing was given the least attention. This finding is consistent with those of Asadollahi and colleagues,<sup>17</sup> and Dehghani and colleagues.<sup>10</sup> These studies showed that in spite of the importance of learning life skills in the development of society and well-being of social life, still the amount of attention paid to their education is not as significant as it should be. This may be because the social studies textbooks also focus on other items and topics that have little attention to life skills, although life skills are a set of strategies that each person needs to live in the community in which he/she lives. Planners and authors need to pay even more attention to this because life skills are abilities that help us behave wisely and correctly in different situations, so that we can relax, enjoy, and at the same time establish a consistent and useful relationship with others; in this way, can solve the problems that arise and feel happy without resorting to violence or selfishness while living.

The results of this research are limited to the life skills of basic, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade social science textbooks, so care should be taken in

generalizing the results to other textbooks. The sample group of this research consisted of teachers in Shiraz, which leads to a decrease in generalizability to other groups.

## Conclusion

Since the best place to train these skills is schools, attention and education are essential there, so we need to focus more on the development of life school in the school curriculum.

**Conflicts of interest:** None declared.

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