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Alternative and mainstream education in Kerala: A comparative study based on life skills of students

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Abstract--This study compares students' life skills from alternative education with those from mainstream schools in Kerala. Education is an essential virtue that transforms the unlettered child into a responsible and mature adult. Consequently, the present study explores the opportunities for alternative education to enhance school education in India, particularly in Kerala. This study demonstrates the importance of alternative education as a powerful tool for meeting the changing needs of public education in the era of a globalized economy. The tool used for the study was the Life Skills Inventory (LSI) developed by the investigator. The study results revealed that alternative education students in Kerala have more life skills than those in mainstream schools. Study results indicate that alternative education improves the socioeconomic status of a nation as well as the quality of life of individuals.

Keywords--Life Skills, Alternative Education, Mainstream schools.

Introduction

Students have a vital role to play in the progress of the nation. The students in Kerala receive traditional education through mainstream schools, including public, government-aided, and private schools. Schools with mainstream education tend to use rote learning and place a high value on knowledge with a well-defined curriculum. In most cases, students' abilities are given a minimum amount of importance. The fact is that traditional classrooms and teaching methods may have contributed to the factors associated with school dropouts. Not only is dropping out of school a serious challenge to one's livelihood, but also to the school system, the community, and society in general. Alternative, non-traditional options should be offered to students at risk of failing school in order to reduce the dropout rate and promote student academic success. Alternative schools offer unique learning options to students who do not function well in the traditional brick-and-mortar school (Barr, Colston, &

Parrett, 1977; Caroleo, 2014). Flower, A., McDaniel, S. C., & Jolivette, K. (2011) defined effective alternative schools as those that implement practices that are (1) appropriate for meeting the needs of students, (2) feasible for use in a school setting, and (3) proficiently able to produce positive student results. Wilson, Stemp, and McGinty (2011) considered effective alternative schools as those that actively re-engage students' learning process.

Need and significance

Life skills are a set of skills that can be learned or gained through direct experience in order to enable individuals and groups to address issues and problems encountered in daily life effectively. Creative thinking, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, as well as the ability to communicate and collaborate, along with personal and social responsibility contribute to good citizenship - all core skills necessary to succeed in the 21st century, both for healthy societies and successful individuals. It is not possible to develop life skills naturally; they must be learned. Our everyday experiences at home and at work may provide us with certain life skills, but they do not provide adequate preparation for the active role required of citizens in today's complex and diverse society.

Modernization has resulted in severe changes in the 21st century, and education must adapt to these changes. An advanced level of skills and knowledge is required for a knowledge society, which can only be achieved through a paradigm shift in education. Learning and developing academic skills are extremely complex processes that are shaped and influenced by many factors, including personal characteristics (both cognitive and non-cognitive), physical development, culture, family environment, institutional and community resources, and the formal schooling process.

A traditional learning environment may work well for many students, but there are many students who do not function well in such a setting. A few alternative education models have already been started in Kerala in an attempt to inculcate in students the best of international-standard academic and life skills. Alternative schools offer different opportunities for learning and acquiring education to those students who do not function well in traditional classrooms (Caroleo, 2014; Smith & Thomson, 2014). The overall development of every institution depends upon the students' support also. The present study aims to find out whether there is any difference in students' Life Skills in Alternative education and mainstream education. The three mainstream schools used in this study are from the private, government and aided sectors.

Research Questions

1. What will be the level of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in alternative education?
2. What will be the level of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in mainstream schools?
3. Is there any difference in the Life Skill of VIIIth standard students in alternative education and mainstream schools?

Objectives of the Study:

1. To find out the level of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in alternative education.
2. To find out the level of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in mainstream schools.
3. To compare the Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in Alternative education and mainstream schools.

Hypotheses

1. The level of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in alternative education is at a moderate level.
2. The level of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in mainstream schools is at a moderate level.
3. There is no significant difference in the Life Skill of VIIIth standard students in alternative education and mainstream schools

Methodology

Method: The method adopted in the present study is the Normative Survey.

Population: All the secondary school students of Alternative education and mainstream schools in Kerala.

Sample: The sample selected for this study constitutes 60 VIIIth standard students each in alternative education and mainstream schools of Kerala.

Tools: The major tool of the study is the Life Skill Inventory.

Procedure of Data Collection

In order to find out the Life Skills of students in Alternative education and mainstream schools in Kerala, a Life Skill Inventory was administered to 60 VIIIth standard students in each group after getting permission for administering the tool. The collected data were subjected to further statistical analysis in order to verify hypotheses.

Statistical techniques for data analysis: The main statistical techniques used are: Mean, Standard deviation and t-test

Analysis and Interpretation:

Analysis of the level of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in alternative education

To find out the level of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in Alternative education, the mean and standard deviation of the total sample data were calculated the value obtained for the mean is 88.41, and the standard deviation is 16.13. The level of leadership among VIIIth standard students in Alternative education as high, average and low was calculated by applying the formula: $m+sd$, between $m+sd$ and $m-sd$ and $m-sd$. The responses of the students in

Alternative education regarding the level of Life Skills and the details are shown in Table 1

Table 1
Details regarding the level of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in Alternative education

Life Skills	Number of students	Percentage
High	26	43.3
Average	23	38.3
Low	11	18.4
Total	60	100

Table 1 show that 43.3% of the VIIIth standard students in Alternative education have high-level Life Skills, whereas 38.3 per cent of students have moderate level Life Skills. The table also shows that 18.4% of students have Life Skill at a low level.

Tenability of Hypothesis H₁

The hypothesis states that the level of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in Alternative education is moderate.

Since more number of VIIIth standard students (43.3%) in Alternative education Life Skills at a high level, the hypothesis formed in this context; the level of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in Alternative education is at a moderate level is rejected.

Analysis of the level of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in mainstream schools

To determine the level of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in mainstream schools, the mean and standard deviation of the total sample data were calculated. The value obtained for the mean is 76.56, and the standard deviation is 18.03. The level of leadership among VIIIth standard students in mainstream schools as high, average and low was calculated by applying the formula: $m+sd$, between $m+sd$ and $m-sd$ and $m-sd$ respectively. The responses of the students regarding the level of Life Skills and the details are shown in Table 2

Table 2
Details regarding the level of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in mainstream schools

Life Skills	Number of students	Percentage
High	17	28.33
Average	30	50.0
Low	13	21.67
Total	60	100

Table 2 shows that 50% of the VIIIth standard students in mainstream schools have a moderate level of Life Skills, whereas 28.33 per cent of students have high-level Life Skills. The table also shows that 21.67% of students have Life Skills at a low level.

Tenability of Hypothesis H₂

The Hypothesis states that the level of Life Skill of VIIIth standard students in mainstream schools is moderate.

Since 50% of VIIIth standard students in mainstream education have Life Skills at a moderate level, the hypothesis formed in this context; the level of Life Skill of VIIIth standard students in mainstream education is at a moderate level is accepted.

Comparison of Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in Alternative education and mainstream schools

To determine whether the Life Skill of VIIIth standard students in Alternative education and mainstream schools differs significantly, the mean and standard deviation of the total sample were calculated separately their critical ratio was calculated and tested for a significant difference. The result and test of significance are shown in the following table.

Table 3

Test of significance difference in the Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in Alternative education and main stream schools

Life Skills	Number of students	Mean	S.D	t value	Remarks
Alternative education	60	88.41	16.13	3.19	Significant at 0.01 level
Main stream education	60	76.56	18.03		

Table 3 shows that for comparing VIIIth standard students' Life Skills in Alternative education and mainstream schools, the obtained critical value (t) 3.19 is greater than the table value (2.58) at .01 level of significance. This shows that there is a significant difference between VIIIth standard students' Life Skill in Alternative education and mainstream schools and the difference being more in favour of students in Alternative education.

Tenability of Hypothesis H₃

The hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in the Life Skills of VIIIth standard students in Alternative education and mainstream schools.

Analysis and discussion of the results on Hypothesis H3 make it clear that there is a significant difference in the Life Skill of VIIIth standard students in Alternative education and mainstream schools (CR=3.19;p<0.01). Since the

result is not in conformity with the hypothesis framed in this context, hypothesis H3 is rejected. **Major Findings**

The following are the major findings of the study:

- More number of VIIIth standard students (43.3%) in Alternative education Life Skills at a high level.
- Fifty per cent (50%) of VIIIth standard students in mainstream education have Life Skills at a moderate level.
- There is a significant difference between Life Skill of VIIIth standard students in Alternative education and mainstream schools and the difference being more in favour of students in Alternative education (CR=3.19;p<0.01).

Implication of the study

Interestingly, the present study revealed that there was a significant difference between VIIIth standard students' Life Skills in alternative education and mainstream schools, with the difference being more in favour of the alternative education students. When compared with students in mainstream education, students in alternative education possess a high level of Life Skills. A diverse array of alternative education methods has been offered to students in order to express their abilities; therefore, they have more freedom than mainstream schools. As alternative schools have become increasingly aware that not all students have the same abilities and that not all students learn in the same manner, they have developed to meet the needs of the students they serve. Providing smaller class sizes, more one-on-one interaction between teachers and students, greater flexibility in scheduling, multiple ways for students to earn credits, differentiated instruction, and a supportive atmosphere, these non-traditional alternative schools are designed to meet those needs and promote student success for those who encounter difficulties in the regular educational setting. It would be helpful to understand the common characteristics of alternative schools in order to assist educational leaders, course creators, and instructors to begin, maintaining, and improving alternative schools for students.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Since students of Alternative education have high Life Skills, it is suggested that Educational leaders and program directors with the information necessary to address concerns relating to the operation, funding, and support of such schools. Likewise, the study's information may help develop an awareness of all stakeholders of the available options and approaches in Alternative education that could be implemented to assist at-risk students, support student academic success, and improve the high school graduation rate.

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