

Adulting 101: The Importance of a Life Skills Education

Edward Perry Jr

Marywood University

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Abstract

This research paper stresses the importance of teaching life skills in a high school education. Life skills are the vital piece missing from a child's education in the United States. Life skills allow children to be prepared before entering the real world. Many surveys have stated that students wish to learn life skills and feel they are missing out.

While there have been challenges in implementing a life skills program in our education system, the potential benefits are significant. Despite the limited school year and the financial implications, a well-designed life skills program can equip students with essential life skills, enhancing their preparedness for the future. It's also important to note that many believe parents or guardians share the responsibility of teaching life skills.

This paper takes a comprehensive approach, exploring the importance of life skills and incorporating student, parent, and teacher perspectives. It also delves into the ethical implications of life skills programs and provides policy suggestions for successful implementation.

Keywords: education, life skills, high school students, life skills programs, education policy, curriculum policy

Introduction

Education is one of a young adult's most essential and profound times. According to the United States Department of Education, its overall goal is to "promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (Department of Education, 2024). Most education is rooted in liberal arts education. Having students exposed to various subjects like history, science, English, and mathematics is an example of subjects taught in the United States. One's educational journey truly does not end. It is a lifelong process, and we as humans constantly learn and obtain new information daily. With the introduction of vast technology and social media connectedness, the learning process truly does not end after school or even after work. We are a genuinely interconnected world twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

The liberal arts education goes beyond high school and can be found at most colleges and universities. Being well-versed in these subjects can profoundly impact students' lives and help them become more well-rounded. Conversing these subjects in everyday life and speaking confidently is just one goal of a liberal arts education. Another essential aspect of a child's education seems to be taught minimally or entirely missing. This missing and vital link to a child's education is the importance and knowledge of life skills.

What exactly is a life skill, and how is it defined? A life skill "is a skill that is useful or important in everyone's life" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). That may be a minimal definition in context, but life skills can mean many things. "The skills that must be possessed in life skills include problem solving, decision making, creative and critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal skills, empathy, and self-awareness, coping with stress and

emotions. Life skills are grouped into thinking skills, social skills and emotional skills" (Winarsanu et al, 2023).

Combining and teaching all these skills to high school students can help them better understand the real world after graduation. Teaching a liberal arts education is still very important, teaching students about English, history, science, and math. However, without teaching life skills in a high school education, are teachers and other school administrators doing a disservice to our students?

Students are wondering why these critical life skills are omitted from their education. Some might ask why we have to learn calculus or trigonometry. I'll probably never use it. Why don't we know about fundamental world skills such as registering to vote, paying taxes, and managing a personal budget? This research paper will stress the importance of life skills and why they are essential in a high school education.

Literature Review

Difficulty Teaching Life Skills

A regulated school year consists of one hundred and eight days in a calendar year. Teachers must adhere to and follow curriculum guidelines within that school year. Students, teachers, and administrators should meet specific outcomes and expectations. That 180-day time frame gives the teacher limited time to cover all topics and discussions. Another topic of vital importance is standardized testing.

Prepping students for state testing and other national standardized testing like the SAT and ACT is still significant; however, it can be burdensome, especially with today's test-optional policy set forth at many colleges and universities. "Instead of learning critical life skills on how

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to manage money, how to negotiate, or how to communicate, kids are mostly taught to memorize information. This is helpful to learn, but not at the cost of not learning critical life skills. Many people put these “life” skills on the onus of the parents to teach their kids, but not all parents are qualified to teach these lessons, and many assume that school is “enough learning.” The school system would be a perfect place to learn these indispensable skills” (Guise, 2017).

Why aren't life skills taught in our high schools in the United States? There are many reasons, but many common themes were due to budgets. Many schools are suffering budget cuts, and money needs to be spent and prioritized depending on the school district involved. School years are only 180 days out of the year, and there are only so many days to fit the proper curriculum for its students. “Why don't we teach these skills in our educational system? I think the answer is a complex one, but a big factor is probably because it's assumed that children will learn all of this at home. But what if your parents model terrible communication skills? Or they are living paycheck-to-paycheck always on the verge of bankruptcy? That's not a great way to learn sometimes. I think another reason we don't teach these skills is because they're "soft." In other words, easy” (Morgan, 2017).

Our teachers in the United States education system teach our students to become model citizens once they graduate high school. If these students are not taught the importance of life skills, are the teachers doing a disservice to their students? Will they be prepared to enter the real world after high school graduation? Teachers, parents, and family members want their children to be ready to enter the world, whether that next step is attending college, joining the military, or getting employment.

Student Opinions of Life Skills

If students are unaware of these life skills, such as financial management/literacy, cooking/nutrition, and so on, how are they expected to adapt and survive in the real world? According to an article in the New York Times, high school students were interviewed on their thoughts about the United States education system regarding being prepared to enter the real world. A high school student from Wilmington, NC, said, "It feels like once we've graduated high school, we'll be sent out into the world clueless and unprepared. I know many college students who have no idea what they're doing, as though they left home to become an adult but don't actually know how to be one. I barely understand credit and they expect me to be perfectly fine living alone a year from now. We need to learn about real life, things that can actually benefit us. An art student isn't going to use Biology and Trigonometry in life" (The Learning Network, 2019).

As more and more students graduate and enter the real world, post-high school graduation, how truly prepared are they? Are their high school teachers and administrators doing them a disservice by omitting these vital life skills? Getting what high school students think about life skills can further the issue. A recent survey was sent out to high school graduates and college graduates to get their view and opinions about coping without the knowledge of life skills. According to quizlet.com, "68% of recent graduates think non-academically focused courses in formal education settings would better prepare students for the real world. This belief is especially strong among respondents that attended public schools and colleges, 71%" (Panorama Education, 2023).

The Quizlet survey also asked students specifically what areas they are lacking in the world of life skills. "More than any other skill, nearly one in five recent graduates say they are

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the least confident in handling automotive maintenance, such as changing a tire or their oil. This is followed by financial planning (17%), insurance (12%), minor home repairs (11%), cooking (11%), cleaning (8%) and organizing (8%)" (Panorama Education, 2023). Since they are so broad, many life skills cannot be realistically taught in an entire academic school year. Students are taking into their own hands if their school and school district are not teaching these essential life skills. How are these students teaching themselves? Students aren't just talking – they are taking actions to supplement their knowledge of basic life skills. More than half of recent graduate respondents said they learned basic life skills online, with 35% saying they learned through a search engine and 33% gravitating to social media. Most said they relied on family members and friends (72%) or through trial and error (68%) (Panorama Education, 2024).

These days, schools solely focus on college prep, honors, advanced placement, and even dual enrollment classes (taking college classes while in high school). Yes, they are vitally important to a high school student's curriculum but adding life skills can only enhance the students' experience. A student from Kent, Ohio, was interviewed on her take on what's important in education, and she said "I am frustrated about what I'm supposed to learn in school. Most of the time, I feel like what I'm learning will not help me in life. I am also frustrated about how my teachers teach me and what they expect from me. Often, teachers will give me information and expect me to memorize it for a test without teaching me any real application" (The Learning Network, 2019).

According to a CBS news article, adults were surveyed on their thoughts about what they were taught in school. Now, in the real world and being active in their careers, many wish they had learned specific life skills while attending high school. "The top five skills that respondents

wanted to learn in school were money management and budgeting, how to do taxes, how to manage your well-being, understanding loans and how to negotiate" (CBS Philadelphia, 2019).

Many respondents also believed they do not use much of what they were taught in school, such as calculus, in real life. Survey respondents thought they were missing out on essential life skills that could have been taught during high school. "Overall, 89 percent say life would be easier if they had learned such practical skills in school, while the average person surveyed said they didn't truly grasp "adult" skills until 29 years old" (CBS Philadelphia, 2019).

Who is Responsible to teach Life Skills

The topic of who should primarily teach life skills is up for debate. Some may argue that it should strictly come from the student's household. Some also say that life skills should start in the home and be taught by whoever the student is living with. Today, many children come from different backgrounds.

Unlike in the 1950s, when most student's parents were married, since it was frowned upon, they had moral support from both parents. That is not the case in today's world. Some students live with only one parent, raised by grandparents, raised by aunts or uncles, or even in the foster system. All in all, knowing life skills to begin in the student's home is preferable.

Since many students are not learning the proper knowledge of life skills at school, then having it taught at home is the best alternative. "Jessica Lahey, author of *The Gift of Failure*, advocates that we teach our kids autonomy so they will be more motivated to engage in the business of their lives and learn how to be competent" (Carpenter, 2021). Teaching children critical life skills can be challenging.

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There are so many essential life skills out there, so the bigger question is, what are the most important, and what do parents teach? "Car repair, finances, cooking and mental health: There are so many skills we need to teach that it can often seem overwhelming. Which ones can they learn on their own? How much do we teach versus standing back and letting them learn from experience?" (Carpenter, 2021).

On the other hand, some students might have families with better knowledge of these life skills than other families. Some students may be more knowledgeable due to socioeconomic background and other factors. If some students are unfortunate not to learn it at home and not at school, how will they ever learn life skills? "Classrooms have become so focused on preparing our children academically that life skills have been put on the back burner," said Hutton. Also, the helicopter-parenting trend has given rise to the fear that a lot of parents feel for their child's safety. Many parents are overprotective of their kids using electrical appliances, knives, and other items that could potentially harm them, which gets in the way of learning these skills" (Hamaker, 2016).

If life skills are not taught inside the classroom, the students can learn them through family members. Every family is different, and no two are alike, especially today. "Parents and teachers alike should play an active role in preparing kids for the future" (Positive Action, 2023). Communities see the importance of life skills and actively fulfill this need through community programming. If our teachers are not actively teaching these life skills, then people outside the classroom in their communities will. These life skills are even being taught on college campuses as well.

Teaching Life Skills in The Community

Many Adulting 101 classes are being taught at local libraries and other events in the local community. Outside organizations within the community take it upon themselves to educate our youth instead of our educators inside the classroom. "Lucas herself got the idea for an Adulting 101 series after seeing the concept on several Facebook library programming groups. Lucas partnered with another staffer, library assistant of six programs focused on cooking, finances, job hunting, news literacy, apartment living, and miscellaneous topics such as cleaning an oven and checking engine oil. They (the students) just thought these things should have been taught in school or at home" (Ford, 2018).

Life Skills in College

Life skills seem to be tossed aside and are not one of the more important topics to teach students throughout the school year. Some colleges even take into account the importance of life skills. If students do not get the proper education in these skills in high school, college is the next phase for most students. Students are still learning and growing at these institutions even though being an adult legally in the United States is considered when a person turns eighteen. The education department at Texas Tech University took it upon themselves to create an Adulting 101 workshop for its students. They believed that these life skills were vital to students' development during their college years.

"Individuals are emerging into adulthood without understanding basic life skills such as paying bills, cooking, eating healthy, planning a budget, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. At Texas Tech University, educators in the Family and Consumer Sciences Education

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program have created a course entitled "Adulthood 101: Real Skills for Real Life" to address the lack of life skills in students during their college years.

With a critical science-based perspective, this course teaches students the skills needed for personal development, health and wellness, citizenship, communication, consumer choices, employability, parenting and childcare, and balancing work and family" (Houey et al, 2020). Professors see the importance of life skills even if they are not taught in secondary schools. Obtaining these skills is essential even after high school. Students are still trying to determine what path to go down during college (decide what major to pursue). Access to these skills can further enhance a student's professional and personal development.

If students are missing the mark of learning life skills by not being taught in high school or even through family members, the next chapter for them to know is in college. College students, most of them only 18, but legal adults, are still developing and maturing and finding themselves. Offering life skills courses, seminars, and workshops can open many avenues of learning for college students. "Colleges should step in by offering zero-credit "life skills" courses while streamlining general education requirements. This move would not only bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world application but also equip graduates for a well-rounded life post-graduation" (Shields, 2023).

College students are learning to live independently, especially if they are living on campus. Many students living on campus are experiencing what it's like to live on their own for the first time. This can be daunting and overwhelming, and some students may feel lost in the shuffle as to how to go about living independently. These students must take it upon themselves to master such skills as time management, financial responsibility, and academic success throughout their college career.

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Another aspect where life skills are essential in college is when college students decide to live off campus. Many students are likely unaware of the various elements of a rental lease for an apartment or house, what is included in the rent, and what is not (such as utilities like electricity, water, garbage, fees, etc.) Other things that would be beneficial for life skills knowledge are financial management and literacy. Living off campus requires students to shop for groceries independently and not rely on a meal plan provided by the college or university.

Living off campus provides students with an early and real-life scenario of living independently. Not having a support system from family or the college can adversely affect the students' perspective of living independently. High schools and colleges are doing a disservice to their students by not providing knowledge of life skills before entering the real world after graduating. If students are not learning in high school and not college, where and how do these students expect to learn these skills?

"Colleges can do more to facilitate this type of learning through introductory college courses for first-year students, workshops, and additional training on campus. Teaching these adult life skills at the undergraduate level not only helps universities with enrollment, but also trains students to be well-adapted members of the workforce and society" (Porter, 2020).

The Debate on Life Skills

Learning and knowledge of life skills is a significant and essential piece in a child's development. Being mindful and knowledgeable of these skills can better prepare today's youth while entering the real world. The biggest question at hand is, how does one define life skills? According to the World Health Organization, life skills are defined as " defines Life skills as the

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abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life " (Parapati et al, 2017).

Life skills can be a combination of many things. They can be soft skills such as critical thinking, conflict resolution, teambuilding skills, and effective communication, to name a few. Life skills can also be detailed skills such as financial management/literacy, paying taxes, applying for a credit card, looking for an apartment, etc. They can also be skills learning to cope with and manage stress and anxiety.

Deciding what skills are essential and which should be left to the side is debatable. Learning life skills is a very subjective matter. What someone believes is a crucial skill may not be as important as others. For example, parents deciding on what life skills to teach their children can be up for debate. We come from different and diverse backgrounds, and not every family will have the same answer regarding teaching and learning these essential skills.

For example, according to Indeed.com, "many soft skills that employers look for in capable staff members are also essential life skills. The same abilities that help you lead a productive and happy life can lead to similar results in the workplace. Some of these skills are empathy, nonverbal communication, public speaking, self-awareness, organization, and critical thinking" (Indeed.com)

Life skills can also help students develop skills that can improve their psyche. "Life skills are based on executive functions; they bring together our social, emotional and cognitive capacities to problem solve and achieve goals. Studies have found they are critical to success in school and life" (Mind in the Making, 2023).

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Life skills can also be broken down into various categories. They can be broken down into subcategories, such as thinking skills, social skills, and emotional skills. "Thinking skills might involve being able to think of multiple solutions to a problem or develop new innovations in a creative way. Social skills might involve knowing how to develop healthy relationships, how to communicate in effective ways, and how to interact with others successfully. Emotional skills involve being comfortable in your own skin, dealing with emotions effectively, and knowing who you are" (Davis, 2024).

All in all, there is no definitive list of what life skills need to be taught to our children. Whoever is teaching the life skill to a student, whether a teacher or parent, will be based on their own experience and what they feel is essential to themselves and the students they are teaching it to.

Analysis

Life skills have been and are still presently a vital topic and matter to analyze and review. These skills help students during an essential time in their lives and can help them as they mature into adults. If these skills are so critical, why do many students say they wish they were taught all these life skills before entering the real world? Are teachers and parents doing a disservice to today's youth by not providing these skills?

The literature analyzed many viewpoints when it comes to the learning of life skills. Student opinions and viewpoints were taken into consideration in the form of surveys and questionnaires. Many students ushered the opinion of wanting to learn these skills before graduating high school.

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Other themes that were found in the literature were where these life skills were being taught. Since a school year is only 180 days, there is limited time to learn many things within the school year. Many students take it upon themselves, thanks to YouTube and other online tools, to learn these necessary skills. Colleges and universities also see the need for students to learn these skills. Some colleges, such as Texas Tech, have an Adulting 101 series for which students can sign up. Free workshops or zero credit-based classes can be an alternate avenue for colleges and universities to provide these life skills to students.

Another theme that was mentioned in the literature review was the responsibility of parents when it comes to the learning of life skills. If the school and school district cannot provide the time or the resources, parents, and guardians should be a knowledgeable outlet for their children. Since so many life skills exist, homing in on the most important ones can prove challenging. There are many categories of life skills out there and deciding which ones to focus on the most varies by each person. Being financially stable might be a top priority to someone instead of learning how to vote or change a flat tire.

With all the research that has been conducted throughout this study, four significant theories emerged on the importance of learning and using life skills. These theories are experiential learning theory, transformative learning theory, cognitive learning theory, and connectivism theory. Three perspectives will be identified through experiential learning, transformative learning, cognitive learning, and connectivism learning theories, including teachers, students, and parents.

Experiential Learning Theory and a Teacher's Perspective

Learning and teaching our children has evolved throughout the years. Having students learn from a textbook, handouts, and other materials and being tested on that subject has been one way of teaching. With today's use and readiness of technology, a new form of learning, called experiential learning, is a new and immersive way to bring real-world concepts inside and outside the classroom. What exactly is an experiential learning theory?

"Experiential learning theory focused on learning by doing. Using this theory, students are encouraged to learn through experiences that can help them retain information and recall facts" (Western Governors University, 2020b). Instead of testing students on material and having them regurgitate facts and dates that they will most likely not retain, bringing the natural world inside the classroom is a step in the right direction. Teachers can get real-life examples of what they are learning and how to apply it to a real-life situation or scenario. Showing students they can learn just as much, not solely from a textbook, can be beneficial.

Incorporating the teaching of life skills by utilizing experiential learning theory is a great way to introduce students to life skills. Teachers can show how an actual life skill is done instead of just reading or telling students about it. Some students may be visual learners, so using experiential learning theory may benefit both the teacher and the students. "It is a strong instrument for bringing about positive modifications in academic education which allow learners to apply what they have learned in school to real-world problems (Guo et al., 2016)".

Taking a pause or break from what is expected to be taught by the teacher can benefit the teacher. Teachers want students to succeed in the real world, so why not bring the real world to the classroom and the students to the real world? One example is getting students to a mechanic

to see how to change a flat tire. Another example can be taking students to a local bank to talk about financial literacy or bringing someone from the bank to speak directly to the students.

Providing hands-on opportunities and experiences like these will hopefully foster a sense of positivity and happiness for both the students and the teacher. "By creating environments where students can learn and experience at the same time, teachers offer students the opportunity to immediately apply their knowledge and real-world experiences" (Western Governors University, 2020b).

Transformative Learning Theory and a Parent's Perspective

As stated in the literature review, parents and/or guardians can also play a critical role in learning life skills. If teachers and other administrators are not teaching life skills, another paramount source comes from a parent/and or guardian. Parents and guardians should not solely rely on their children's teachers to provide all learning of a child's education. Many important things and factors can also be taught outside of the school inside the child's home/and or outside community.

Using and adapting the transformative learning theory approach can be beneficial for all involved, especially the student's support system (family). "Transformative learning theory can be defined as the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives) – sets of assumption and expectation – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change. Such frames are better because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action". (Meridian University, 2023). Parents and guardians can provide much

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knowledge and wisdom to their children based on what they have been taught/experienced in their own lives.

Passing down ideals, wisdom, and knowledge to the next generation has been done generation after generation. Most parents/guardians want to ensure their child or children grow up in a world better than the previous generation. Taking the time to show their children what is essential regarding life skills can be paramount to their children's intelligence and education before entering the real world after graduating high school. The time outside of school may be the only chance students get to learn life skills if their school does not teach these essential skills as part of the curriculum.

"Nevertheless, a transformational approach could help students open up and realize that failure, struggle, and making mistakes are all part of the journey toward mastery and finding the truth about the world" (Meridian University, 2023). Parents/and or guardians providing their knowledge of what life skills they have mastered will help the next generation and so forth. The life skills a child's parent has learned and felt important may differ from what the child feels is important to them.

Providing a balance of previous knowledge and asking their child what they feel is important for them to master can be a perfect blend of adapting new skills and gaining prior knowledge of life skills from their parent/ or guardian. Children can transform themselves into the person they want to become by learning life skills from their parents and life skills today. Parents or guardians can provide their children with a different and unique perspective. The world was different than the world their child was living in. Whether it is about politics, the economy, technology, or other world views, our children's world is vastly different.

By presenting that unique perspective of what their parents were taught, children can see and utilize essential life skills from their parent's generation and adapt those skills to their own lives. Parents can allow their children to think critically and view the world around them. "This approach allows students to become active actors in the process of learning, which in turn develops their critical thinking and makes them more engaged with the lesson's materials" (Meridian University, 2023). Parents can also transform, meaning that as their children adapt to different viewpoints and opinions, they can do so. A particular thought or opinion a parent had while growing up may not be politically correct or accurate today.

Humanism Theory and a School Administration Perspective

Education has evolved and changed over time. A liberal arts education provides a strong foundation in various subjects. Learning concepts in science, mathematics, English, and other humanities gives a broad overview and knowledge of these subjects. In a sense, a liberal arts education can make students more well-rounded and well-versed in many subjects they are taught throughout their careers.

Other educational skills such as life skills, are equally important as the various subjects in a liberal arts education system. Learning these specific soft skills justifies and relates to the learning of the whole person. By utilizing the humanism theory, school administrators, specifically those dealing with curriculum instruction and practice, can positively change a student's educational journey.

"Humanism emphasizes the importance of personal growth, self-actualization and whole-person development. Humanist learning theory emphasizes the unique needs and capabilities of each student and underscores the efficacy of a personalized education" (Feder,

2024). Using the humanism approach, school administrators can focus on the required curriculum inside the classroom and real-world life skills outside the classroom. By implementing this approach, a unique blend of classical education with fundamental world life skills, a student can potentially feel more prepared before entering the real world.

School curriculum administrators can profoundly impact by implementing a humanistic approach to its educational foundation and curriculum. The following principles of the humanistic approach should be included: "student choice, fostering engagement, self-evaluation, and a safe learning environment. It is crucial for students to find motivation and engagement in their learning, and that is more likely to happen when students are choosing to learn about something they really want to know" (Western Governors University, 2020d).

Introducing life skills to the current curriculum and having students choose what skill or skills they believe are most important to them fosters a positive curriculum experience. Allowing the student to customize their educational experience regarding life skills is a more student-centered approach and a unique learning experience for each student.

Constructivism Theory

Many of us have been tested and quizzed on various subjects in our educational careers. We remembered different facts, dates, concepts, and theories for weeks before an exam was familiar throughout education. Studying for weeks before an exam is nerve-wracking, but do we remember what we were just tested on after the test or quiz? A new and emerging educational theory for the twenty-first century is constructivism.

" Constructivism is a learning theory that emphasizes the active role of learners in building their own understanding. Rather than passively receiving information, learners reflect

on their experiences, create mental representations, and incorporate new knowledge into their schemas. This promotes deeper learning and understanding" (McLeod, 2024).

Students learn to "construct," in other terms, various knowledge and theories learned throughout their educational career. They build upon prior knowledge and experiences while learning something new. Each student has a unique and individual experience when it comes to constructivism. Each student is like an architect, constructing their educational journey.

Interacting with one another and having a social aspect of learning these life skills is very relevant when using the constructivism learning theory concept. By showing how a particular skill is done in real-time, rather than just teaching students so they memorize the steps, adding the visual component of the specific life skill is advantageous to all involved. For example, while teaching about financial literacy, going to a local bank and having the students speak with a bank manager and the bank manager telling and showing the students all about financial literacy is an excellent example of constructivism theory. Students can learn about financial literacy while simultaneously learning how to apply for a personal loan or bank account.

"Learning is an active process. Learning involves sensory input to construct meaning. The learner needs to do something in order to learn, it's not a passive activity. Learners need to engage in the world so they are actively involved in their own learning and development. You can't just sit and expect to be told things and learn, you need to engage in discussions, reading, activities, etc" (Western Governors University, 2020a).

Another example of showing interaction inside the classroom is utilizing social media platforms such as YouTube or TikTok. Students today who are part of the Gen Z generation rely heavily on social media. Students practically have the internet at their fingertips and access to

endless information. Teachers can show students various videos on mastering a particular life skill. For example, videos can be shown teaching students how to change a flat tire, how to register to vote or how to apply for a credit card.

Teachers and educators must also be social and interactive to use constructivism correctly. Having the students interact during a lesson instead of being taught is critical. "Progressive education recognizes that social interaction is key to learning and they use conversation, interaction, and group applications to help students retain their knowledge" (Western Governors University, 2020a).

Ethical Implications

Implementing new educational policies can have severe and adverse implications. First and foremost, the overall equality of education can be an issue. Education is something that should be available to anyone who wants to learn. Education is a constitutional right in the United States and should be equal no matter what background one comes from or what socioeconomic situation one comes from.

Unfortunately, not every school district comes from the same socioeconomic background. There can be a drastic difference in educational quality based on a child's school district. For example, there is a drastic difference in academic quality taught at a preparatory school versus a school district in a lower-income area. School districts with ample resources to teach their students will be more academically prepared. Compared with a school with less than ample resources, teaching life skills might not be a reality for its students. Not having ample and necessary resources can lead to many negative repercussions for all involved.

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Implementing a life skills program can be costly for the school district. Adding additional costs and resources to ensure students obtain these life skills can be expensive. Depending on how in-depth the school district wants its life skills program to be, it can also be a financial burden to the school district. Some school districts' budgets may be so tight and strapped that starting a life skills program may not come to fruition. There can be a fine line between introducing new educational opportunities and removing the main goals and objectives students must learn in a given school year.

A school year is only one hundred and eighty days, and a set and planned curriculum must be taught during that school year. Each teacher is expected to ensure certain goals, objectives, and outcomes are met and finished by the end of the school year. Teachers must follow what is expected for each grade level and what their state's Department of Education expects. Teachers and other educators must ensure their students have the knowledge and readiness to move on to the next grade. With the introduction of life skills, shifting away from what is expected to be taught to students may not be the best option. By not focusing on the primary curriculum, teachers may not finish all their goals and objectives by the end of the school year.

Another thing to consider is the ever-changing demographics of students today. Many students from non-speaking English countries are becoming students in school districts in the United States. These students can be disadvantaged because English is challenging to learn and grasp. These students are more than likely used to communicating in their native language. Having these students learn how to communicate effectively in a new language while also learning math, science, and other subjects can be challenging.

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School districts with limited resources to assist these students can have adverse ethical implications. For example, not having the necessary and extra support for these students can lead to academic decline in these students. Having a delicate balance where employees in the school district speak the student's native language and have resources that will help them master the English language is necessary for their academic and self-growth. With the addition of life skills, learning can also create a cultural barrier. These students may be accustomed to a particular way of life. Introducing life skills may also be difficult for these English learners culturally and socially.

Lastly, another ethical implication of the implementation of life skills can also have a political effect. If a school district wants to implement a life skills program, it must go through a series of committees, curriculum committees, and finally to the school board for a vote. The school board has the final say and ultimate voting power in the school district. Being a school board member also has much political pressure and consequences.

At these school board meetings, community members can voice their opinions on matters in the school district. By hearing the positive or negative concerns, the school board, in the end, has the ultimate ethical implication by casting their vote. School board members vote on specific issues such as school taxes, the hiring of new staff, and other issues for the school district. School board members have the ultimate final say and vote on these matters. After all the opinions and shared commentary from parents, students, teachers, and other community members, it is up to the school board. How each school board member decides to vote puts severe and immense pressure on how the school district moves forward.

Policy Recommendations

Learning and teaching life skills is a missing piece in the United States education system. By omitting this vital piece of knowledge to our children, teachers and administrators alike are doing a disservice to the students. Having students rely on themselves and other means to obtain this knowledge should not be their only outlet for learning life skills. Having school districts implement and teach life skills can be a life-changing policy. Stressing the importance of these skills is the central theme of this entire paper. There can be many policy recommendations that can help school districts successfully implement and establish a life skills curriculum or class for school districts nationwide in the United States.

Introducing the teaching of life skills can be an additional class implemented into the school district's curriculum. If approved by the school district's school board, adding life skills can be life-changing. Having life skills be a required class or classes instead of an elective can also stress the importance of learning these skills set forth by the school district itself. Depending on the school district's budget, size, and other factors, introducing one life skills can be a step in the right direction.

Depending on what the school district deems appropriate due to internal factors, teaching life skills can be implemented into current classes already taught by teachers. For example, if students are in an accounting class, adding life skills related to that subject can be beneficial. Teaching about personal finance and budgeting fits an already established accounting class well. Another example can be intertwined with an already established English course. Introducing students to resume writing, cover letter writing, and business writing skills can also be beneficial to the students. Interweaving the use of life skills into existing classes in the

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school's curriculum can be an excellent option for introducing students to the importance of life skills.

An entire added required course in the curriculum can also be another option for school districts. The whole school year can be dedicated and broken up into various categories of life skills necessary to students to master. For example, a section on financial literacy can be taught to students. Examples include budgeting one's finances, distinguishing between debit and credit cards, and opening a checking account. The possibilities are endless when it comes to teaching about financial literacy. Other topics that can be broken up into the school year include learning how to register to vote, how to do one's taxes, what to look for in a lease when looking for an apartment, etc.

To immerse students in life skills and provide real, hands-on learning experiences, providing field trips outside the classroom is an excellent opportunity for students. If students learn about financial literacy, taking them to a local bank or credit union can be relevant to what they are learning in the classroom. Having them speak with bank employees about bank accounts, credit/debit cards, and other aspects of personal finance can be highly beneficial. Another example can be taking students to a car dealership. Here, they can learn about the process of leasing a car versus buying a car, which is tied to financing options. Students can also learn how to service a vehicle (oil change, changing a flat tire, etc.).

Another option can be bringing hands-on opportunities to students in their classroom. Having guest lecturers in the community can be an option if having a field trip is not a suitable or viable option. These presentations can occur either during the scheduled school day or after school/in the evening. Hosting various presentations can also benefit the student's family and get them involved.

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Having parents and guardians involved in learning life skills is also very important. Various workshops for the community provide access to all interested in learning life skills. Getting students and parents involved in these workshops is essential. The continuation of these life skills will hopefully continue beyond the classroom and into the student's home. By providing these life skill workshops, the school district is also invested in showing students and parents the importance of obtaining these skills before graduating high school.

Another option is forming a strategic relationship with the local school district and library. Libraries are known to host a slew of community events throughout the year. Forming a strategic partnership with a local library to assist with learning life skills can be a step in the right direction. Members of the school district, local businesses, and the library staff can host a series of life skills events.

To understand and gauge where the school district's students are, surveying students about life skills can be another policy recommendation. School administrators can ask specific questions in a survey to all high school students. Asking students what they believe life skills are defined to them, what skills are essential to them, and if they feel the school district should teach life skills are just some of the questions that can be asked of high school students. Other questions can be asked are whether students would prefer learning life skills implemented into an already existing class or teaching life skills as its own separate class/elective.

School administrators can also ask students how they currently obtain knowledge and life skills. Students may learn these skills from family members, friends, or even online. Today, generation Z lives and breathes social content on their phones daily. "Social media platforms are no longer just for connectivity but have evolved into primary search tools for a quarter of the

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population. TikTok, in particular, has risen as a favored resource over Google for Generation Z, indicating a preference for the quick, visually driven content the platform offers” (Haan, 2024). If students are taking it upon themselves to master specific life skills by themselves, they certainly believe they are essential to their upbringing and personal growth.

Directors of curriculum and other school administrators can present these findings from the surveys to different committees and, ultimately, the school board. Presenting and showing research supporting the implementation of life skills to the curriculum can strengthen the real possibility of updating the curriculum at the specific high school. Another policy recommendation is constructing and designing a cost/benefit analysis of adding life skills. Showing two different ways to implement (already in the existing curriculum or an entirely separate requirement) can portray a real-life scenario by adding life skills to the school district.

Getting the parents' and guardians' perspectives on implementing life skills is also very important. Letting a student's caretaker know what this new curriculum policy will entail provides open communication and allows the parents/guardians to be aware. A step further can be providing a survey to the parents/guardians to get their perspective on learning life skills. Ask whether they agree with the curriculum implementation and who they believe should be teaching their children life skills. Other questions can be provided in this survey.

One final policy recommendation is to see how other school districts (whether local, regional, or national) have implemented successful learning of life skills in their schools. Teachers and educators share the common bond of having their students succeed inside and outside the classroom. All who are involved in a child's education want them to succeed. Utilizing resources from other teachers and other school districts can be very practical. Seeing

what other school districts have done outside the box regarding life skills can be very eye-opening.

School administrators can also survey neighboring school districts that have implemented successful life skills programs. Surveying other schools and districts that may have had difficulty implementing a successful program or have had struggles, is another policy recommendation considered. Gaining a world perspective and seeing both sides of the positives and negatives of implementing life skills can be very beneficial. Seeing what policies and procedures worked and did not work can give school districts a complete perspective.

Summary

The goal of this paper is to stress the importance of introducing life skills into the curriculum of high school students. Each year, students learn advanced levels of English, history, math, science, music, art, etc. Providing exposure to these subjects will make a student more well-rounded when they enter the real world. There is also another set of vital skills and knowledge that can make students more prepared as they enter the real world post-high school graduation. These skills are called life skills, and they are a crucial part of a child's education and should be taught before entering the real world.

What comes to mind when one hears life skills, and how is it defined? According to the World Health Organization, life skills are defined as " defines life skills as the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life " (Parapati et al, 2017). A literature review was done analyzing what has been said about life skills and the importance of teaching these skills.

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A challenge to teaching life skills is finding the time to prepare them properly. There is limited time to teach the necessary subjects such as history, biology, chemistry, music, etc. A school year only consists of one hundred and eighty days. Teachers have goals and objectives that they must meet by the end of each school year. Also, standardized testing, including prepping for state testing and training students for the SAT and ACT, is significant.

“Instead of learning critical life skills on how to manage money, how to negotiate, or how to communicate, kids are mostly taught to memorize information. This is helpful to learn, but not at the cost of not learning critical life skills. Many people put these “life” skills on the onus of the parents to teach their kids, but not all parents are qualified to teach these lessons, and many assume that school is “enough learning.” The school system would be a perfect place to learn these indispensable skills” (Guise, 2017). Another reason some schools do not teach life skills is a lack of resources in the school district and budget issues.

Student opinions and thoughts about life skills were also significant to analyze. From the various articles researched in the literature review, students were highly vocal in their opinion of life skills. Many found it super vital to their educational experience and journey. One high school student who was interviewed in a New York Times article said, "It feels like once we've graduated high school, we'll be sent out into the world clueless and unprepared. I know many college students who have no idea what they're doing, as though they left home to become an adult but don't actually know how to be one” (The Learning Network, 2019). If students aren't taught life skills in high school, how else do they learn to tackle these important skills?

If teachers are not teaching life skills inside the classroom, other alternatives would be the parents and guardians of these students. Not every family is equal when it comes to resources

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outside the school. Families come from all different socioeconomic backgrounds. Relying on parents or guardians may be difficult in learning life skills.

A CNN article interviewed parents on their perspective of teaching life skills, "car repair, finances, cooking and mental health: There are so many skills we need to teach that it can often seem overwhelming. Which ones can they learn on their own? How much do we teach versus standing back and letting them learn from experience?" (Carpenter, 2021). If a student's parent or guardian cannot have the ability to teach life skills, another outlet to give them access is through the local community. Local community libraries are taking the initiative to provide young adults with knowledge of life skills. Libraries can provide these workshops for free to the community, focusing on high school students. Providing this knowledge outside the classroom can be highly beneficial if students aren't learning these skills inside or in their homes. Providing another outlet for education outside the classroom and in the local community benefits all who are involved.

If students are not learning essential life skills in high school, in their own home, or not even in their local community, they are seeing the importance of life skills in the next chapter of their educational journey, which is in college. Colleges also notice the importance of introducing students to life skills before graduating from their institutions. For example, at Texas Tech University, the education department designed a series of Adulting 101 workshops for their students. With a critical science-based perspective, this course teaches students the skills needed for personal development, health and wellness, citizenship, communication, consumer choices, employability, parenting and childcare, and balancing work and family" (Houey et al, 2020). Some colleges are even considering offering zero to one credit classes available to students to learn these essential life skills across the board for all majors and programs at colleges and universities.

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The overall concept of life skills and what they should include are still debated. The idea of life skills can be subjective. There is not one set of definitive life skills from a textbook that should be taught to students. This can prove difficult when a teacher is given the chance to teach life skills; how they approach teaching them is up to them. This can also cause a potential rift in what parents/guardians believe is essential. Parents can use the knowledge and skills they learned from their parents and previous generations. What one parent may believe is important to teach their child, another parent may disagree with that other parent or teacher.

Four significant theories emerged on the importance of learning and using life skills. These theories are experiential learning theory, transformative learning theory, cognitive learning theory, and connectivism theory. Three perspectives were identified through experiential learning, transformative learning, cognitive learning, and connectivism learning theories through the eyes of teachers, students, and parents.

Along with any policy recommendations come ethical implications that one must think about when pursuing the said policy. With the addition of a life skills curriculum for high school students, some things must be considered. Access to education should be equal across the board and have no differences in race, age, sex, or gender. All citizens have equal protection under the law thanks to the United States Constitution. However, society has changed, and access to education has drastically changed.

There are school districts in the United States that make a vast difference when it comes to providing education. For example, a private preparatory school usually has much more funding than a school in a lower socioeconomic area that is rural. When school districts have tight budgets, saving a dollar is considered heavily. If a school district is already strapped for

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funds, issuing a new curriculum program may not be the best option. Issuing a life skills program can be costly, and other, more critical matters may need to be funded instead.

Other ethical implications to consider are the changing demographics in school districts in the United States. More non-English speaking students are becoming students in school districts. School districts should be aware of this and provide resources to these students so they can succeed. Another implication to consider is the political backlash that might ensue from this policy. This life skills program may have to go through many committees and ultimately go up for a vote in front of the school district's school board. One member can indeed hold power by voting yes or no for the policy to become effective in the school district.

Implementing and launching any policy can have its challenges. However, many recommendations can be given to those involved in launching a life skills program in a high school. Deciding how to implement life skills into the curriculum exactly is vital. Teachers and other administrators can choose to implement the learning of life skills into the already existing curriculum. For example, in an accounting class, the accounting teacher can implement personal finance into the class. The opposite can be implementing a separate class, whether required or an elective, to a student's schedule. This class will focus solely on life skills as an individual subject.

If a school district does not have the means to implement a life skills program during the school day, there are other options to assess. School districts can have workshops in the evenings, inviting students and families. This will involve the parents or guardians in learning and teaching life skills. Another idea could be partnering with a local community library to offer life skills workshops.

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Another excellent policy recommendation is conducting surveys and asking students for their opinions on life skills. Getting accurate positive or negative feedback from students can be essential when constructing a life skills curriculum policy. Sending parents surveys to get their opinions on the subject matter can also provide crucial evidence about life skills. Another excellent suggestion is contacting other school districts who have successfully implemented a life skills program. All educators and administrators want to see their students succeed, so relying on one another is a step in the right direction. Conversely, contacting other districts that have had trouble implementing a program may provide some crucial feedback for the matter at hand. School districts can see both sides of the coin, positively and negatively, when implementing life skills.

Conducting these surveys can provide further proof in a more positive light when trying to start a life skills program. Teachers and other administrators can present the findings of these various surveys to the school board. Providing a thorough and detailed report based on the survey findings and answers to school board representatives can provide validity and reliability for the life skills program.

In conclusion, implementing a life skills program in high school can have many positive outcomes. Teachers and administrators can ensure that their students are prepared for the real world. By applying real world and hands-on activities, teachers can provide experiential learning opportunities for their students. Getting parents involved as well in the life skills learning process is essential. Introducing a life skills program can be revolutionary and a path forward for many school districts across the country in the United States.

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