

ACQUISITION OF YOUTH LIFE SKILLS

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Abstract

A successful life position for any person is based on different types of knowledge and their acquisition and enrichment probability; awareness of own abilities, their development and personal interest in the process; a system of positive attitudes as an integrated wholeness of personality traits which are formed in life experience, knowledge acquisition and will effort unit and are manifested in values, goals, ideals and norms. Successful role performance guarantees confident young people's functioning in the society, thereby creating the sense of security and confidence in themselves and their actions. In order to fulfil social roles it is necessary to acquire the general, social, as well as personal skills, which are generally referred to as life skills. If they are acquired successfully, young people are able to build successful relationships with their peers and also adults, are able to be active members of social life. Life skills guarantee success to young people in their personal life formation. They are able to be more independent and also be responsible for their actions and take responsibility for it.

Thus one of the school tasks is to promote the pupils' personal and social development. I Rubane (Rubane, 2000) has acknowledged self-cognition and self-determination, awareness and defence of own rights, stress management, resistance to psychological pressure, critical thinking, decision making, problem solution, social adaptation, cooperation, efficient communication as important life skills. However, the mentioned life skills can be called as important only conditionally, for no personal skills are mentioned what the young people could find a solution to different life situations with. These skills include self-care, cooking, personal budgeting, housework performance, usage of home/office appliances, daily routine planning, healthy lifestyle adherence etc.

Keywords: Life, general, personal and social skills, youth age range

Introduction

As it is mentioned in the document of the European Information Network on Education (Eurydice, 2002), globalization and its manifestations in culture, economics and environment are the base of the radical changes in economics and social sector in European countries. The scientific and technological progress has promoted the international integration and cooperation, increased competition.

The Europe 2020 strategy is about delivering growth that is: smart, through more effective investments in education, research and innovation; sustainable, thanks to a decisive move towards a low-carbon economy; and inclusive, with a strong emphasis on job creation and poverty reduction. The strategy is focused on five ambitious goals in the areas of employment, innovation, education, poverty reduction and climate/energy.

Knowledge is acknowledged as the most valuable resource of growth promotion in order to respond to challenges quickly. It is the tool for economic and cultural boom promotion. Knowledge is acknowledged as the driving force for personal and professional

development. When people obtain knowledge, acquire skills and change them into a competence to be used purposefully, they not only promote the progress of economics and technology, but also obtain a great personal satisfaction and well-being.

The European Commission supports the setting up of European Sector Skills Councils designed to anticipate the need for skills in specific sectors more effectively and achieve a better match between skills and labour market needs. These councils aim mainly to provide more and better information about the skills situation in different sectors; to help develop skills governance in each sector and national skills policies by encouraging: national organisations to cater more effectively to the needs of the various sectors, organisations active in the same field to learn from each other, all organisations concerned to share information and experience.

Youth preparation for society's challenges and usage of its offered possibilities and achievements become a significant goal of the education system. The acquisition of life skills at school is the prerequisite in order everybody could adapt to changes in society, compete in the labour market, build successful relationships with people, be an active member of social life and happy in personal life. The ability to compete in the labour market is an important aspect especially among the youth, because the choice of profession happens just at this age and also lots of young people start an independent life, entering employment relations. I. Bluka and I.M.Rubana (Bluka, Rubana, 2002) consider that the acquisition of life skills allows not only a successful functioning in the society, but also creates the sense of security and confidence, promotes spiritual well-being.

Research goal

Study the influencing factors of youth life skills.

Young people's psychological characterization in the life skills formation context

In order to assess the young people's opportunities in the life skills acquisition, attention should be paid to the main characteristics of the young people's age. The teenagers and youth age limit is not strictly determined and for different authors these limits fluctuate. However, the age from 15 to 25 is considered the youth age range. I Kons (Kons, 1985) thinks that the youth age is the literal meaning of the "third world," which exists between childhood and the adult's world. Biologically it is the final stage of the physical maturity. On the one hand, young people feel mature and they want to be independent, but, on the other hand, it is a high responsibility which requires lots of life wisdom and skills. The young people cannot be called children any more but, nevertheless, they are not adults yet. The personal action and role structure during this period obtain new, adult person's characteristics.

The social and personal self-determination problem is topical to young people, which does not mean autonomy in relation to adults, but precise orientation and their place determination in the adults' world. Young people's self-determination is an extremely important personality formation stage.

The issue of profession choice is a very essential and important task for young people, for it affects their future in the most direct sense. The main social task is the profession choice. It is important to be aware of own interests and understand what they are the best at in order to choose an appropriate profession. The young person's self-esteem and formation of "I" image is strengthened with the career choice. E.Erikson (Eriksons, 1998) mentions that mostly young people are worried about the disability to choose their professional identity. To maintain their integrity they over-identify themselves with the heroes of the crowd or different cliques for some time. Criminality and proneness to mental illness among young people can be explained with the identity confusion, when the doubt-appear about their ethnic

or sexual identity, or when the role confusion joins the long-lasting hopelessness. The young person who is not sure about their identity avoids shyly any kind of intimacy with another person. Also J. Kulberg (Kulbergs, 1998) mentions that when a negative identity has been formed, the character features, which are possibly different from the desired and expected ones by the bystanders, look for their manifestation chances, e.g. joining asocial gangs. Identity diffusion is expressed in the fear and despair form, which sometimes leads even to a short-term loss of reality sense.

E. Želve (Želve, 2011) mentions that the sense of own autonomy is important in the youth age. On the one hand, the young people broaden their horizons, trying out different social roles and slipping into them. On the other hand, they form their individuality. Young people perceive themselves as adults (and the society perceives them the same way), and appropriate behaviour and social responsibility are required from them as from an adult. It is important for young people not only to perform a social role, but also feel the compliance of this role with their individuality.

The differentiation of bigger emotional reactions and emotional state expressions characterizes the youth age (in comparison with teenagers' age), as well as the increase of self-control and self-regulation. For young people the emotional moods are a lot more persistent and deliberate than teenagers. Just because of this fact it is not recommended to push young people to do the things which oppose their interests or assurance, but try to find a compromise, so the young people could feel like an individuality and personality, which are respected by the surrounding people, especially their parents.

Characterization of life skills

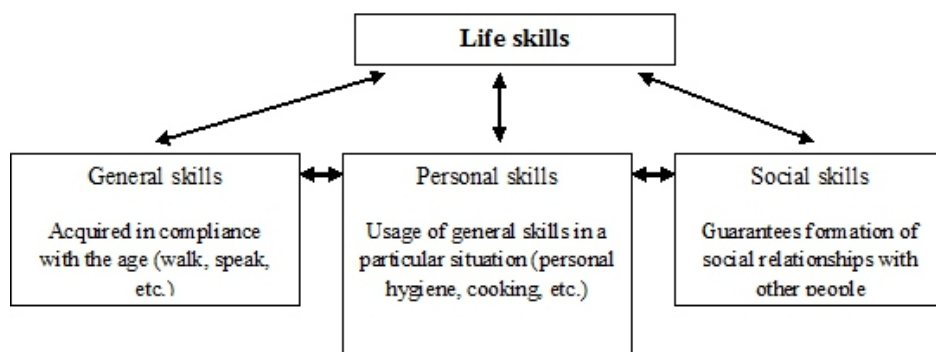
Already in 1993 the World Health Organisation described the necessary skills for life activity as a positive, to external conditions appropriate behavioural ability, which allows dealing with the daily life requirements and taking up its challenges. The World Health Organization indicates that life skills education is designed to facilitate the practice and reinforcement of psychological skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way: it contributes to the promotion of personal and social development, the prevention of health and social problems, and protection of Human Rights.

There are very few institutes in the world producing the trainers for life skills education for the training to the students at school level. Central Board of Secondary Education (India) presents an interesting approach to the acquisition of life skills. The life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. The core life skills are:

1. the social skills (self awareness, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, empathy);
2. the thinking skills (critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making, problem solving);
3. the emotional skills(coping with stress, coping with emotions).

Objectives of the programme are: to familiarize the students in the theoretical foundation in the life skills education; to train students in training methodologies; to enable students to apply life skills in various spheres; to develop professionals in life skills education; to empower youth with the ability to contribute as youth worker specialized in the area of life skills education.

Life skills help to respond appropriately in different life and domestic situations, to find them an effective solution and they consist of several skill groups: Let's look at another division of the life skills:



Picture 1. Components of life skills (2004)

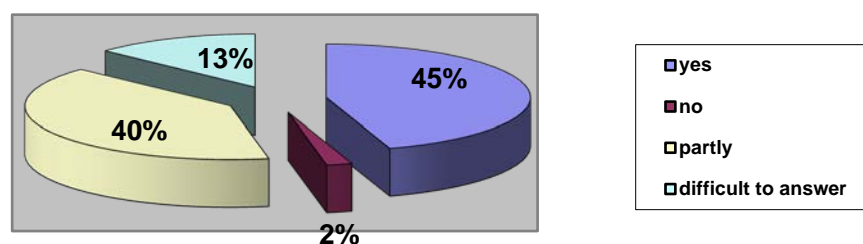
The general, personal and social skills are equally important in the young people's life, because they are related to each other and it is not possible to highlight one of them as the most or least important. If the general skills have not been acquired, it is impossible to acquire the personal skills, thus the social skills are not acquired either.

General skills have earned much attention; they are also called as the subject-independent or transversal skills. They can be used for a wide range of different subjects and sectors. According to B.Rey (Rey, 1996) the term transversal does not apply to the elements which are common to different subject-related competencies, but to extra subject content unrelated competencies, which can be used in other sectors. Transfer and adaptation of general skills make them as an especially valuable tool for a successful activity in fast changing conditions. Some of the main general skills are the communication skills, problem solving skills, reasoning abilities, leadership ability, creative ability, motivation, team work and ability to learn. Recently the ability to learn has caused a special interest in the life-long learning context.

Personal skills are obtained during the lifetime. Self-management, strong self-motivation and the desire to understand new ideas, acquire and use the knowledge take an important place, which guarantee the personal reaction and attitude towards the responsibilities and challenges at work and in life. In order to set real and clearly defined long-term and short-term goals, it is necessary to be able to focus one's attention and effort in a particular period of time.

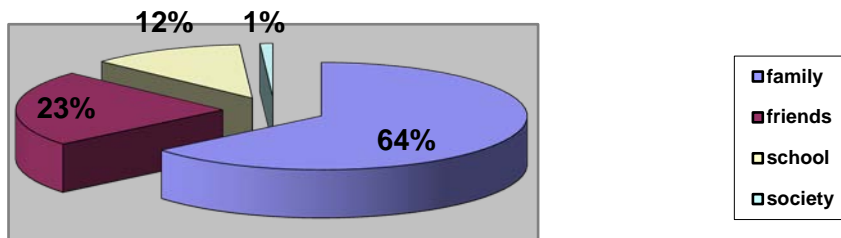
R. Andersone (Andersone, 2004) emphasizes that social skills are needed for human cooperation. They help operate successfully in a group and acquire training exercises. Social skills give a chance to everybody to use own experience in a group and learn from each other, self-awareness, own values and awareness of other people as unique values, interest and care of each other and about the total work outcome of the group, human and emotional mutual relationships with others, the skill to take upon responsibility for themselves and others.

Answers to the question: "How good are acquired life skills for living independently?" reveals opinion of young people. Clarifying young people thinking about their skills, it is possible to see that the thought of it is different:



Picture 2. Youth life skills acquisition for living independently

Life skills are a prerequisite for the youth's ability to function successfully in society and fulfill social roles. Successful life skills provide the ability for young people to be regardless and assume responsibility for their actions. Life skills help to reduce the negative behavior and its consequences. The young people confirm that they get the help in the process of life-skills formation:

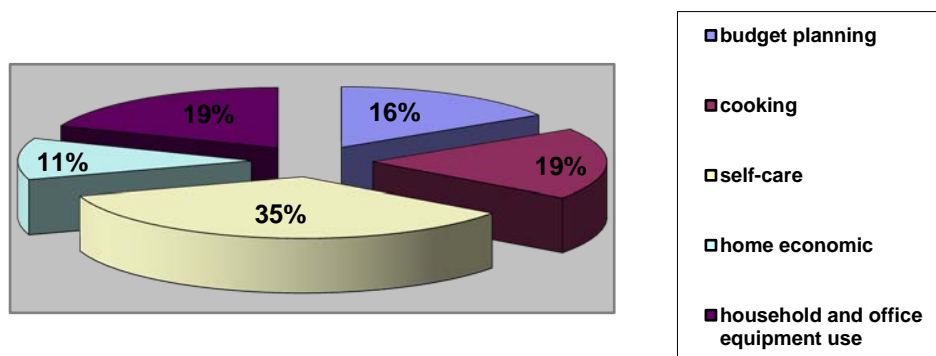


Picture 3. Assistants for young people to acquisition of life skills

In the responses the family occupies the highest ranking. It is important to increase school and society impact.

Family as the life skills builder

It is very important to assess what role a family takes in the young people’s life skills acquisition. The family in which all basic functions work systematically, supplement and enrich each other, in which each its member feels beloved, supported and understood, can be considered as an optimal , thus – functional (Vikmane, 2007). A positive and emotionally favourable environment characterizes such a family, where each member of family performs own social roles, is able to develop on their own, and also helps other members of family develop. According to Ā.Karpova (Karpova, 2006) the functional family is flexible with open free mutual relationships, with possible exchange of roles, clearly formulated family laws. A healthy family is a place where intimacy and love is disclosed. One of the main components in a well functioning family structure is the parents’ solidarity in relationships with their children. A family is based not on a parental dominance over children, but on the fact that parents’ authority ensures their children’s safety.



Picture 4. Better acquired life skills

Parents provide the implementation of the family’s basic functions and creation of a positive and favourable environment for their children’s and their own development. As life skills are successfully built in an action, then in a family it is achieved by the performance of social roles and family functions which is guaranteed by their close mutual relationships.

Just the educational function has got an important role in the family, because while upbringing the children, parents transfer their knowledge and life wisdom, but the children, while learning from their parents, acquire their life skills. Also the everyday household function has got an important role in the family, for while acquiring and performing household chores, children learn practically to perform different tasks both independently and together with their family members. Life skills acquired in the family are an invaluable benefit.

The positive family environment and atmosphere creates conditions in which the acquisition of the young people's life skills is promoted. The relationships in the family which are based on solidarity and mutual family members' respect promote the acquisition of different skills already in early childhood. Children acquire these skills while working together with their parents, individually, as well as while observing and imitating. Young people, while acquiring their life skills and building their independent life, choose as the base the values, norms and life wisdom, which have been taught and accepted by their parents. The acquisition of life skills is best implemented in a functional family because interaction between parents and children takes place during the implementation process of roles and family functions.

Unlike functional families, there are dysfunctional families which are characterized with different difficulties in the performance of family functions and roles, as well as social problems and risks. In the research "Assessment Criteria of Risk Factors in Dysfunctional Families" a family, in which there are difficult problems to be solved, limited opportunities to provide favourable life conditions for a wholesome development for all family members, is considered as a social risk family. Social risks and problems exist in these families. They might be connected with family formation, external conditions which influence the national and public situation (low-income families, families with bad living conditions, refugees' families, unemployed families, etc.); internal factors such as family members' asocial behaviour (dipsomania, drug abuse, violation of law, etc.).



Picture 5. The main risk factors in the social risk families

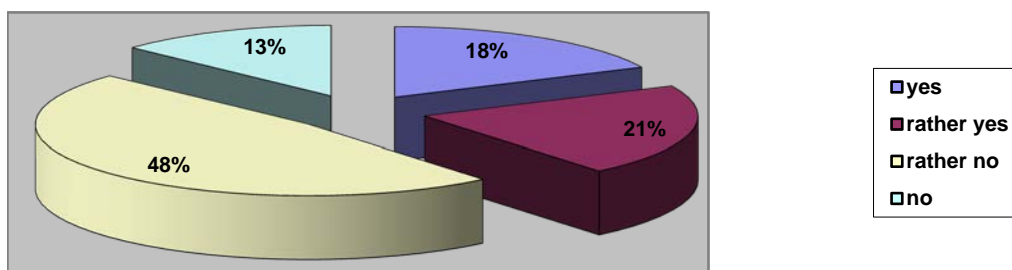
In such families there is usually one of the risk factors: depression, indifference, dipsomania, drug abuse, the risk of violence increases and criminogenic situations appear. Without seeing a solution to the hopelessness, the family usually chooses the destructive path. The unequal social status promotes the social exclusion risk of the families and children

in the society. A big part of the children in these families do not receive a sufficient care, wholesome nutrition, children live in an unfavourable social environment which has the risk of violence and crime.

The mentioned family parameters in relation to a dysfunctional family show that the acquisition of life skills in such a family is obviously disturbed. No cooperation between children and parents is formed, the basic functions of a family are not performed optimally, and also the environment and atmosphere in the family can be assessed as a negative one. The acquisition of social and personal life skills does not happen as successfully as in a functional family.

The acquisition of life skills in extra-familial care

Children orphans and children without parents' care and young people do not gain their social and life skills in a family, but in extra-familial care. Nevertheless the work in an orphanage is organized, so that the environment where children live would be closer to the family environment. However, when starting an independent life young children and young people frequently have not acquired different life skills and abilities that are needed in their further lives.



Picture 6. Children orphans and children without parents' care life skills acquisition for living independently

As shown by the survey, young orphanage does not acquire enough life skills to feel secure in the independent life. I. Plaude (Plaude, 2001) points out that the pedagogic activity of an orphanage is directed to the opportunity to attain that children and youth return in families, prepare them for upbringing in other families or family-alike life form; as well as to promote and support the formation of young people's independence.

In the governmental programme of the improvement of children and family condition for 2010 it is pointed out that for the development of family-alike environment in extra-familial care there are "Youth Houses" created. It is emphasised that knowledge and skills in the planning of personal budget, in management of house keeping, taking care of one-self and so on is an essential precondition for a successful start of an independent life. Although the Latvian currently operates eight youth home, it is not enough. According to data from the Ministry of Welfare, a total 1,793 children living in orphanages without parental care or in foster families, of whom 805 are children between the ages of 13 and 18 years.

In the families state policy guidelines for 2011-2017 it is pointed out that in accordance to the research "Extra-familial Care (extra-familial care institutions, foster families, custody) and the study of adoption system and suggestions for its improvement" data: 41% of children of extra-familial care feel fully prepared and have acquired the necessary skills to start of an independent life after leaving the institution. The data shows that so far the development of family-alike environment in children extra-familial care does not happen so successfully – it is not even a half of young people, who are in extra-familial care. Even though the creation of such a "Youth House" is a very positive and significant investment in the promotion of life skills acquisition, where young people can cook, do

housework, take care of the order and do other things that would be necessary for further life, it can be concluded that it is necessary to look for possibilities to improve the activity.

The research reveals reasons why children and young people at an orphanage do not acquire enough life skills. Firstly, children and young people in extra-familial care institutions do not have as great freedom of action as it is in families, where children mostly organize their own free time and plan their agenda. Secondly, children do not do many social life activities themselves, but it is done by the staff and teachers, which does not promote the acquisition such life skills, as well as cooking, doing housework and others. Thirdly, the relationships between the orphanage students can frequently be bad, which does not promote the acquisition of life skills, because there are different conflict situations that create a stressful atmosphere, frequent fights for their place in the group.

School options for the promotion of young people's life skills acquisition

To help the youth so that they become a wholesome member of society is an important task not only to the family, but school and young people themselves. L. Braše (Braše, 2010) makes topical the school tasks, when preparing students for their further life actions. The professional activity of teachers has to promote the perfection of indicators, which confirm the readiness to life activities: live independently, take responsibility for the trusted obligation, perceive a person realistically, acting, creating positive communication, to evaluate oneself, to adapt to a new environment, to set real life goals, to achieve the set goals.

In order to become a wholesome member of the society, it is needed to acquire life skills successfully. In the methodical material "The Acquisition of Life Skills at School"(Bluka, Rubana, 2002) it is pointed out that life skills are the precondition, so that everyone could adapt to the changes in society, to compete in the labour market, to create successful relationships with people, to be an active member of social life and happy in personal life. Z. Rudņicka (Rudņicka, 2001) emphasizes that one of human resources, that promotes the development of children and young people life skills is the social pedagogue, who provides social protection and welfare for children, youth and their families at educational and foster institutions, cooperating with governmental and non-governmental institutions, helping to overcome situations of crisis.

A. Jefimova and A. Tarasova (Jefimova, Tarasova, 2008) promote the consultation as one of the most effective methods of social pedagogue's activities, during which they give some advice, information, affecting individual, group/family awareness, feelings, emotions, environment, give them knowledge, support, create skills, in that way helping to solve problems and promoting the course of socializing process. A consultation is very effective in the work with young people to promote the social skill acquisition, because it is used both in the preventive work, in the work with an individual, as well as in the work with a group or family.

Conclusion

Life skills are a precondition for the youth ability to function successfully in society and to fulfil social roles, because a successful acquisition of life skills provides the ability for youth to be independent, to be responsible for their action, to diminish the negative behaviour and its consequences. In a functional family the family functions and social roles are fulfilled systematically and successfully, in that way providing optimal conditions for creation of youth life skills, in opposition to a dysfunctional family, which is characterized not only by different social problems and risks, but also the acquisition of life skills of children and young people do not happen so successfully.

A family, which can provide children's development and the acquisition of different life skills, can be regarded as the best environment for a child and young people, when

starting their own independent life follow the example of their parents and more or less reproduce the family model of parents. The fact that one of the main tasks of orphanages is to return the child to a family shows that the most favourable environment for child's development is a functional family. Young people from extra-familial care institutions can practically acquire different life skills in the founded Youth Houses.

Social pedagogues have an important place in the promotion of young people's life skills acquisition. Applying different methods, they have the opportunity to interest young people to improve their life skills. Although young people feel that they have acquired life skills successfully, there is a large part of young people who want to develop them more, which is a very positive aspect in the teachers and parents' activity in the promotion of young people's life skills acquisition.

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