

Life Skills Integration in English Textbook Grade 5: A Qualitative Content Analysis

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Keywords: Life Skills, English Textbook, Qualitative Content Analysis, Critical Thinking

DOI No:

<https://doi.org/10.56976/rjsi.v6i3.255>

This qualitative study focuses on integrating core life skills in Grade 5 English textbook that was purposively sampled. Applying qualitative content analysis supported by NVivo 14, the study explores how these essential skills are integrated into the textbook. The results show that communication, creativity, and critical thinking are given considerable attention. Such activities include creative writing assignments, reading and comprehension exercises, and dialogues. However, the study reveals some areas not covered extensively in teaching, such as negotiation, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. All 12 skills are introduced, but their integration level is inconsistent. The textbook offers a basis for life skills learning, but there is an opportunity for improvement as it concerns real-life situations. This study adds to the knowledge about integrating life skills in the primary education curriculum and the possible enhancements to the textbook in line with the UNICEF MENA framework.



1. Introduction

When the world progresses in technology, globalization, and problem-solving approaches, there is a need to instill youth with core life skills. In the age of technology and globalization, there are new challenges and opportunities for the twenty-first century individuals (Reimers, 2020). However, traditional academic learning alone does not sustain the complex challenges of learning and twenty-first-century society. Keeping this in mind, educational systems are universally reforming to incorporate life skills into the curriculum.

UNICEF MENA office has been involved in promoting this new educational paradigm shift. According to UNICEF MENA, in the year 2017, a total of twelve life skills were found to be significant for the young generation and to help them lead effective lives in today's world. These skills include creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, cooperation, negotiation, decision-making, self-management, resilience, communication, respect for diversity, empathy, and participation (UNICEF, 2017). This elaborated framework can be used to effectively incorporate life skills into practice and content across the educational context.

In other words, the significance of these life skills does not end with achieving academic goals. They are needed for individual growth, interpersonal communication, and career development. Innovation and flexibility, promoted through creative and critical thinking, are essential in changeable environments. Cognitive skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making allow a person to handle problem situations. Critical thinking or higher-order thinking skills have been focused on in the national and international literature (Ariani, 2020; Jamil et al., 2024; Jamil et al., 2020; Jamil, 2021; Maknun, 2020; Naseer et al., 2021). Interpersonal skills include working together, negotiating, and exchanging information to develop relationships and cooperation in several settings. Individual responsibility and persistence are connected to individual satisfaction and the capability to overcome difficulties.

Pakistan, like many developing countries, is reforming its education system to meet the demands of the 21st century. The country's National Education Policy 2009 emphasized the importance of life skills education, recognizing its role in promoting social cohesion, economic development, and personal growth (Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, 2009). In education policy and curriculum documents, critical thinking skills have been focused on in several different studies (Jamil et al., 2024a; Jamil, Bokhari, & Iqbal, 2024b; Jamil, Bokhari, & Rafiq, 2024c; Jamil et al., 2024d; Jamil, et al., 2024f; Jamil, Mehmood, et al., 2024g; Mehmood & Saleem, 2024). Yet, interpreting policy intentions into practical curricular content needs careful examination and ongoing improvement.

Education in the English language fills a special place in Pakistan's curriculum. Education in the English language is seen as a gateway to individual and national progress because English is a world language of trade, science, and diplomacy. Therefore, English textbooks help enhance language skills and can function as a medium for life skills education. According to the curriculum, the Grade 5 level is the middle phase of learning in primary

education. Students become more intellectual and aware of other people's feelings at this stage. This is the right time to teach and remind students of life skills as prerequisites for future learning and growth. It would be interesting to examine how well the education system prepares students for the future by discussing the integration of life skills in English textbooks for Grade 5. Critical thinking has been focused on the English curriculum and textbooks (Jamil et al., 2024; Liang & Fung, 2021; Zhang & Kim, 2018).

The rationale for this study is in its capacity to advance knowledge of curriculum and education policy. By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the current approach to integrating life skills in the textbook, the research can inform future changes to the texts and supplementary materials. Moreover, the study's findings may enhance existing literature to integrate life skills education at the primary level, not only in countries like Pakistan but also in other countries with the same issues in education.

1.1 Objective of the study

- To analyze the incorporation of 12 core life skills in the English textbook Grade V according to the UNICEF MENA (2017) framework.

2. Review of the Literature

Life skills in education have been a topic of interest for the last few decades. These life skills enable students to face the challenges of the twenty-first century (Maqsood et al., 2022; Prajapati et al., 2017). Previous literature shows the positive effect of life skills on the various spheres of students' growth. For example, Durlak et al. (2011) performed a meta-analysis of school-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, which incorporate several life skills mentioned by UNICEF MENA. According to their study, the students presented improved social and emotional understanding and skills, positive attitudes, conduct, and achievement.

Mercer (2019) also points out that, in language education, it is possible to foster life skills and language knowledge in language classrooms. They assume that the communicative approach to language acquisition allows for constantly implementing skills such as cooperation, critical thinking, and cultural sensitivity. UNICEF currently provides a framework of 12 core life skills adopted by the MENA region in 2017. For instance, creativity and critical thinking have been major areas of focus in education research. Recent literature has focused on these (Ariani, 2020; Jamil, Bokhari, & Ahmad, 2024). As highlighted by Trevallion and Nischang (2021), creativity should be encouraged in education since it is critical in promoting innovation in different spheres of life. Likewise, Facione and Facione (2007) focused on the importance of critical thinking in education, with operational definition as intentional, active reasoning that leads to interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference. Skills such as problem-solving and decision-making have also received a lot of attention.

Different studies in the previous literature have been conducted. A recent study by Kholis and Azmi (2023) was about need analysis regarding developing an interactive



multimodal English e-book oriented to twenty-first-century skills. According to the study, the students' English skills were poor, with little vocabulary and motivation towards learning English. The focus was on the promotion of twenty-first-century skills. In a study by Ghosheh Wahbeh et al. (2021), the role of project-based language learning has been explored to develop life skills among students. In another study, the impact of English club activities was found on students' communication skills of EFL. Similarly, Puspitasari (2020) conducted a study regarding project-based learning implementation to cultivate preservice English teachers' twenty-first-century skills.

In the Pakistani context, different studies have been conducted regarding the topic. Jamil et al. (2024) conducted a study regarding the development of critical thinking skills in English classrooms at the secondary level with teachers' perspectives through a questionnaire. In a study by Svanemyr et al. (2015), a case study was conducted on scaling up life skills-based education in Pakistan. Similarly, life skills have been explored through the same framework in different recent studies for the textbooks of Pakistan Studies & Biology, Grade IX, and Physics textbook for grade X (Jamil, Ain et al., 2024; Jamil, Arif, et al., 2024; Jamil, Jabeen, et al., 2024)

Previous research has been mainly conducted with students in secondary education or has covered life skills education in a more general way without concentrating on textbooks. Moreover, limited literature employs the 12-core life skill framework developed by UNICEF & MENA for textbook analysis. This framework offers a solid foundation for investigating life skills integration but has not been used extensively to analyse curricular content. At the same time, integrating life skills education and English language teaching and learning in primary schooling is another gap that warrants research. Since English is an important language globally and has the possibility of being extended to other skills, this is an important field of research.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach to explore the integration of life skills in Grade 5 English textbook based on Single National Curriculum (SNC) published by Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board Lahore (downloaded from <https://pctb.punjab.gov.pk/E-Books>). The research design is guided by the methodological framework outlined by Krippendorff (2018), which emphasizes the systematic and replicable examination of texts to draw valid inferences about their context and content. Purposive sampling was used to select the textbook. It is a non-probability sampling technique suitable for qualitative research with specific criteria for the selection (Patton, 2002). Qualitative content analysis was used, a systematic and thorough examination described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). The analysis process was facilitated by NVivo 14 software, which permits useful organization, coding, and retrieval of qualitative data (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). The textbook's content was systematically coded for explicit and implicit references to the 12 life skills.

4. Findings of the study

The findings of the study are described as follows based on the different aspects of the framework incorporated in the textbook:

4.1 Creativity

The English grade 5 textbook encourages creativity mainly through writing activities. For example,

In unit 2, students are asked to write a poem on "My Country" using given rhyming words. This activity allows students to express their patriotic feelings creatively while practising rhyme schemes. It has been narrated in the following way:

"Write a poem on the topic 'My Country' with the help of the given rhyming words." (p. 93)

Students are instructed to write a story with the moral "A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed" in unit 7. This task requires students to create characters, plot, and dialogue while conveying a specific message.

"Write a story with the moral 'A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed.'" (p. 74)

In unit 14, students are asked to write a poem about "My Pet Cat" using given rhyming words. This exercise combines creativity with vocabulary practice. It has been described as follows:

"Write a poem on the topic 'My Pet Cat' with the help of the given rhyming words in your notebook." (p. 141)

4.2 Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is promoted through comprehension questions and analysis tasks in the textbook. For example, in unit 8, post-reading questions ask students to apply critical thinking to respond to the text, encouraging them to relate the content to their experiences. It has been described in the following words:

"Use critical thinking to respond to the text (post reading), applying world knowledge and your own opinion to the text read and relate your feelings and experiences to what is read." (p. 75)

In unit 4, students are asked to think critically about the writer's feelings when he sees the burnt grass and wilted trees, promoting empathy and analytical skills. (p. 38). In unit 5, students must read a paragraph and write its main idea, encouraging them to synthesize information. Analytical reading tasks ask students to identify story elements, promoting a deeper understanding of narrative structure in unit 7, p. 71.

4.3 Problem-Solving

In the textbook, problem-solving is not incorporated as prominently in some activities. For example, in unit 7, p. 67-68, the story presents a problem where a frog tricks a mouse, and students are asked to think of alternative endings, encouraging problem-solving thinking. It has been narrated in the following words:

"Read the story again and write its summary in your own words." (p. 71)

Similarly, Unit 4, narrates that students are asked to think about how to keep the environment clean, prompting them to consider solutions to real-world problems. It has been described in the following words:

"What steps would you take to reduce deforestation?" (p. 36)

4.4 Cooperation

The textbook describes how group activities and discussions promote cooperation. For example, unit 3, p. 28, narrates that students are asked to conduct a role-play activity in groups, fostering teamwork and collaborative skills. It has been described in the following way:

"Arrange a role-play activity in the class and use the above routine greetings and social courtesies in your dialogues."

In review 2, p. 64, students are instructed to arrange a classroom discussion on healthy habits, encouraging cooperative learning and shared decision-making. It has been described as follows:

"Arrange a discussion in class about healthy habits."

In the same way, unit 12, p. 119, narrates as students practice taking turns in conversations, an essential cooperation skill.

4.5 Negotiation

In the textbook, the negotiation aspect is not extensively covered. It has been described as a dialogue demonstrating how to politely request something, a foundational skill for negotiation. For example, *"Hafsa: Teacher, could I go home early today?"* (Unit 13, p. 128) Similarly, unit 14, p. 137: The poem "Two Little Kittens" indirectly teaches about conflict resolution, which relates to negotiation skills.

4.6 Decision-Making

In the textbook, decision-making is incorporated into some activities and stories. For example, in unit 7, p. 68, students are asked what they would do if they were in the mouse's place, encouraging them to consider the consequences of decisions. It has been narrated in the following way:

"If you were in place of Ali, what would you do?"

In the same way, the story about Suleman (Unit 10) deciding to buy a goat for Eid presents a decision-making scenario in the following words:

"Suleman: Assalaam-o-Alaikum, father. When are we going to buy a goat for Eid?" (Unit 10, p. 95)

4.7 Self-management

In the textbook, regarding the self-management aspect, time management and personal responsibility are addressed in different ways like in unit 10, p. 104: it has been described in the following way:

"Write a recipe of your favorite dish on the internet and write it in your notebook."

Similarly, the text discusses setting goals for saving money, which relates to self-management in unit 5 in the following words.

"Make smart spending decisions and do not waste money buying things extravagantly." (p. 111)

4.8 Resilience

Resilience is indirectly addressed through stories of overcoming challenges in the textbook, like in unit 4, p. 36-37: The story shows resilience in restoring a neglected garden, demonstrating perseverance in the following way:

"I decided to bring the same scenery back with the help of my father, sister and brothers."

Similarly, the text in unit 3, p. 25-27, is about successful women role models who implicitly teach resilience through their stories of overcoming obstacles in the following words:

"Due to her untiring efforts, she got the title of 'Maadar-e-Millat,' or 'Mother of the Nation'." (p. 27)

4.9 Communication

Communication skills are developed through various speaking and writing activities in the textbook. For example, in unit 1, p. 4, students practice expressing and responding to opinions, which is crucial for effective communication. It has been narrated in the following way:

"Arrange a role-play activity in the class and use the above routine greetings and social courtesies in your dialogues."

In unit 6, dialogue practice for introducing oneself and engaging in conversation builds verbal communication skills are discussed in the following way:

"Demonstrate conventions and dynamics of oral interactions in a group to introduce themselves and others and engage in conversation." (p. 54)

4.10 Respect for Diversity

Respect for diversity is promoted through cultural awareness in the textbook in the following way:

"Students, let's go to the garden and plant trees." (p. 38)

In the same way, unit 3, the text about successful women from different fields, promotes respect for diverse career paths and achievements. It has been narrated in the following words:

"History depicts that whenever females get suitable circumstances, they perform well and achieve their goals." (p. 26)

4.11 Empathy

Empathy is encouraged through character analysis and perspective-taking in the textbook in unit 7. Students are asked to consider the feelings of characters in the story, promoting empathetic thinking in the following words:

"Can you think of a different moral for the fable?" (p. 68)

Similarly, in unit 14, the poem is about quarrelling kittens and encourages students to think about the consequences of conflicts on others.

"They found it much better, That stormy night, To lie by the fire, Than to quarrel and fight."
(p. 137)

4.12 Participation

Active participation is encouraged throughout the textbook in the following way:

In review 2, students are asked to arrange and participate in a classroom discussion, promoting active engagement in the following way:

"Arrange a discussion in class about healthy habits." (p. 64)

Similarly, in unit 12, students practice taking turns in conversations, encouraging participatory communication (p. 121). In Unit 2, activities encourage students to express their opinions, fostering participatory learning in the following words:

"Arrange a classroom discussion and ask students to express their opinions about any of their favourite poems." (p. 16)

4.13 Discussion

From the analysis of the Grade 5 English textbook, it can be concluded that life skills are presented to some extent, which agrees with the 12 core life skills mentioned in the UNICEF MENA (2017) framework of core life skills. According to the findings, among the identified in the textbook, communication, creative, and critical thinking skills were found to be the most integrated. Such an emphasis correlates with trends in education systems worldwide, where these skills are recognized as essential for learning in the 21st century (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). The substantial emphasis on communication skills is especially relevant in conjunction with an English language textbook and addresses the two goals of language learning and preparation for life. This integration further supports the (Mercer, 2019) contention that language classrooms can help develop other competencies. The emphasis on creativity through different writing tasks is in harmony with Cropley and Cropley (2009) call for developing creative thinking in education. However, the analysis of the creative writing approach indicates that the scope of creativity development is constricted, which implies the need to engage in more diverse types of creativity across different domains. Analysis and critical thinking skills were present but were mostly focused on the elements of the passage and the comprehension questions. This approach resonates with Facione and Facione (2007) understanding of critical thinking as a process that involves interpretation, analysis, and evaluation. However, as suggested by Abrami et al. (2015), there was a need for scaffolding critical thinking strategies to enhance the effectiveness of critical thinking teaching and learning. The relatively low level of cooperation and participation skills demonstrated through group activities and discussions is encouraging. These elements relate to life skills education's social learning aspects, as Durlak et al. espoused (2011). It is commendable that the textbook under analysis incorporates strategies that encourage respect for diversity and empathy through the content and character analysis. It is in tandem with current trends in language education that have emphasized the acquisition of intercultural competence (Byram et al., 2002).

Nevertheless, these aspects could be improved with more direct instruction and practice in perspective-taking and cultural sensitivity. The level of integration of the life competencies in the textbook shows that it is not easy to turn the broad competencies into lesson content. It is not exclusive to the Pakistani context; variation in life skills coverage has also been identified in textbook analysis in other countries (Khoo & Knight, 2015). However, the results indicate that integrating life skills into textbooks may require more purposeful and structured activities.

5. Conclusions

The current study analyzed the grade 5 English textbook published by the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board using qualitative content analysis. The textbook was analyzed to explore the integration of 12 core skills by UNICEF MENA. It was found that communication, creativity, and critical thinking skills are well covered, but negotiation, problem-solving, and decision-making skills are poorly covered. The analysis confirms the promise of English language textbooks for life skills education and, at the same time, highlights the difficulties in operationalizing such competencies into teachable concepts. Thus, the findings of this research will complement the existing literature on life skills education in developing countries and provide beneficial information for curriculum developers, policymakers, and educators. As for the further improvement of curricular materials, it is seen that there is a lack of purposeful and consistent incorporation of all the 12 core life skills elucidated by UNICEF MENA. Future textbook development should aim to illustrate skills more reasonably, concentrating on the abilities that are seldom shown. Moreover, proving this reflection, this study emphasizes the need to assist the organization of textbook content and teacher training to enhance the teaching and practice of life skills education. Given that global education systems progressively recognize the importance of life skills in the context of the twenty-first century, the findings of this study may serve as an opening point to the development of the content and practice of infusion across the primary education curriculum and English as a second language (ESL) in developing nations.

5.1 Recommendations

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

- Textbook developers should aim to improve the inclusion of life skills like negotiation, problem-solving, and decision-making through specific activities in the textbook.
- Future revisions of the textbooks analyzed in the study should incorporate more direct development and opportunities for life skills enhancement.
- Integrate more authentic practices and situations that reflect cultural realities through which students can apply life skills.
- Teachers' handbooks and supplementary material should be created to teach and monitor life skills learning.

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