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Empowering Futures through Life Skills Education: Navigating Challenges and Opportunities for Teachers in High Schools of the Shiselweni Region, Eswatini

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Abstract:

This qualitative study explores the role of teachers in enhancing Life Skills Education (LSE) in high schools of the Shiselweni Region, Eswatini. Using purposive sampling, 30 teachers were selected to provide in-depth insights into their experiences, perceptions, and LSE-related strategies. Guided by the Targeting Life Skills Model by Hendricks (1998), this research examines how educators navigate the challenges and opportunities inherent in teaching life skills. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were employed to gather rich, qualitative data. The thematic analysis revealed four key opportunities and three significant challenges faced by teachers in this context. The study identified professional development programs, community engagement, curriculum integration, and government support as major opportunities for enhancing LSE. Conversely, resource limitations, training gaps, and cultural barriers emerged as significant challenges. Teachers emphasized the need for targeted training programs and better resource allocation to effectively teach life skills. The study concludes with recommendations to develop comprehensive training programs and increase resource allocation to schools. By addressing these challenges and leveraging the identified opportunities, life skills education can be significantly enhanced, ultimately empowering students in the Shiselweni Region to navigate their futures more effectively.

Keywords: Life skills education, teachers' perspectives, Shiselweni Region, challenges and opportunities

1. Introduction

This paper explores the critical role of Life Skills Education (LSE) in empowering young people to navigate the complexities of modern life. It delves into the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers in high schools in the Shiselweni Region of Eswatini as they implement LSE programs. The paper will discuss the theoretical underpinnings of LSE, particularly the Targeting Life Skills Model by Hendricks (1998), and examine the current state of LSE integration in school curricula. Additionally, it will highlight the importance of a holistic educational approach that includes decision-making, problem-solving, and emotional coping skills. Through qualitative research involving 30 purposively sampled participants, this study will identify both the obstacles and potential advancements in the effective delivery of LSE, providing actionable recommendations for educators and policymakers.

2. Background

Young people are the custodians of our future, representing a significant demographic force (UNICEF, 2012). However, the fast-paced changes in today's world present numerous challenges for the youth. Society must find ways to protect and empower young people to become happy and healthy adults. Life Skills Education (LSE) is one approach that promises to contribute to the well-being of youth, equipping them to face life's many challenges (UNESCO, 2011).

Preparation for adulthood through life skills is crucial yet often overlooked in education. In the United States, for instance, young adults frequently graduate from high school with limited knowledge of navigating real-world expectations (Cassidy, 2018). In a highly competitive and rapidly evolving world, it is increasingly critical for learners to enter adulthood equipped with skills for lasting success. The primary goal of education, despite its evolving nature, remains to prepare learners to be independent and responsible members of society (Meier & Naude, 2017). While standards and curricula may change over time, the necessity for life skills to aid learners in navigating adulthood remains constant.

The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) (2009) defines life skills as psychosocial competencies that enable individuals to develop adaptive and positive behaviors to deal effectively with the challenges and demands of everyday life. Life Skills Education aims to provide a deeper understanding of these skills, particularly for adolescents (Chaudhary, Mehta & Kapadia, 2012). This education guides and prepares learners for life and its possibilities, equipping them for meaningful and successful living in a rapidly transforming society (Meier & Naude, 2017). Through LSE, learners are exposed to a range of knowledge, skills, and values that enhance their physical, social, personal, emotional, and

cognitive development. Moreover, the program provides strategies for individuals to make healthy choices that contribute to a meaningful life (Parvarthy & Renjith, 2015). The major life skills include decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, empathy, and coping with emotions and stress (WHO, 2011).

The World Education Forum 2015 adopted the Incheon Declaration, reaffirming the commitment to achieving Education for All (EFA) by 2030. During this conference, the international community emphasized the relevance of education, particularly the need to focus on appropriate life skills for all learners worldwide (UNESCO, 2015). The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) linked life skills to education, stating that education should aim to develop the child's fullest potential (UNICEF, 2011). Focusing on life skills is a critical response to the challenges facing young people today, as discussed in several international recommendations like the CRC, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and EFA.

In many Latin American and Caribbean countries, schools struggle to expand appropriate learning and life skills programs (UNESCO, 2012). Similarly, there is growing awareness in the Eastern and Southern Africa Region (ESAR) that the life skills of children and adolescents have been largely neglected in education programs both in and out of school (UNICEF, 2012). Countries are increasingly signaling the importance of equipping young people with the knowledge and skills to make responsible life choices. For example, Uganda produced the "Life Skills Education Resource Booklet" to help young Ugandans make strong, informed choices for a bright and safe future (UNESCO, 2015). In Malawi, the purpose of Life Skills Education is to empower children and teachers with skills for HIV prevention and to address sexuality issues (Kalanda, 2010).

In Eswatini, policymakers and youth-serving professionals are similarly grappling with how best to address the wide-ranging needs of young people (WHO, 2012). The underlying assumption is that empowering young people to make informed decisions and develop critical thinking skills will result in better lives. In 2011, the Ministry of Education and Training launched the Guidance and Counseling panel to develop an age-specific syllabus that covers Guidance and Counseling, Health Promotion including HIV/AIDS, and Life Skills Education in all secondary/high schools (Mtshali, 2011).

Life Skills Education was officially incorporated into the education policy in 2011 (Education & Training Sector Policy, 2011). The program has been running in selected schools and is not yet examinable. There is a notable lack of literature on Life Skills Education research in Eswatini, particularly in the Shiselweni Region. Conducting this study creates an opportunity to highlight the issues and direct focus on areas where the government and other relevant stakeholders can improve the implementation of Life Skills Education in Eswatini's schools.

3. Statement of the Problem

There is growing concern over the rising cases of violence, adolescent pregnancy, drug and substance abuse, poor academic performance, high school dropout rate, and HIV/AIDS prevalence in secondary/high school students (UNESCO, 2012). The learners' behaviours indicate inadequate knowledge of life skills education, which could indicate the ineffective implementation of life skills education in high schools in Eswatini. According to Ngcamphalala (2015) in the Eswatini State of the Youth Report, adolescents and youth in Eswatini do not have adequate information and access to services that will enable them to make informed decisions about their lives. The report further reveals a variety of challenges that today's Swati youth face, which will require a comprehensive, coordinated, and multi-sectorial response from the Government, development partners, and other relevant stakeholders (Ngcamphalala, 2009). These include violence, adolescent pregnancy, high school dropout rate, HIV/AIDS prevalence, and drug and substance abuse. The vulnerabilities that inadequate knowledge creates for young people are especially critical to address. Hence, the study was conducted to answer the following question: What is the role of teachers in enhancing life skills education in high schools in the Shiselweni region of Eswatini?

4. Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by the Targeting Life Skills Model by Hendricks (1998), also known as the 4-H Model or Framework. Initially developed to aid Extension professionals in creating youth programs, this model is applicable to various educational contexts. The model emphasizes developing competencies essential for youths' immediate and future success, focusing on HEAD (knowledge, reasoning, creativity), HEART (personal and social competencies), HAND (vocational and citizenship competencies), and HEALTH (physical competencies). This holistic approach aligns with the goals of LSE in high schools, aiming to develop learners' cognitive, psychomotor, and social skills comprehensively.

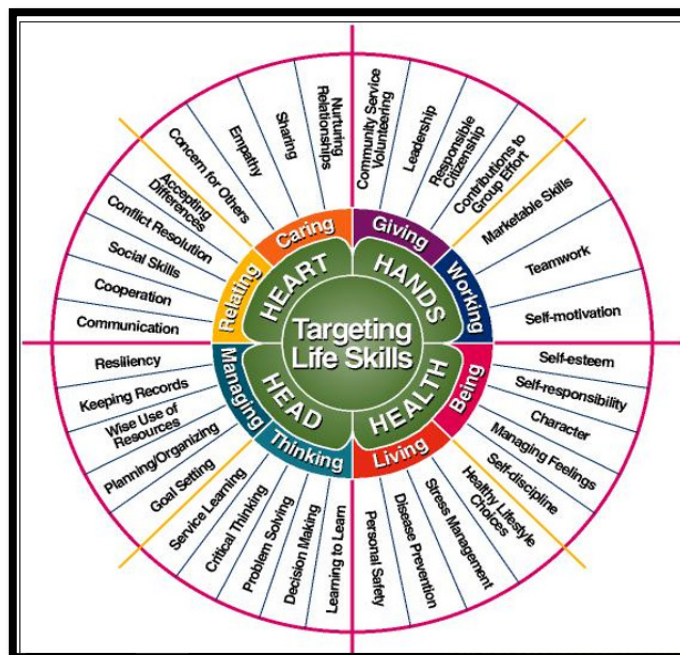


Figure 1: The 4-H Targeting Life Skills Model
Source: Hendricks (1998)

5. Methodology

5.1. Research Paradigm

The study adopted an interpretative paradigm. According to Willis (2007), an interpretative methodology provides a context that allows the researcher to explore participants' experiences deeply. The interpretative paradigm is essential for understanding the experiences, understandings, and perceptions of individuals, thereby uncovering reality beyond quantitative measures. This paradigm accepts multiple viewpoints, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the situation (Morehouse, 2011). The interpretative approach was particularly suitable for this study as it aimed to gain in-depth insights into the role of teachers in enhancing Life Skills Education (LSE) in high schools.

5.2. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a multiple-case study design. Creswell and Poth (2017) describe qualitative research as a method for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because it enabled the researcher to collect rich, detailed data, preserving the participants' perspectives (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). The multiple case study design, as defined by Yin (2018), allows for an in-depth exploration of contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, making it ideal for understanding the role of teachers in LSE in Shiselweni high schools.

5.3. Target Population

The target population for this study consisted of 200 Life Skills Education teachers in high schools within the Shiselweni region. These teachers were involved in facilitating the LSE curriculum and were in close contact with learners, making them knowledgeable about life skills education issues. Their experiences and insights were crucial for this study.

5.4. Sample Size

A sample of 30 Life Skills Education teachers was selected from the target population using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows for the selection of participants based on specific characteristics that align with the study's objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this case, the teachers were chosen based on their involvement and experience in teaching LSE. This sample size was deemed sufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' experiences, perceptions, and strategies related to LSE.

6. Data Collection Instruments

The main data collection instruments for this study were in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The in-depth interviews were conducted with the selected teachers to gather detailed insights into their experiences and perceptions regarding LSE. Semi-structured interview guides were used to allow flexibility and enable the exploration of various aspects of LSE (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The interviews were conducted in private settings to ensure confidentiality and lasted approximately 40 minutes each. The focus group discussions were conducted with smaller groups of teachers to facilitate interactive discussions and obtain multiple perspectives on LSE. Each focus group consisted of 6-8 teachers and was guided by a discussion facilitator. The discussions provided rich data through group interactions

and helped uncover deeper insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers in implementing LSE (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

7. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection followed a structured procedure. After obtaining the necessary permissions from relevant authorities, the researcher visited the targeted schools to explain the study's purpose and gain consent from participants. Appointments were scheduled for the interviews and focus group discussions, which were conducted at times convenient for the participants. A total of 30 teachers participated in the in-depth interviews. The interviews were guided by semi-structured interview guides, and data were recorded using voice recorders and notes. Each session lasted about 40 minutes, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the research questions. Three focus group discussions were held, each comprising 6-8 teachers. The discussions were facilitated by a moderator who guided the conversation using a discussion guide. The sessions were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

8. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The analysis involved the following steps: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report.

9. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount in this study to ensure the rights and dignity of participants were respected. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Institutional Ethical Review Board at the University of Eswatini and the Ministry of Education and Training. Participants were fully informed about the study's aims, procedures, risks, and benefits. Written consent was obtained before participation.

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions (Stevens, 2013). The researcher ensured participants were protected from physical, emotional, and psychological harm by conducting interviews in a respectful and non-intrusive manner (Shamoo & Resnik, 2015). Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using pseudonyms and ensuring no identifying information was disclosed. Data were securely stored, and access was restricted to the researcher and the supervisor (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

10. Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research involves ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 2012). Credibility was ensured through triangulation of data collection methods, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (Hunter & Brewer, 2015). Transferability was ensured through a thick description, which was used to provide a detailed account of the research context, enabling others to determine the applicability of the findings to other contexts (Merriam, 2009). Confirmability was ensured through an audit trail, which was maintained to document the research process and decisions made, ensuring the findings were based on participants' responses and not researcher bias (Patton, 2015). Dependability was ensured through an inquiry audit, where an external reviewer examined the research process and data analysis to confirm the consistency and reliability of the findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

11. Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in one high school in the Shiselweni region to test the data collection instruments and procedures. The pilot involved six teachers and three learners, revealing any deficiencies in the instruments, which were then addressed before the main study (DeVos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2018).

12. Findings of the Study

Participants in the study advocated for collaboration between parents and teachers for Life Skills Education to yield the intended results. During one focus group discussion, participants concurred that parents should be involved in the implementation of Life Skills Education so that they may closely examine and rectify their children's behaviour where possible. Moreover, participants from the three Cases felt that it should not be left to the school alone to develop life skills in children. Parents are supposed to lay the foundation so that when the child gets to school, he/she has at least the basics of life skills. It does not have to start with the teacher at school.

The following quotes were drawn from participants in support of the above point:

Parents have to work hand-in-hand with teachers as far as imparting life skills is concerned. Teaching Life skills should start with the parent at home. The teacher should find that the base or foundation has already been laid and just add on what the parent has taught the child (Participant # 5, a 26-year-old male teacher from Case A).

Teaching Life skills should begin with the parents at home. Parents should not run away from their responsibility of teaching their children about life (Participant # 2, a 49-year-old female teacher from Case A).

The community, church, and parents should collaborate with teachers for the betterment of the child, as most of the learners nowadays are orphans. Others are raised by grandparents instead of their biological parents, and all these types of children should be catered for (Participant # 2, a 49-year-old female teacher from Case A).

Contrary to the findings above, the study revealed that although teachers showed an understanding of the importance of Life Skills Education to learners, they viewed teaching the subject as an extra load for them. As much as participants acknowledged the importance of life skills education to learners, they felt that teaching the subject was an extra load for teachers. Findings revealed that teaching Life Skills Education was viewed as an additional burden on the already over-stretched teaching load. Participants had a feeling that the government should train people who will specialize in teaching Life Skills Education in schools rather than it being taught by the already loaded teachers. Moreover, participants were confident that hiring specialists such as psychologists to teach life skills education would not only ease the load on teachers but also make learners feel free to open up and confide in their problems.

The following are the voices of participants from focus group discussions:

There is too much work. As teachers, we now have to do lesson planning/preparation for our subjects, that is, the examinable ones, and then prepare for Life Skills Education; it becomes too much for the teacher. The government should hire people who will specialize in teaching Life Skills Education (Participant # 3, a 36-year-old male teacher from Case B).

12.1. Life Skills Education Positively Impacts Learners

Participants maintained that Life Skills Education is a worthwhile programme for the youth as it helps them understand themselves and empowers them with many capabilities to face challenging situations. From participants' responses, it transpired that Life Skills Education makes learners focus on their school work and also equips them with entrepreneurial skills.

On the contrary, however, most of the participants in Case B concurred that Life Skills Education is not very effective in shaping learners' behaviour and attitudes. Participants in this Case argued that learners' attitude towards their academic work was improving at a very low pace. According to them, learners were demonstrating very little change in regard to dedication to school work.

The following quotes are examples of what participants said in a focus group discussion:

The effectiveness of Life Skills Education in schools cannot be achieved overnight. It takes time to manifest, but somehow, the change is manifested in the learners' change of behaviour and attitude towards school work, their openness to disclosing personal problems to the teachers, particularly the Life Skills Education teachers, and their seeking help (Participant # 4, a 51-year-old female teacher from Case B).

12.1.1. Life Skills Education Equips Learners with Entrepreneurial Skills

The findings of the study pointed out that Life Skills Education is worth teaching and learning because it not only empowers learners with cognitive skills but also promotes the development of entrepreneurial skills. Life Skills Education, therefore, empowers learners holistically as it equips them with social and entrepreneurial skills and is, therefore, practical. In support, the learner participants admitted that, indeed, life skills education has equipped them not only with social skills but also entrepreneurial skills. Learner participants further pointed out that they have learnt to apply what they learned in real-life situations in the classroom.

In support, the following statements were uttered by participants in some of the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews:

The programme has helped us discover our potential and capabilities. We are now able to start our own businesses. For example, I started a pie business using the skills I acquired in the Life Skills Education lessons (Learner 1, a Form 5 female student from Case C).

12.2. Implementation of Life Skills Education Comes with Some Challenges

The study established that the implementation of Life Skills Education has been buffeted by numerous challenges since its inception. Participants in the focus group discussions admitted that, indeed, they experienced various challenges as teachers while implementing the Life Skills Education programme in schools. Challenges cited were inadequate training for Life Skills Education teachers, lack of motivation among teachers, negative attitudes among learners, and increased workload for Life Skills Education teachers.

12.2.1. Inadequate Training of Teachers

From the responses in the focus group discussions, it emerged that inadequate training of teachers was a great challenge in facilitating and promoting the Life Skills Education programme in schools. Participants in all three Cases concurred that the training they went through was not enough to empower them to handle the syllabus with confidence. They lamented that they were only trained for three days, so there was no way they could master all the key concepts in the course. The study revealed that the short duration of training was not sufficient to develop an understanding of content and empower teachers to mediate sensitive topics with confidence. Participants felt the government should devote more time to training Life Skills Education teachers. During one of the focus group discussions, it transpired that due to inadequate training, teachers avoided teaching sensitive topics such as sexuality. A participant in one of the three Cases commented that what they went through was not training but rather an awareness campaign. The following are examples of quotes from participants during a focus group discussion:

We feel the training we went through was not enough; the teachers were only trained for three days, yet they were expected to master the whole content. This is in contrast to what normally happens in other fields, where training cannot be less than two years. For example, training as a counselor is usually not done in less

than 2 years. The government, therefore, needs to give more time to training the Life Skills Education teachers (Participant # 4, a 35-year-old male teacher from Case A).

12.2.2. Negative Attitudes

Participants in the focus group discussions also cited negative attitudes among learners and the non-Life Skills Education teachers as hampering the effective teaching of Life Skills Education. The tendency for learners is that they do not take courses which are not assessed seriously and, therefore, do not give them the attention they deserve. Similarly, it is common practice for teachers not to put much effort into courses that are non-examinable.

12.2.3. Learners' Attitude

The study revealed that learners in high schools have a negative attitude towards learning Life Skills Education. Participants had a feeling that most learners do not take Life Skills Education seriously, probably because they do not know the importance of the subject in their lives. Lack of cooperation and interest can also be due to the non-examinable nature of the subject. Below are quotes from participants in some focus group discussions:

Learners do not consider the subject important, so they do not come to class during this period. They abscond from the Life Skills Education classes, yet as a teacher, I am not expected to force them to learn it (Participant # 3, a 36-year-old male teacher from Case B).

The non-examinable nature of the subject makes learners attach very little importance to it (Participant # 1, a 42-year-old male teacher from Case A).

12.2.4. Teachers' Attitude

The findings of the study also revealed that some teachers display negative attitudes and non-commitment towards the teaching of life skills education. Their understanding is that importance should be attached to the examinable subjects that are perceived to promote academic excellence and certification rather than Life Skills Education. Responses gathered from participants in the focus group discussions showed that Life Skills Education is not considered important by some teachers and learners as it is not examinable, and this waters down their effort to see the programme yield the intended results. The following are quotes from participants during focus group discussions regarding the attitude of teachers, particularly non-Life Skills Education teachers and some learners, towards the subject:

The other teachers who are not teaching Life Skills Education feel it is a waste of time; they neither take it seriously nor support it (Participant # 6, a 34-year-old female teacher from Case A).

Negative attitudes from learners and non-Life Skills Education teachers are a major challenge. They do not take the subject seriously. As a result, the other teachers want to use the Life Skills Education periods to push the syllabi of the examinable subjects (Participant # 5, a 34-year-old male teacher from Case C).

12.2.5. Lack of Motivation in Teachers to Teach the Subject

The findings of the study indicated that lack of motivation in teachers to teach the subject was one of the factors hindering the effective implementation of Life Skills Education in schools. Participants felt there was a lack of motivation in both the Life Skills Education teachers and the learners. One participant from Case B opined that the lack of motivation in the teachers emanated from the fact that they know they do not get any remuneration for teaching the subject; hence, they view it as an extra load. This affects their interest in teaching, resulting in some of the teachers giving the most attention to what they perceive as priority subjects only. Here is what participants said in a focus group discussion:

As teachers, we are not motivated to teach Life Skills Education because we know we are not paid for it, yet it is an extra load. One form of motivation could also be attending workshops and refresher courses (Participant # 1, a 39-year-old female teacher from Case B).

12.2.6. Increased Workload of Teachers

Participants' responses in the focus group discussions indicated that the teachers were grappling with heavy workloads and, therefore, were not able to give Life Skills Education full attention. Moreover, participants complained that the overloaded timetable, coupled with pressure to complete the syllabi of the examinable subjects timeously, renders the teaching of Life Skills Education almost impossible. The teachers lamented that as a result of the heavy teaching loads, they are not able to give individual attention to the learners and their needs. The following are voices from participants in relation to the above point:

We do not have enough time; our timetables are full. As a result, we only meet the learners once a week for Life Skills Education (Participant # 7, a 36-year-old female teacher from Case C).

Life Skills Education increases our teaching load; as teachers, we now have to prepare lessons for their subjects, that is, the examinable ones, and then prepare for Life Skills Education; it becomes too much for the teacher (Participant # 2, a 38-year-old female teacher from Case B).

Participants in both the focus group discussions and the in-depth interviews concurred that making learners understand the applicability and relevance of the content learnt in Life Skills Education could make them attach importance to the subject. Findings revealed that the non-examinable status of Life Skills Education negatively influences learners' attitudes towards the subject. It also influences teachers to utilise time allocated for Life Skills Education for syllabus coverage of other subjects. Participants believed that learners could start taking the subject seriously if they knew they would be examined on it at the end. Otherwise, for now, they view the Life Skills Education sessions as leisure time and thus do not take them seriously. Below are quotes from participants supporting the above statements:

The Ministry of Education and Training should make Life Skills Education examinable as the non-examinable nature of the subject makes learners and the other teachers attach very little importance to it (Participant # 1, a 42-year-old male teacher from Case A).

Findings showed that failure to introduce any form of assessment and evaluation measures lowers the status and recognition that Life Skills Education deserves. Participants observed that the tendency for teachers is to put more emphasis on the subjects that are examinable and also believed to be adding value to the passing of learners. Similarly, learners do not take subjects which are not assessed seriously. As a result, they do not give them the attention they deserve.

Participants opined that effective Life Skills Education should work to develop an environment in which learners may use their new skills and create opportunities for learners to practice and meaningfully use these skills outside the classroom. Furthermore, participants felt learners should be encouraged to start projects that are in line with what they have learned in class to stimulate their interest. This can also help them realize the importance of the subject. Below are some quotes from participants in support of the above point:

In order to make Life Skills Education interesting, it must include a practical aspect, for example, a project that the learners can plan on their own, present, get approval for, and then implement. Such projects will enable them to practice what they have learnt in class so that it becomes concrete rather than abstract (Participant #1, a 44-year-old female teacher from Case C).

Findings revealed that properly trained personnel was a must if any programme was to be effective in achieving its intended objectives. Participants in all three Cases echoed the same sentiments on the importance of training Life Skills Education teachers to enhance Life Skills Education in schools. They argued that training is crucial for teachers as Life Skills Education is taught differently from other subjects in that it is particularly concerned with the teaching of values, and values are not learnt as other curriculum subjects. Participants further recommended that teachers be trained for a longer period than the usual duration of about 3 days. Moreover, findings pointed out that teachers need training even on the methodologies to use in teaching Life Skills Education so that the acquisition of psychosocial competencies among learners is not left to chance or at the teachers' discretion. Participants further recommended that mechanisms be put in place to ensure appropriate identification of teachers who can teach Life Skills Education. The following are voices from participants in a focus group discussion:

Teachers need to be trained fully for them to be ready to teach Life Skills Education, even if it calls for a full year's training, so that they may know the right approaches in teaching the subject and also for the subject to be taken seriously (Participant # 1, a 42-year-old male teacher from Case A)

Participants in all the focus group discussions expressed their disappointment in the fact that they are not remunerated for teaching Life Skills Education, yet it is an extra workload for them. They had a feeling that the government should recognize their effort by at least giving them incentives. These may be in the form of extra pay or allowances similar to the responsibility allowances given to sports teachers. According to participants, well-motivated, competent and committed teachers provide one of the surest routes to improved learning achievement.

The government should provide incentives to motivate teachers. As it is, we find ourselves demotivated, especially because the learners do not even like the subject; most of them have no passion for it (Participant # 2, a 40-year-old male teacher from Case C).

The findings of the study further revealed that schools lack variety in terms of instructional materials. Participants believed that the provision of a variety of technological tools was cardinal in promoting Life Skills Education in schools and in making its implementation a success. They were of the view that the lack of such materials negatively impacts the learner's ability to acquire life skills. The following is a statement from one participant in support of the above view:

One of the measures that should be taken to enhance Life Skills Education in schools is to ensure the provision of relevant materials and instructional equipment. This could be audio/visual materials and equipment such as movies, films, and projectors, to name a few (Participant #5, a 26-year-old male teacher from Case A).

The study revealed that some teachers have negative feelings about the teaching of Life Skills Education. In one focus group discussion, for instance, participants complained that teaching Life Skills Education is an additional burden to them. In as much as the teachers acknowledged the importance of the subject to learners, they insisted that it was an extra load on them and pleaded that the government should hire personnel who would specialize in teaching life skills education. As far as these teachers are concerned, it is taxing to prepare lessons for life skills education and examinable subjects.

The findings that Life Skills Education is relevant and fulfilling to teach also contradict UNICEF (2010), which established that teachers in Eswatini and Uganda felt the teaching of Life Skills Education was not their responsibility, and so were reluctant to mainstream it into the existing curriculum. Moreover, these teachers complained that they were not conversant with experiential learning activities for teaching Life Skills Education.

On another note, participants emphasized the importance of parental involvement in enhancing life skills development among learners. They concurred that collaboration between parents and teachers was necessary for Life Skills Education to yield the intended results. Participants also felt that developing life skills in learners should not be left to the school alone. Mpande (2013) also supported the idea of collaboration by citing the non-involvement of parents and community members in Life Skills Education as one of the factors hindering the effective implementation of the programme in schools. Wairimu (2015) also identified a lack of parental support as one of the many challenges teachers face as they implement the Life Skills Education programme. This implies that the teaching of Life Skills Education has to

start with the parent at home. Parents ought to lay the foundation so that by the time the learner gets to school, at least he/she has the basics of life skills.

In as much as participants showed understanding of the importance of Life Skills Education to learners, findings pointed out that they viewed teaching of the subject as an overload to them. Participants had a feeling that teaching life skills education is a burden to them since it increases their teaching load. Participants opined that the government should train people who specialize in teaching life skills education in schools instead of teaching subjects that are already overloaded with teachers. These findings are in line with Wairimu (2015), who appealed to the Government of Kenya to take the initiative to employ more teachers as a way of combating the high teacher-learner ratio since teachers view teaching Life Skills Education as an additional burden on the already overstretched teaching load. The implication is that the Ministry of Education and Training should train and hire specialists in the field, that is, teachers who will specialize in teaching Life Skills Education only and not the other subjects.

From participants' responses, it was evident that life skills education has several benefits for learners, including helping them understand themselves and empowering them to face challenging situations. In light of the above, participants viewed Life Skills Education as a worthwhile programme for the youth. Both learner and teacher participants concurred that Life Skills Education is worth teaching and learning as it helps empower learners with quite a number of capabilities. Findings revealed that the subject helps learners to be focused and organized. Through Life Skills Education, learners tend to focus on their academic work and avoid practices that will ruin their future.

The study further established that Life Skills Education enables learners to identify their potential, boost their self-esteem, and develop a positive attitude towards their school work. These findings are consistent with those of Srikala and Kishore (2010), who observed positive changes in classroom behaviour and interaction among learners in the Life Skills Education programme compared to those who were not in the programme. Learners in the programme were significantly better adjusted to the school and teachers compared to those not in the programme.

Sharing similar sentiments was Parvarthy and Renjith (2015), who identified several benefits of Life Skills Education to learners that include improvement of self-esteem, increasing happiness, quality of life and emotion regulation, and also helping them achieve psychological, social and mental well-being. The Confederation of British Industry (2011) also concurs with the study findings by asserting that Life Skills Education enables learners to take responsibility for what they do rather than blaming others. They are also able to make decisions and understand why they make certain choices in life. Kalanda (2010) also observed that Life Skills Education increases knowledge levels and leads to behaviour change among teachers and children. Sridevi (2015) also concurs with the study findings and establishes that Life Skills Education makes it relatively easier to instil values and influence young people to develop responsible and safe behaviour. This is an indication that Life Skills Education is indeed a good programme. Through the lens of the Targeting Life Skills Model guiding the study, it is the role of teachers to equip learners with the following as indicated by the findings: self-motivation (HANDS), self-discipline, healthy lifestyle choices, and personal safety (HEALTH).

The above findings, however, contradict findings by Prinsloo (2007), who reported that head teachers in South Africa felt there was little impact Life Skills Education could make on learners even if they could provide some support for teaching the subject in their schools. The head teachers felt it was difficult for them to support the Life Skills Education programme because many learners in their schools were careless, irresponsible, and had no vision and mission in life. As far as these head teachers were concerned, the Life Skills Education curriculum had not fully yielded positive results. Meanwhile, findings further indicated that Life Skills Education not only promotes the development of cognitive and social skills but also equips learners with entrepreneurial skills. The programme empowers learners holistically and is, therefore, practical. Through life skills education, learners are able to apply what they have learned in the classroom in real-life situations. In support of these findings, Mpande (2013) opined that Life Skills Education was worth teaching and learning because it promoted and encouraged entrepreneurial skills or productivity among learners.

Consistent with the study findings in this regard are findings by Sridevi (2015), who emphasized the importance of directing the education of a child towards the development of childhood personality and talents to full potential. Sridevi (2015) also posited that the participatory learning approach used in Life Skills Education is integral for life skills development because it means that what was discussed, understood, practiced, and applied by the learner and not just what the teacher delivered. The findings, therefore, vividly noted that Life Skills Education is worth teaching and learning despite the many challenges it has faced in its implementation. Based on the 4-H Model guiding the study, findings revealed that teachers have a role to play in empowering learners on marketable skills (HANDS), planning, organizing, wise use of resources and goal setting (HEAD). The Life Skills Education programme in schools was expected to empower learners to use their hands to earn a living.

Participants cited inadequate teacher training as one of the greatest challenges in facilitating and promoting the Life Skills Education programme in schools. The general outcry in all three cases was that the initial training teachers went through was too shallow and, therefore, not sufficient to empower them to handle the syllabus with confidence. This finding is in agreement with Adhiambo (2013), who established that most teachers felt they were not sufficiently trained in Life Skills Education. Adhiambo (2013) also pointed out that the few teachers who had attended in-service training on Life Skills Education argued that the training failed to equip them with adequate skills to handle the curriculum successfully.

Also in line with this finding is Onwuegbu (2011), who felt teaching is difficult because teachers have to deal with complex human behaviour, which, once established, is difficult to change, and the complexity increases if the teacher is not well equipped to achieve such change. Abobo (2012) shared similar sentiments and observed that Life Skills Education teachers are not fully equipped with the relevant skills to handle the subject, thus rendering them ineffective in their delivery of subject content. The study findings are also in line with Rembe (2006), who posited that in Zimbabwe, teachers'

training in the Life Skills Curriculum takes only three days. Meyers (2011) also noted that teachers implemented Life Skills Education on a limited basis due to lack of training. The implication is that the government should be prepared to allocate money and devote more time to training Life Skills Education teachers so that the programme may yield the intended results. Contrary to the findings above, however, Jawarneh (2013) established that most teachers felt they were well equipped to teach Life Skills Education. The teachers indicated that they had attended 10 or more in-service training sessions relevant to Life Skills Education.

Participants also cited negative attitudes as hampering effective teaching of Life Skills Education. Their observation was that learners do not take subjects that are not assessed seriously and, therefore, do not give them attention. Likewise, teachers seemed not to put much effort into non-examinable courses. Findings revealed that learners displayed negative attitudes towards learning life skills education, probably because they were ignorant of the importance of the subject in their lives. Lack of cooperation and interest can also be attributed to the fact that the subject is not examinable. This idea is supported by Mpande (2013), who also noted that learners had a negative attitude towards learning Life Skills Education. Mpande (2013) cited the negative attitude of learners as a matter of concern to parents, most of whom claimed that school-going children had gone digital and thus wanted to spend most of their time on mobile phones or computers.

The findings imply that there is a need for improvement in students' awareness of Life Skills Education since a notable number of them seem ignorant about the importance of the subject in their lives. Moreover, through inspectors, guidance, and counseling officers, the Ministry of Education and Training need to hold campaigns on the importance of Life Skills Education in the curriculum among learners, teachers, and community as a whole. Complete awareness will influence attitudes and produce an apparent effect. The study further revealed that some teachers display negative attitudes towards Life Skills Education and non-commitment. These teachers feel that importance should be attached to examinable subjects rather than Life Skills Education. In agreement, June (2008) observed that teachers in Japan were negative about the practice of Life Skills Education. Similar sentiments were shared by Mulama (2007), who argued that teachers have negative attitudes and lack commitment and an understanding of their role in the implementation of the Life Skills Education programme.

This finding is also in line with Abobo (2012), who affirmed that successful implementation of the Life Skills Education curriculum is highly dependent on the teacher's attitude. Abobo (2012) opined that the attitude of the teacher influences the learners' attitude and perspective towards the subject. There is, therefore, a need for head teachers to be fully engaged in the management of Life Skills Education in their schools to ensure that the subject is accorded the importance it deserves. The head teachers need to monitor the time allocated for Life Skills Education in the timetable to ensure that it is indeed used for the subject.

Kitimo (2014), on the other hand, seems to contradict these findings and maintains that head teachers showed a positive attitude towards the implementation of Life Skills Education by sensitizing teachers, learners, and parents on the importance of the subject. Githaiga *et al.* (2014) shared the same sentiments and observed that a majority of teachers teaching Life Skills Education in secondary schools had a positive attitude towards the subject. The positive attitude is an indication that these teachers were aware of the significant role Life Skills Education plays in youth development.

The study further established that a lack of motivation among teachers in teaching Life Skills Education was also a hindrance to the implementation of the programme. Participants felt there was a lack of motivation for both the Life Skills Education teachers and learners. The assumption was that teachers lacked motivation because they were not remunerated for teaching life skills education, yet it was an extra load. These findings are in agreement with Wairimu (2015), who argued that the high pupil-to-teacher ratio affects the implementation of Life Skills Education because it leads to heavy workloads, which tends to discourage teachers.

Kitimo (2014) shared similar findings and cited a lack of motivation as one of the factors hampering the teaching and learning of Life Skills Education. Kitimo (2014) further observed that teachers are paid very little salaries, and this affects their motivation to teach, making some of them pay the most attention to what they perceive as priority subjects, which is only at the expense of life skills education. The implication is that the government should give serious attention to the issue of remunerating Life Skills Education teachers so that they can be motivated to teach the subject. Moreover, findings indicated that teachers are grappling with heavy workloads and, therefore, are not able to give Life Skills Education full attention. Participants complained that the overloaded timetable, coupled with pressure to complete the syllabi of the examinable subjects timeously, renders the teaching of Life Skills Education almost impossible. In their responses, participants lamented that due to heavy workloads, they are not able to give individual attention to the learners and their needs. Similar sentiments were echoed by KICD (2009), who asserted that teachers view the teaching of Life Skills Education as an additional burden on the already over-stretched teaching load. This means there is a need for government to employ and train more teachers in Life Skills Education to reduce the workload of the teachers.

13. Conclusion

The study concludes that Life Skills Education (LSE) is crucial in empowering learners to navigate the challenges of modern life. Despite its importance, the implementation of LSE in high schools within the Shiselweni region faces significant challenges. These include inadequate training for teachers, lack of motivation, negative attitudes from both learners and some teachers, and heavy teaching workloads. However, the study also reveals the positive impact of LSE on learners, such as improved self-esteem, better decision-making skills, and the development of entrepreneurial abilities. Therefore, it is imperative to address the challenges hindering the effective implementation of LSE to fully harness its benefits for the youth in Eswatini.

14. Recommendations

To enhance the implementation and effectiveness of Life Skills Education in high schools, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Firstly, the Ministry of Education and Training should prioritize comprehensive and continuous training programs for LSE teachers to ensure they are well-equipped to handle the curriculum confidently.
- Secondly, the government should provide incentives, such as additional remuneration or allowances, to motivate teachers to invest time and effort in teaching LSE.
- Additionally, integrating practical aspects into the LSE curriculum, such as projects and real-life applications, can make the subject more engaging and relevant for learners.
- Finally, fostering collaboration between parents, teachers, and the community is essential in supporting the holistic development of learners through LSE, ensuring that the foundation laid at home is reinforced and built upon in the school environment.

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