

Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy of Life Skills Education

Dr. A. Radhakrishnan Nair¹
Dr. Gauri Hardikar²

¹ Former Registrar Central University of Kerala and Founder President, Indian Association of Life Skills Education

² Asso. Professor, Smt. Kapila Khandvala College of Education; Secretary, Indian Association of Life Skills Education

Abstract:

Life skills education has received great attention during current times as a tool for holistic development of individuals leading to societal development. The WHO (1994) has defined the term Life skills as 'the ability (capability) that can be imbibed and improved through practice, to translate the knowledge, attitude, and values to support adaptive and positive behaviours, to deal efficiently with the needs and challenges of everyday life'. Empirical evidence suggests that life skills education leads to improved academic, emotional, physical and social outcomes for individuals. Hence, life skills are now widely included in the academic curricula across the world. The four pillars of education, according to Delors (UNESCO, 1996) form the philosophical underpinnings as well as provide the framework for integration of life skills into education. Various life skills education models have been proposed and implemented by agencies working in the field. By their very nature, life skills are contextual and are most effective when they are implemented in alignment with the cultural contexts of the individual. Philosophical thoughts from various cultures hold invaluable potential for life skills education. These connections need to be deliberated upon for effective integration in the transaction of life skills education, leading to an enriched discourse and implementation. This paper aims to explore the renowned Indian Sannyasin (Monk), Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of education, within the context of the four pillars of education as the philosophical underpinning of life skills education and for creating a conceptual framework by analysing the connection between the three tenets of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of education, viz., manifestation of oneself, character building and man making; the four pillars of education by UNESCO; and the ten core life skills by World Health Organisation as well as the four dimensions of life skills by UNICEF-MENA. The objective of this exploration is to delve into the age-old wisdom of philosophical traditions of India towards life skills as a guiding compass to navigate the complex challenges of modern life.

Key Word – Life Skills Education, Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy of Education.

Date of Submission: 15-05-2021

Date of Acceptance: 31-05-2021

I. INTRODUCTION

Life skills education as a discipline is of recent origin. The first extensive proposal for life skills education was made by Winthrop Adkins and Sydney Rosenberg in their training programme for Youth Centre in New York (Conger, 1973). The objective of the inclusion of life skills is for developing appropriate and responsible problem-solving behaviours in the management of personal affairs among the youth. The life skills are applied to various areas of life responsibility viz., self, family, leisure, community and job. Subsequently, the report of the 'Faure Commission' appointed by UNESCO in 1972 recommended 'Learning to Be', as the primary objective of education and suggested 'lifelong education' (Faure, 1972). Later Delors Commission on education (Delors, 1996) defined the pillars of education as learning to be, learning to live together, learning to know and learning to do.

The four pillars of education propounded by Delors Commission, considered as the philosophical underpinnings of life skills education, provide a framework for integration of life skills into education. As defined by WHO (1994) life skills is 'the ability (capability) that can be imbibed and improved through practice, to translate the knowledge, attitude, and values to support adaptive and positive behaviours, to deal efficiently with the needs and challenges of everyday life'. The World Health Organization promotes a school-based life skills programmes as a means to develop skills amongst young people to help them lead a healthy lifestyle and optimum physical, social, and psychological wellbeing. The UNICEF-MENA (2017) regarded life skills as a cross cutting, interconnected and overlapping application of knowledge, values, attitudes and skills which are integral to quality education and are universally applicable and contextual. Development of life skills is a

process to be applied to various learning areas covering four dimensions: the cognitive, the individual, the social and the instrumental.

The ten core life skills as proposed by the WHO are, self-awareness, empathy, interpersonal relationships, effective communication (Learning to live together), critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving and decision making (learning to know), coping with emotions and coping with stress (learning to be). Self-awareness as the mother skill is a cross-cutting skill with respect to all other skills and is critical to the effective practice of all other skills. Learning to be, comprise of the set of skills which enable one to stand on one's feet and for which self-management skills like coping skills and self-awareness are mandatory. All ten core life skills work in combination and none of them are effective if practised in isolation. For effective functioning of an individual or to perform to their fullest potential a person requires all the life skills along with the skills required for working productively and thereby generating income. Life skills are enablers for effectively performing to one's fullest potential and when they are used in tandem with other skills like employability /citizenship skills, they work towards enhancing the collective wellbeing of the individual as well as the society.

UNICEF-MENA (2017) has categorised life skills on the basis of learning which has been classified into: 'Learning to Know'/the Cognitive Dimension- creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills; 'Learning to Do'/the Instrumental Dimension- cooperation, negotiation, decision making skills; 'Learning to Be'/the Individual Dimension- self-management, communication, resilience and Learning to Live Together'/the Social Dimension- respect for diversity, empathy and participation skills. In the UNICEF model also the focus of life skills education is holistic development of the person as proposed by WHO through the rights-based approach.

Importance of life skills

Life skills assume critical importance in a world beset by unprecedented uncertainties and challenges. The focus of life skills has evolved from being targeted at coping with challenges to being viewed as transformative competencies, enabling individuals to play a proactive role as agents of change to deal with personal and societal challenges through development of personal agency. This involves the holistic development of the individuals in the cognitive, social, emotional domains, with emphasis on the integration of values and attitudes for sustained behaviour change. Thus, the potential of life skills, as transformative competencies is invaluable to help individuals to navigate the complexities of day-to-day life skilfully and towards the outcome of wellbeing for self and others.

The transformative power of life skills is often discussed in spiritual and philosophical discourses of different cultures. Since life skills are contextual in nature, if connections can be made among the indigenous philosophical thoughts of the learners on life skills, they can connect themselves more meaningfully with the content of the life skills education programme and will be able to integrate it effortlessly in their day-to-day life. Through this paper, the authors have attempted to explore the philosophical thought of Swami Vivekananda on education to understand its relationship on life skills education.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to analyse Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of education and the philosophy of life skills education to develop a conceptual frame work to understand the relationship amongst them.

The paper analyses the content of Vivekananda's philosophy of education through the selected texts from the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda and the philosophical underpinnings of life skills education from Learning to be (Faure, 1972) and Learning: the treasure within (Delors, 1996). The themes emerging from this analysis are depicted in the form of a conceptual framework.

III. SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND LIFE SKILLS

While the term life skills are of the origin in the late half of the 20th Century, it would be academically interesting to see whether India, a land of ancient wisdom and the seat of ancient Universities has ever thought of an education model which focuses on the holistic development of the learners. The Gurukula system of education which was prevalent in India in the ancient times, where the student learns from the face/mouth of the Guru (*Gurumukham*) is a form of experiential learning or learning by doing which is considered as the best method for life skills education. The teachings of *Bhagavad Gita*, *Vedas* and *Upanishads* are the storehouse of knowledge on life skills which we do talk about but are often less discussed.

Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of education is Vedanta education. Swami Vivekananda, the great Monk of India has travelled across the globe and preached the philosophy of Vedanta and the model of education he believed as important for humanity. For him education comes from the faith in one's own Self, and through faith in one's own Self ascends *Brahman* inherent in them. The faith in one's own Self, which is

the basis of Vedanta, has not yet been even slightly carried into practice. Vedanta education focuses on the development of the self, the person within, the inner self of the person. According to Vivekananda, education should unveil the divinity in man/woman and this divinity should be seen in treating lunatics, in punishing criminals and in everything that is connected with human life.

By narrating the story of Nachiketa from *Kathopanishad* (Vivekavani, 2010), Vivekananda¹ points out that, the education that our children receive is inferior. Nachiketa is the embodiment of *shraddha* (attention, faith, devotion), which a school student requires. The *shraddha* which is the keystone of the Veda and the Vedanta — the *shraddha* which emboldened Nachiketâ to face *Yama* (God of Death) and question him is the quality a student needs to acquire. To Vivekananda, "the ignorant, the man devoid of *shraddha*, the doubting self runs to ruin." According to him, "the remedy is the spread of education. The schoolboy learns nothing, but has everything of his own broken down — want of *shraddhâ*. First of all, self-knowledge. I do not mean thereby, matted hair, staff, *Kamandalu*, and mountain caves which the word suggests. What do I mean then? Cannot the knowledge, by which is attained even freedom from the bondage of worldly existence, bring ordinary material prosperity?" Certainly, it can.²

Education is that which leads to developing the 'self' and 'shraddha'. To Vivekananda, '*Atman*' or 'self' is there in all the living beings. The difference is only in its manifestation. "Dualist, qualified-monist, monist, Shaiva, Vaishnava, Shâkta, even the Buddhist and the Jain and others — whatever sects have arisen in India — are all at one in this respect that infinite power is latent in this *Jivatman* (individualised soul); from the ant to the perfect man there is the same *Âtman* in all, the difference being only in manifestation. That power manifests as soon as it gets the opportunity and the right place and time. From the highest God to the meanest grass, the same power is present in all — whether manifested or not. Vivekananda advises "We shall have to call forth that power by going from door to door."³

The basic tenets of education suggested by Swami Vivekananda was that, it is not the amount of information that is put into the brain and runs riot there, undigested throughout life. It must be life-building, man-making, character making, assimilation of ideas. "If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library. If education were identical with information, the libraries would be the greatest sages in the world and encyclopaedias the rishis." (Vivekavani, 2017)

Education to Vivekananda is the manifestation of perfection that a man already possess. Education for him means, the process by which the character is formed, strength of mind is increased, and intellect is sharpened, because of which one can stand on one's own feet. It should be the one which gives people self-confidence, enabling them to develop self-respect, to enhance faith, to understand, and to develop inner and spiritual self.

Swami Vivekananda's focus of education is man making- physically, intellectually, and spiritually- which means a harmonious development of the body, mind and soul; character building (Strengthening of character); developing the strength of mind; equip oneself to face challenges; impart spirit of philanthropy; develop courage; strengthening, enlightening and invigorating knowledge- the knowledge like, self-knowledge, political knowledge, secular knowledge, social knowledge, and spiritual knowledge; expanding the intellect; enhances the power of concentration-degree of concentration and detachment; education for physical development; spirit of renunciation; attaining self-sufficiency; developing feeling of brotherhood; serving humanity; developing spiritual life; and making people self-reliant and have vocational skills.

Vivekananda believes that if education with its religious core can invigorate man's faith in his divine nature and the infinite potentialities of the human soul, it is sure to help man become strong, yet tolerant and sympathetic. It will also help man to extend his love and good will beyond the communal, national and racial barriers. The individuality of India lies in her spiritual culture, Vivekananda opined. Hence in his view, for the development of a balanced nation, we have to combine the dynamism and scientific attitude of the West with the spirituality of our country. His philosophy of education is not confined into spirituality or divinity, it has highlighted the importance of vocational education, income generation activities, eradication of poverty, eradication of inequality and caste differences. He advocated the appropriate blend of materialistic and spiritual elements in education.

The educational philosophy put forward by Swami Vivekananda is holistic in nature, focusing on individual self (personality) social self (society) Physical self (physical education, exercise, sports and games) self-reliant (vocational education) and spiritual self (values, culture and divinity).

¹ For complete discourse please see <https://vivekavani.com/realisation-swami-vivekananda/> accessed on 21 05 2021.

² <https://vivekavani.com/swami-vivekananda-quotes-katha-upanishad-nachiketa/> accessed on 21 05 2021.

³

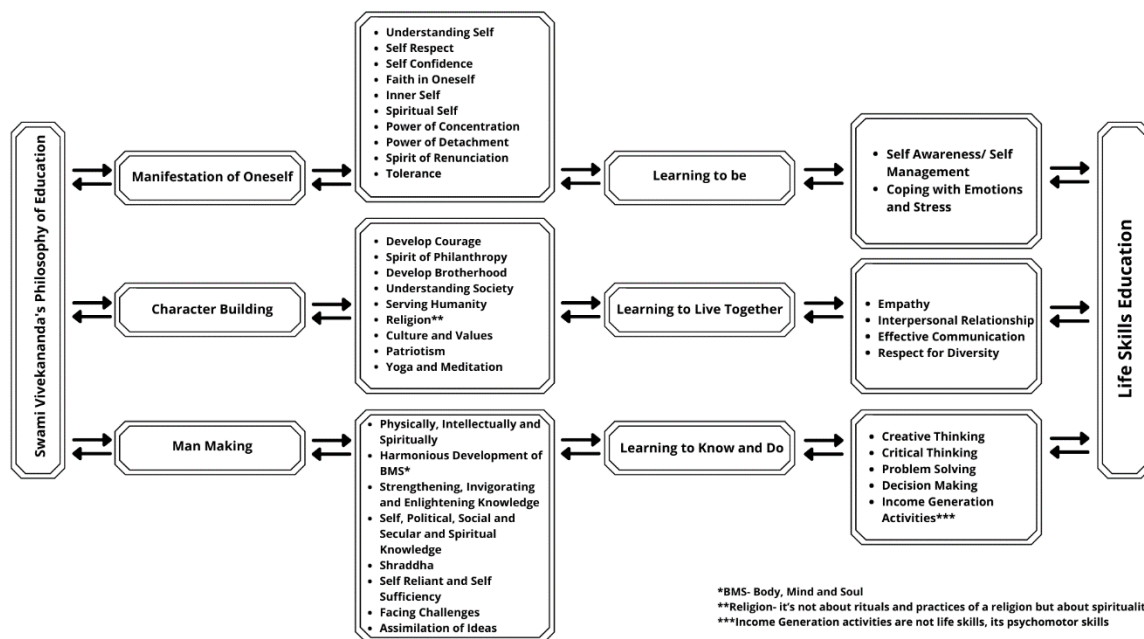
Relationship between Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of Education and Life Skills Education

The holistic personality development of the person is the objective of education scheme of Swami Vivekananda, which is the basic principle of life skills education as well. According to Vivekananda, manifestation of oneself, character building and man making are the cardinal principles of education or the perfection of body, mind and soul. For him education is for acquisition of knowledge and its application for the wellbeing of the person and society. For him education is the only way by which a person can be enabled to perform to his potentials.

Purpose of education according to Swami Vivekananda is the manifestation of perfection in oneself, character building and man making. The philosophical underpinnings of life skills education are learning to be, learning to live together, learning to know and learning to do. Manifestation of oneself is enabling a person to stand in their own legs, understanding strengths and weakness, understanding self, self-respect, self-confidence, faith in self, developing the inner self, developing the spiritual self, enhancing the power of concentration and detachment, increasing the spirit of renunciation and internalising tolerance.

Life skills helps an individual to function effectively in socially heterogeneous groups, acting autonomously and in using tools interactively (OECD, 2001). It is the result of the use of a combination of core life skills like social skills, thinking skills and coping skills. These skills help in the manifestation of perfection in man and developing character building and personality. The conceptual framework of the relationship of Swami Vivekananda philosophy of education and the life skills education can be depicted as in figure 1.

Fig: 1. Conceptual Framework of Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy of Education and Life Skills Education



The concept of learning to be in life skills education is the ability of a person to stand on his own feet. Their self-management and coping skills enable them to face the challenges and overcome the difficult situations. The purpose of education is to develop these faculties in the individual. It is the individual dimension of education for UNICEF-MENA (2017). On a close look to the manifestation of oneself with the principle of learning to be (Delors Commission, 1996) in life skills education, we will understand that by enabling education the person will understand his 'self' properly and know how to manage it and have control on oneself. The individual will be in a position to cope with emotions and stressful situations and to face any challenges in their life. The capacities and competencies of the person will be developed in such a way that he can lead a positive and happy life.

According to Swami Vivekananda concentration, which necessarily implies detachment from other things, constitutes a part of Brahmacharya, which is one of the guiding mottos of his scheme of education. Brahmacharya, in a nutshell, stands for the practice of self-control for securing harmony of the impulses. To him the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collection of facts. He said, "If I had to do my education over again, and had any voice in the matter, I would not study facts at all. I would develop the power

of concentration and detachment, and then with a perfect instrument I could collect facts at will." Side by side, in the child, should be developed the power of concentration and detachment and that is learning to be.

Development and strengthening of character or character building according to the vision of Vivekananda involves, harmonious development of body, mind and soul; developing courage; spirit of philanthropy; developing brotherhood; serving humanity; understanding society; religious teaching; culture and values; patriotism; yoga and meditation. This is the social dimension of a person according to UNICEF-MENA (2017) and learning to live together as per Delors commission (UNESCO, 1996). Interpersonal relationship, empathy and effective communication are the components of learning to live together according to WHO. For UNICEF, understanding and respect for diversity and participation also include learning to live together. Empathetic person only can understand and respect the diversities in the society and culture. He only can have the spirit of philanthropy, brotherhood, and service to humanity. The basic premise of *Sanadhana Dharma*, the very old doctrines of the Hindu Dharma, '*Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam*' (world is one family) and '*Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu*' (may there is wellbeing to all) are the epitome of empathy without any parallels.

Swami Vivekananda's scheme of education has recommended the teaching of *Bhagavad Gita*, *Vedas* and *Upanishads* among Hindu and other religious texts. He believed that this will enable the people to refine their minds and in purifying the souls. The education should focus on culture and values of the society. Swami Vivekananda has only endorsed the spiritual element of education and not the teaching of rituals and religious practices of any religion as a part of education. Spirit of philanthropy, courage, brotherhood, serving humanity and patriotism also needs to be strengthened as an outcome of education, which can be learnt from religious texts easily. These traits will enable the person to live together successfully in the multicultural and diverse world.

Vivekananda reiterates that religion is the innermost core of education. However, by religion, he does not mean any one kind in particular, but its essential character, which is the realization of the divinity inherent in man. He reminds us time and again that religion does not consist in doctrines or creeds or any set of rituals. To be religious for him means leading life in such a way that we manifest our higher nature, truth, goodness and beauty, in our thoughts, words and deeds. To him religion is the highest motive power 'in building up character, in making for everything that is good and great, in bringing peace to others, and peace to one's own self, and, therefore, be studied from that standpoint. Swamiji believed that if education with its religious core can invigorate man's faith in his divine nature and the infinite potentialities of the human soul, it is sure to help man become strong, yet tolerant and sympathetic. It will also help man to extend his love and goodwill beyond the communal, national and racial barriers. He never promotes religious chauvinism, rather tolerance of all religions, brotherhood, harmony and peace. This philosophy of Vivekananda is the essence of the 'learning to live together' pillar of education propounded by Delors Commission.

In his scheme of education, Vivekananda has laid great stress on physical health as he always professes that a sound mind resides in a sound body. He often quotes the Upanishadic dictum '*nayamatma balahinena labhyah*'; i.e., the self cannot be realized by the physically weak. However, along with physical culture, he harps on the need of paying special attention to the culture of the mind. According to Swamiji, the mind of the students has to be controlled and trained through meditation, concentration and practice of ethical purity. Healthy body and healthy mind concept of him is the body image concept of 'self' in self-awareness.

Man making involves physical, intellectual, and spiritual development of the person, i.e., harmonious development of body, mind and soul. This has its link in character building also. To be a perfect man means one should have knowledge- self-knowledge, political knowledge, social knowledge, secular knowledge, spiritual knowledge, and physical knowledge. The knowledge should be strengthening, invigorating, and enlightening. The knowledge makes the person self-reliant and self-sufficient. It helps in generation of new ideas and assimilation of ideas. Man making education helps in facing challenges. Swamiji says, "we need technical education and all else which may develop industries, so that men, instead of seeking for service, may earn enough to provide for them-selves, and save something against a rainy day." He feels it necessary that India should take from the Western nations all that is good in their civilization. However, just like a person, every nation has its individuality, which should not be destroyed. The individuality of India lies in her spiritual culture. To quote him: 'Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there undigested, all your life. Education for him means that process by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, and intellect is sharpened, as a result of which one can stand on one's own feet.'

Man making education of Swami Vivekananda is similar to the concept of learning to know and learning to do pillar of Delors philosophy and to that of cognitive dimension and instrumental dimension of life skills defined by UNICEF-MENA. Thinking skills and the ability to perform a work efficiently enable the person to lead a successful life. Knowledge which is strengthening, invigorating and enlightening will help think critically and creatively. Education which enhances intellect, generation of new ideas and its assimilation will help one to solve their problems effectively and take considered and responsible decisions. Life skills education (UNICEF-MENA, 2017, p.1) leads to the achievement of a knowledge society through improved education

outcomes; the realization of economic development through improved employment and entrepreneurship; and the attainment of enhanced social cohesion through improved civic engagement.

Swami Vivekananda recommended holistic education in the second half of the 19th Century. UNICEF MENA (2017) speaks about holistic approach to education in 21st Century. It says that the "vision is underpinned by a holistic approach to education, considering the whole learner by acknowledging the multi-dimensionality of education, which plays not only into the cognitive, but also the individual and social realms, especially with regard to personal development, social cohesion and sustainable development. Quality education, within this framework, is envisioned as fostering empowered individuals who can learn effectively and fulfil their social responsibilities while also being successful in the context of the workplace. It needs to be sustained by a strong ethical foundation, which recognizes that education fosters human dignity, before economic performance, and promotes human rights-based values".

Manifestation of perfection in man, character building and man making are the pillars of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of education. These three pillars overlap, inter-connect and reinforce one another to combine in the individual in his development. Similarly, the ten core life skills inter-connect, overlap and reinforce each other in achieving the result of developing competencies in the individual to face the challenges in everyday life effectively and to develop positive behaviour. Manifestation of oneself in man, character building and man making are all the outcome of the life skills internalised during the education process. The level of these outcomes depends on how much life skills are internalised by the individual from his schooling.

The philosophy of life skills education is considered as western as it has its depiction in the UNESCO report in 1996. Whereas the philosophy of education advocated by Swami Vivekananda through his writings and speeches till 1902 unfold the idea of holistic education focusing on the total development of the individual covering all agencies like physical, mental, emotional, cognitive, social and spiritual.

IV. CONCLUSION

Swami Vivekananda has never talked about life skills education as we do now. He talked on holistic education which is the manifestation of oneself which helps in character building and ensures physical, intellectual and spiritual development or ensuring the harmonious development of body, mind and soul. And that is the crux of life skills education. Educationists may work on a model of life skills education to the children and youth of the nation focusing on the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda which could be culturally appropriate for Indian audience.

References

- [1]. Conger, D. S. (1973). *Readings in Life Skills. Readings and Appendices*. Retrieved 05 11, 2021, from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED108032.pdf>
- [2]. Delors, J. (1996). *Learning: The Treasure Within*. Paris, UNESCO publishing.
- [3]. Faure, E. (1972). *Learning to be: the world of education today and tomorrow*. Paris, UNESCO.
- [4]. NCERT. (2015). *Swami Vivekananda and Education: Empowering Teacher Educators*, New Delhi: National Council for Teacher Education.
- [5]. OECD. (2001). *The Definition and Selection of Key Competencies: Executive Summary*. Retrieved on 19 05 2021, from <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/35070367.pdf>
- [6]. Roy, S. d. (n.d.). *Education in the Vision of Swami Vivekananda*. Retrieved 05 10, 2021, from <https://www.esamskriti.com/e/Spirituality/Education/Education-In-The-Vision-Of-Swami-Vivekananda-1.aspx>
- [7]. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda/Volume 2/The Powers of the Mind*. (2021, 04 23). Retrieved 05 08, 2021, from Wikisource: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Complete_Works_of_Swami_Vivekananda/Volume_2/The_Powers_of_the_Mind
- [8]. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda/Volume 4/Translation: Prose/The Education that India needs*. (2013, 07 6). Retrieved 05 08, 2021, from Wikisource: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Complete_Works_of_Swami_Vivekananda/Volume_4/Translation:_Prose/The_Education_that_India_needs
- [9]. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda/Volume 4/Writings: Prose/What we Believe in*. (n.d.). Retrieved 05 08, 2021, from Wikisource: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Complete_Works_of_Swami_Vivekananda/Volume_4/Writings:_Prose/What_we_Believe_in
- [10]. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda/Volume 5/Conversations and Dialogues/II - V Shri Surendra Nath Sen*. (2012, 04 16). Retrieved 05 08, 2021, from Wikisource: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Complete_Works_of_Swami_Vivekananda/Volume_5/Conversations_and_Dialogues/II_-_V_Shri_Surendra_Nath_Sen

- [11]. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda/Volume 6/Lectures and Discourses/Concentration and Breathing*. (2012, 04 16). Retrieved 05 08, 2021, from Wikisource: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Complete_Works_of_Swami_Vivekananda/Volume_6/Lectures_and_Discourses/Concentration_and_Breathing
- [12]. UNICEF-MENA. (2017). *Reimagining Life Skills and Citizenship Education in the Middle East and North Africa: A Four-Dimensional and Systems Approach to 21st Century Skills*. Retrieved 05 10, 2021, from UNICEF-MENA: https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/6151/file/LSCE%20Conceptual%20and%20Programmatic%20Framework_EN.pdf%20.pdf
- [13]. Vivekananda, S. (2014, 04 09). *My Plan of Campaign* . Retrieved 05 08, 2021, from Vivekavani: <https://vivekavani.com/plan-campaign-vivekananda/>
- [14]. WHO. (1994). *Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools*. Retrieved 05 10, 2021, from Program on Mental Health World Health Organisation: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/63552/WHO_MNH_PSF_93.7A_Rev.2.pdf

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

The authors acknowledge the contribution of Mr. Nagendra R, I Year MSW student, Pondicherry University, for designing fig.1, the conceptual framework of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of Education and Life Skills Education.

Dr. A. Radhakrishnan Nair, et. al. "Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy of Life Skills Education." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 26(05), 2021, pp. 01-07.