

Life Skills Education from the Perspectives of Vietnamese Teachers and Educators

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ABSTRACT Life Skills Education among elementary school students is a vital school administration topic as a universal problem. One of the recent issues concerning both the media and parents is Life Skills Education among the elementary schools worldwide. This study aimed to investigate Vietnamese elementary educators' and teachers' perceptions of Life Skills Education. The sample was composed of 702 participants (529 teachers and 173 educators) attending twenty elementary schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. A total of 19 items measured Vietnamese elementary educators' and teachers' perceptions of Life Skills Education. Specifically, the form of Life Skills Education in schools was assessed by ten items and teaching methods for life skills by nine items. The results found that the mean score on the form of Life Skills Education that elementary school educators and teachers' perception was 2.67 (SD = 0.85) and on the teaching methods of Life Skills Education that elementary school educators and teachers' perception was 3.18 (SD = 0.98). This study suggested that it was necessary to increase the perception of Life Skills Education by educators and teachers to improve quality teaching and teaching skills.

INTRODUCTION

Life skills are defined as essential psychosocial and interpersonal skills which interrelate among the skills producing powerful behavioral outcomes (UNICEF 2003). Life skills are necessary for children's healthy development and prevention against risky situations (WHO 1999). Mainly, life skills bring about some benefits in many directions that could be listed as (1) having good effect on children's interpersonal skills, enhancing social adjustment, increasing peer acceptance, reducing improper social behaviors (Rahmati et al. 2010) and (2) improving psychological status as well as communication skills, increasing self-esteem in children with learning

disorders (Kazemi et al. 2014). In the light of Life Skills Education's indispensability, primary schools in Vietnam have their students learned life skills in different forms and by different methods.

In this case, the roles of educators and teachers must be seriously taken into consideration, but first and foremost, their perceptions on Life Skills Education need examining. Around the world, researches have been conducted to explore the perceptions of parents (Ferrari et al. 2004) and students (Meyer 2015) on Life Skills Education. However, educators' perceptions of Life Skills Education is only studied as a small part of the research (Roselyne 2014).

The first main contribution proposed in this aspect of Life Skills Education is the results from other studies that reveal that teachers' positive perceptions on Life Skills Education mainly dedicate to their professional as well as personal growth (Lagat 2017). Ithagi (2007) supports that argument by finding that the success of the teacher curriculum, to a great extent, depends

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on teachers' attitudes. In Vietnam, a researcher recommended that one of the solutions for the effectiveness of Life Skills Educational management could be improving educators' and teachers' perception (Huynh-Lam 2014). Huynh et al. (2018) found significant differences in barriers to the implementation of Social-Emotional Learning programs among the teachers with different years of teaching experience.

Aim and Objective

To the authors' knowledge, no study has focused on perceptions of educators and teachers on Life Skills Education, especially in Vietnam. The primary aim of this study is to examine perceptions of elementary educators and teachers on Life Skills Education in Vietnam. This research gives a significant advantage on the ground that the following researches Life Skills Education related to educators' and teachers' perceptions, especially Vietnamese ones, would have a theoretical basis to develop.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The convenience sampling method was used to recruit students who volunteered to help with the study and administer the survey. The survey instrument was distributed to 800 Vietnamese participants of 20 elementary schools located in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, of which 702 questionnaires were returned, for an 87.75 percent return rate, which exceeds the 30 percent response rate most researchers require for analysis (Dillman 2000). The sample of this study was drawn from 702 respondents who completed the survey instrument. There were more urban area participants (61%) than rural area participants (39%) among the 702 Vietnamese participants who were surveyed. Of these, 529 (75.4%) were elementary school teachers, 71 (10.1%) were elementary school coordinators, 41 (5.84%) were elementary school staffs, 37 (5.27%) were principal in elementary schools, and 24 (3.42%) was General of the Young Pioneers Ho Chi Minh in elementary schools. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants.

Table 1: An overview of survey participants

		<i>n</i>	%
<i>Type</i>	Principal	37	5.27
	Coordinator	71	10.1
	Teacher	529	75.4
	Staff	41	5.84
	General of the Young Pioneers Ho Chi Minh	24	3.42
<i>School</i>	Thien Ho Duong elementary school	37	5.27
	Tân Phú elementary school	42	5.98
	Nguyen Truong To elementary school	30	4.27
	Trung Nhat elementary school	47	6.70
	An Phú Tây elementary school	46	6.55
	An Thoi Dong elementary school	36	5.13
	Voi Lau elementary school	12	1.71
	Ly Thai To elementary school	16	2.28
	Phan Đình Phùng elementary school	59	8.40
	Truong Cong Dinh elementary school	23	3.28
	Nguyen Son Ha elementary school	15	2.14
	Tang Bat Ho elementary school	36	5.13
	Đình Công Tráng elementary school	15	2.14
	Nguyen An Ninh elementary school	45	6.41
	Tan Xuan elementary school	44	6.27
	Xuan Thoi Thuong elementary school	50	7.12
	Pham Ngoc Thach elementary school	24	3.42
	Nguyen Thien Thuat elementary school	22	3.13
	Bông Sao elementary school	76	10.8
	Tran Van Kieu elementary school	27	3.85
<i>Area</i>	Urban	427	61
	Rural	275	39

n: Number of participants; %: Percentage

Measure

Questionnaires are designed to survey participants from urban and rural areas in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. First, social-demographic items were introduced in the questionnaire. Then, Vietnamese elementary educators' and teachers' perceptions of Life Skills Education were measured by a total of 19 questions, as present in Table 2. Accurately, the form of Life Skills Education in schools was assessed by ten questions and teaching methods for life skills by nine questions. The responses of the participants

Table 2.: Observed variables measuring perceptions of Life Skills Education

S. No.	Observed variables	Encryption
1	Teach life skills as an independent subject	F1
2	Hold life skills seminars for students	F2
3	Teach life skills through counseling and consultation	F3
4	Infuse teaching life skills into other subjects	F4
5	Infuse teaching life skills into class meetings	F5
6	Infuse teaching life skills into extracurricular activities, community-based activities	F6
7	Infuse teaching life skills into banner cheers, breaks	F7
8	Infuse teaching life skills into mealtime, lunch breaks	F8
9	Infuse teaching life skills into cultural, sporting, art activities; cleaning up; and social events held by the school	F9
10	Infuse teaching life skills into activities of Ho Chi Minh Young Pioneer Organization and Children Star, which gathers from six to eight years old children to educate them	F10
11	Presentation method (explaining, telling stories)	M1
12	Conversation method (asking answering, exchanging ideas/information)	M2
13	Using visual aid method	M3
14	Practicing method	M4
15	Brainstorming method (problem-solving, situation handling, brainstorming)	M5
16	Discussion method	M6
17	Role-playing method	M7
18	Gaming method	M8
19	Project method	M9

were provided at four different levels based on a 4-point Likert scale (Croasmun and Ostrom 2011).

Analyses

All participants were provided informed consent after receiving an explanation of the purpose of the research. The ethics committee approved the research of the Ho Chi Minh City University of Education. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16 was used for data analyses. The coding procedure was performed as follow: 0 = Never/Not at all Effective, 1 = Seldom/Slightly Effective, 2 = Sometimes/Moderately Effective, 3 = Often/Effective. For the purpose of transforming the discrete values into ranks, distance value was calculated as $(\text{Maximum} - \text{Minimum})/n = (4-1)/4 = 0.75$ (Jaafar et al. 2017). Therefore, the meanings of the rankings are judged as below:

+ 0.00 – 0.75 = Never/Not at all Effective
 + 0.76 – 1.51 = Seldom/Slightly Effective
 + 1.52 – 2.27 = Sometimes/Moderately Effective
 + 2.28 – 3.00 = Often/Effective

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants scored in the average range on the questionnaire. The mean score on the form of Life Skills Education that elementary school educators and teachers' perception was 2.67 (SD = 0.85). The mean score on the teaching methods of Life Skills Education that elementary school educators and teachers' perception was 3.18 (SD = 0.98). Mean, standard deviation, and percentage values about these variables are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3 shows the mean, standard deviation, and percentage values about ten items, in addition to the levels of frequency and effectiveness of each item. Among the ten items of different forms of Life Skills Education, three indicators that have the highest levels of frequency, listed in descending order, are respectively: Infuse teaching life skills into other subjects ($M = 2.31$); Infuse teaching life skills into class meetings ($M = 2.23$) and Infuse teaching life skills into banner cheers, breaks ($M = 2.14$). The three indicators with lowest levels of frequency are: Teach life skills through counseling and consultation ($M = 1.32$); Hold life skills seminars for

Table 3: Perceptions of elementary educators on the form of Life Skills Education

		Levels of frequency			M	SD	Order	Levels of effectiveness			M	SD	Order
		0	1	2	3			0	1	2	3		
Teach life skills as an independent subject	n	73	233	308	78			49	162	418	46	1.62	0.71
	%	10.4	33.2	43.9	11.1			7	23.1	59.5	6.6		
Hold life skills seminars for students	n	76	328	256	28			66	154	416	35	1.55	0.73
	%	10.8	46.7	36.5	4.0			9.4	21.9	59.3	5		
Teach life skills through counseling and consultation	n	73	329	257	27			65	202	374	30	1.48	0.73
	%	10.7	46.9	36.6	3.8			9.3	28.8	53.3	4.3		
Infuse teaching life skills into other subjects	n	4	55	350	288			3	56	442	181	2.11	0.58
	%	0.6	7.8	49.9	41.0			0.4	8	63	25.8		
Infuse teaching life skills into class meetings	n	17	48	343	276			16	59	417	184	2.06	0.66
	%	2.4	6.8	48.9	39.3			2.3	8.4	59.4	26.2		
Infuse teaching life skills into extracurricular activities, community-based activities	n	8	127	386	174			10	79	462	134	2.00	0.61
	%	1.1	18.1	55.0	28.4			1.4	11.3	65.8	19.1		
Infuse teaching life skills into banner cheers, breaks	n	8	100	352	233			7	89	434	151	2.01	0.62
	%	1.1	14.2	50.1	33.2			1	12.7	61.8	21.5		
Infuse teaching life skills into mealtime, lunch breaks	n	16	137	370	166			13	113	444	112	1.90	0.64
	%	2.3	19.5	52.7	23.6			1.9	16.1	63.2	16		
Infuse teaching life skills into cultural, sporting, art activities; cleaning up; and social activities held by school	n	4	124	417	147			3	92	475	114	1.97	0.56
	%	0.6	17.7	59.4	20.9			0.4	13.1	67.7	16.2		
Infuse teaching life skills into activities of Ho Chi Minh Young Pioneer Organization and Children Star, which gathers 6-8 year-old children to educate them	n	31	122	381	152			27	102	434	115	1.87	0.69
	%	4.4	17.4	54.3	21.7			3.8	14.5	61.8	16.4		

Table 4: Perceptions of elementary educators on the teaching methods of Life Skills Education

		Levels of frequency				M	SD	Order	Levels of effectiveness				M	SD	Order
		0	1	2	3				0	1	2	3			
Presentation method (explaining, telling stories)	n	8	145	403	133	1.92	0.67	4	8	116	463	96	1.89	0.60	6
	%	1.1	20.7	57.4	18.9				1.1	16.5	66.0	13.7			
	n	4	91	413	185	2.10	0.64	1	3	64	467	149	2.06	0.56	1
	%	0.6	13	58.8	26.4				0.4	9.1	66.5	21.2			
Using visual aid method	n	17	211	316	142	1.81	0.77	5	10	87	442	138	1.97	0.62	4
	%		2.4	30.1	45.0	20.2				1.4	12.4	63.0	19.7		
	n	11	100	391	184	2.04	0.69	2	7	62	462	150	2.05	0.58	2
	%		1.6	14.2	55.7	26.2				1.0	8.8	65.8	21.4		
Brainstorming method (problem solving, situation handling, brainstorming)	n	9	212	363	107	1.79	0.70	9	14	124	469	76	1.84	0.60	7
	%	1.3	30.2	51.7	15.2				2.0	17.7	66.8	10.			
		8													
	n	14	145	385	146	1.93	0.71	3	16	77	477	110	1.94	0.61	5
Role playing method	%	2.0	20.7	54.8	20.8				2.3	11.0	67.9	15.7			
	n	29	285	294	83	1.60	0.75	6	19	130	445	86	1.82	0.65	8
	%		4.1	40.6	41.9	11.8				2.7	18.5	63.4	12.3		
	n	14	172	362	141	1.88	0.73	8	4	73	457	146	2.03	0.58	3
Gaming method	%		2.0	24.5	51.6	20.1				0.6	10.4	65.1	20.8		
	n	156	344	154	14	0.99	0.74	7	133	226	267	21	1.17	0.82	9
	%		22.2	49.0	21.9	2.0				18.9	32.2	38.0	3.0		

students ($M = 1.32$); Teach life skills as an independent subject ($M = 1.54$).

The top three indicators with the highest levels of effectiveness listed diminutively: Infuse teaching life skills into other subjects ($M = 2.11$); Infuse teaching life skills into class meetings ($M = 2.06$) and Infuse teaching life skills into banner cheers, breaks ($M = 2.01$). The bottom three ones which were least capable are listed in ascending order: Teach life skills through counseling and consultation ($M = 1.48$); Hold life skills seminars for students ($M = 1.55$); Teach life skills as an independent subject ($M = 1.62$).

Among the nine teaching methods of life skills on which this research examined the perceptions of elementary educators, the most frequent one is Conversation method (asking-answering, exchanging ideas/information) ($M = 2.10$); followed by Practicing method ($M = 2.04$) and less frequent method is Discussion method ($M = 1.93$). The bottom three least common indicators are respectively: Brainstorming method (problem-solving, situation handling, brainstorming) ($M = 1.79$); Gaming method ($M = 1.88$), and Project method ($M = 0.99$).

The three indicators with the highest average points in effectiveness are as below: Conversation method (asking answering, exchanging ideas/information) ($M = 2.06$); Practicing method ($M = 2.05$); Gaming method ($M = 2.03$). The three indicators with the lowest average points are as below: Project method ($M = 1.17$); Role playing method ($M = 1.82$); Brainstorming method (problem solving, situation handling, brainstorming) ($M = 1.84$).

From the records of this research, it could be seen that the primary type of participants is Teacher (75.4%) and followed by Coordinator with 10.1 percent. The study indicates that the most common form of Life Skills Education is infusing teaching life skills into other subjects, which is also the most effective form. This form of Life Skills Education could be seen in other countries such as Nigeria (Adewale 2011). The most remarkable feature is that infusing teaching life skills into activities of Ho Chi Minh Young Pioneer Organization and Children Star is the fifth common form. Especially, Children Star, a Vietnamese activity-based format in which children are taught to be good kids, doesn't show much effectiveness in educating life skills. The

results surveyed from this study also proved that the level of frequency that educators teach all forms of life skills is not considered high. This finding is comparable to the previous study (Roselyne 2014), which revealed that life skills were taught regularly by only 23.33 percent of the teachers.

It is an essential finding in the understanding of the fact that in Vietnamese elementary schools, educators and teachers mainly considered Life Skills Education as a small part. Educational activities that include an in-depth knowledge of Life Skills Education such as: Teaching life skills as an independent subject; Holding life skills seminars for students; Teaching life skills through counseling and consultation are neither organized regularly nor useful.

In terms of teaching methods, this study also proves that the conversation method (asking answering, exchanging ideas/information) is the most common and effective method at the same time. Noticeably, the gaming method is the third effective method though it holds the eighth position.

This research still contains several limitations. Regarding the limitations of this study, it could be argued that the schools in the urban area participating in this study surpass the ones in the rural area. Since the data collection was only conducted once, it has also contributed to the existing limitations. The approach utilized suffers from the limitation that a quantitative approach would not provide a notion on the possible obstacles that educators may face toward teaching life skills. As the role of learners is as essential as educators' role, there should be a study of their perceptions of Life Skills Education.

CONCLUSION

The study findings showed that most of the educators and teachers believed that the form and teaching methods of Life Skills Education that they taught for their students were effective. To the best of the authors' far-reaching knowledge, this is the first report on elementary educators' perception of Life Skills Education in Vietnam. All results obtained from this research are necessary for the raise in educators' understanding of Life Skills Education to improve life skills teaching quality as well as teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, future research should

examine the learners' perception of Life Skills Education strategically.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several suggestions are offered. First, the findings of the study helped to establish critical guidelines and frameworks for approaches to enhance Vietnam's life skills education. Besides, these findings will include crucial consideration and consequences for different levels of leaders in the broader context of Vietnamese higher education institutions to identify steps to strengthen Vietnamese teachers and educators' perspectives on the life-skilled education.

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