

Life Skills for 21st Century

Bhagyashree Dudhade

Swami Vivekanand College of Education, Pune, Maharashtra, India

Abstract

The term '*Life Skills*' refers to the skills you need to make the most out of life. Life skills are usually associated with managing and living a better quality of life. They help us to accomplish our ambitions and live to our full potential. There is no definitive list of life skills. Certain skills may be more or less relevant to you depending on your life circumstances, your culture, beliefs, age, geographic location, etc. By learning new skills we increase our understanding of the world around us and equip ourselves with the tools we need to live a more productive and fulfilling life, finding ways to cope with the challenges that life, inevitably, throws at us.

The term **21st century skills** refers to a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed by educators, school reformers, college professors, employers, and others to be critically important to succeed in today's world, particularly in collegiate programs and contemporary careers and workplaces. Generally speaking, 21st century skills can be applied in all academic subject areas, educational, career, and civic settings throughout a student's life. While the specific skills deemed to be "21st century skills" may be defined, categorized, and determined differently from person to person, place to place, or school to school, the term does reflect a general—if somewhat loose and shifting—consensus. The 21st century skills are a set of abilities that students need to develop in order to succeed in the information age.

The paper will throw light on blending Life Skills with 21st century skills, essential for the adolescents, for leading a productive and successful life. In fact Life Skills are the inevitable part of the modern era which are essential to sustain in the cut-throat competition throughout the Globe.

KEYWORDS: Life Skills, 21st century skills, adolescents, blending, competition, Globe

Life Skills

The term '*Life Skills*' refers to the skills you need to make the most out of life.

Life skills are usually associated with managing and living a better quality of life. They help us to accomplish our ambitions and live to our full potential.

Life skills equip students to thrive in the classroom and in the world beyond. The 21st century life skills are mainly flexibility, initiative, social skills, productivity, and leadership.

"Life Skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life".

- WHO

Categories of Life Skills

☞ Social Skills

1. Self Awareness
2. Empathy
3. Effective communication
4. Interpersonal relationship
- ☞ **Thinking Skills**
5. Critical thinking
6. Creative thinking
7. Problem Solving
8. Decision making
- ☞ **Coping skills**
9. Coping with stress
10. Coping with emotions

Essential Life Skills

There is no definitive list of life skills. Certain skills may be more or less relevant to you depending on your life circumstances, your culture, beliefs, age, geographic location, etc.

Different life skills will be more or less relevant at different times in your life, for example:

- When at school or university, you'll need **study skills**
- When buying a house, **negotiation skills** may be needed
- You'll need to work on your **employability skills** to get a job
- When you have a job, **leadership** and **presentation skills** may be useful, along with a whole host of other skills
- When you start a family, **time management** and **organising skills** are likely to become important
- There will be times throughout your life when you'll need **conflict resolution**, **stress-management** and **problem solving** skills too

However...

Perhaps the most important life skill is the ability and willingness to learn.

By learning new skills we increase our understanding of the world around us and equip ourselves with the tools we need to live a more productive and fulfilling life, finding ways to cope with the challenges that life, inevitably, throws at us.

Life skills are not always taught directly but often learned indirectly through experience and practice.

21st Century Skills

The term **21st century skills** refers to a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed—by educators, school reformers, college professors, employers, and others — to be critically important to success in today's world, particularly in collegiate programs and contemporary careers and workplaces. Generally speaking, 21st century skills can be applied in all academic subject areas, and in all educational, career, and civic settings throughout a student's life.

It should be noted that the “21st century skills” concept encompasses a wide-ranging and amorphous body of knowledge and skills that is not easy to define and that has not been

officially codified or categorized. While the term is widely used in education, it is not always defined consistently, which can lead to confusion and divergent interpretations. In addition, a number of related terms—including *applied skills*, *cross-curricular skills*, *cross-disciplinary skills*, *interdisciplinary skills*, *transferable skills*, *transversal skills*, *non cognitive skills*, and *soft skills*, among others — are also widely used in reference to the general forms of knowledge and skill commonly associated with 21st century skills. While these different terms may not be strictly synonymous, and they may have divergent or specialized meanings in certain technical contexts, these diverse sets of skills are being addressed in this one entry for the purposes of practicality and usefulness.

While the specific skills deemed to be “21st century skills” may be defined, categorized, and determined differently from person to person, place to place, or school to school, the term does reflect a general—if somewhat loose and shifting—consensus. The following list provides a brief illustrative overview of the knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits commonly associated with 21st century skills:

- Critical thinking, problem solving, reasoning, analysis, interpretation, synthesizing information
- Research skills and practices, interrogative questioning
- Creativity, artistry, curiosity, imagination, innovation, personal expression
- Perseverance, self-direction, planning, self-discipline, adaptability, initiative
- Oral and written communication, public speaking and presenting, listening
- Leadership, teamwork, collaboration, cooperation, facility in using virtual workspaces
- Information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, media and internet literacy, data interpretation and analysis, computer programming
- Civic, ethical, and social-justice literacy
- Economic and financial literacy, entrepreneurialism
- Global awareness, multicultural literacy, humanitarianism
- Scientific literacy and reasoning, the scientific method
- Environmental and conservation literacy, ecosystems understanding
- Health and wellness literacy, including nutrition, diet, exercise, and public health and safety

While many individuals and organizations have proposed definitions of 21st century skills, and most states have adopted learning standards that include or address cross-disciplinary skills, the following are three popular models that can serve to illustrate the concept and its applications in education:

- Framework for 21st Century Learning (The Partnership for 21st Century Skills)
- Four Keys to College and Career Readiness (David T. Conley and the Educational Policy Improvement Center)
- Seven Survival Skills (Tony Wagner and the Change Leadership Group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education)

Blending Life Skills with 21st century skills

Generally speaking, the 21st century skills concept is motivated by the belief that teaching students the most relevant, useful, in-demand, and universally applicable skills should be prioritized in today’s schools and by the related belief that many schools may not

sufficiently prioritize such skills or effectively teach them to students. The basic idea is that students, who will come of age in the 21st century, need to be taught different skills than those learned by students in the 20th century, and that the skills they learn should reflect the specific demands that will be placed upon them in a complex, competitive, knowledge-based, information-age, technology-driven economy and society.

What are the skills students will need in the 21st century?

The 21st century dawned as the beginning of the Digital Age – a time of unprecedented growth in technology and its subsequent information explosion. Never before have the tools for information access and management made such an impact on the way we live, work, shop and play. New technologies and tools multiply daily and the new technologies of today are outdated almost as soon as they reach the market. Numerous studies and reports have emerged over the past decade that seek to identify the life, career, and learning skills that define the skills needed for success in the 21st century world. While there are some differences in how the skills are categorized or interpreted, there are also many commonalities. Common skills across most of the studies include:

Creativity and Innovation - Using knowledge and understanding to create new ways of thinking in order to find solutions to new problems and to create new products and services.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving - Applying higher order thinking to new problems and issues, using appropriate reasoning as they effectively analyze the problem and make decisions about the most effective ways to solve the problem.

Communication - Communicating effectively in a wide variety of forms and contexts for a wide range of purposes and using multiple media and technologies.

Collaboration - Working with others respectfully and effectively to create, use and share knowledge, solutions and innovations.

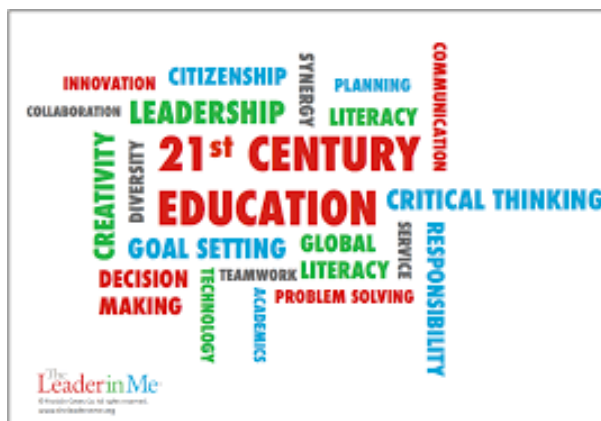
Information Management - Accessing, analyzing, synthesizing, creating and sharing information from multiple sources.

Effective Use of Technology - Creating the capacity to identify and use technology efficiently, effectively and ethically as a tool to access, organize, evaluate and share information.

Career and Life Skills - Developing skills for becoming self-directed, independent learners and workers who can adapt to change, manage projects, take responsibility for their work, lead others and produce results.

Cultural Awareness - Developing cultural competence in working with others by recognizing and respecting cultural differences and work with others from a wide range of cultural and social backgrounds.

“Exemplary science education can offer a rich context for developing many 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and information literacy. These skills not only contribute to a well-prepared workforce of the future but also give all individuals life skills that help them succeed.” (NSTA, 2011)



Integrating 21st Century Skills with Content

These skills are about the thinking processes and behaviors, students will use as they learn subject area content and work with others to deepen their understanding of the content. All of the frameworks emphasize the need to ground 21st century skills in core content, and especially in an interdisciplinary fashion. Organizing instruction around important concepts and “big ideas” helps students create conceptual structures for storing, retrieving and using information in new and unanticipated ways. As the 21st century skills are integrated into content, some key design principles include -

- Connecting the content knowledge to real-world applications and problem situations that enable students to see how what they are learning connects with their lives and the world around them. The work that is asked of students must be authentic work that is relevant and that mirrors real life.
- Emphasizing deep understanding of the learning by focusing on projects and problems that require students to use the content knowledge in new ways and to extend their understanding through collaboration with others. Helping students understand and monitor the thinking processes they are using by including meta cognitive activities that ask students to reflect on their use of thinking structures and the effectiveness of the thinking strategies they employed.
- Using technology to help students access, analyze, organize and share what they are learning and allow students to independently locate appropriate tools for the task.
- Providing opportunities for students to become “creators as well as consumers of published information” (Apple, 2008) by providing opportunities for creating and verifying their own entries in collaborative sites and evaluating contributions of others.
- Engaging students in solving complex problems that require higher order thinking and application of content and that result in new perspectives and solutions to problems.
- Providing opportunities for students to work collaborative as they gather information, solve problems, share ideas, and generate new ideas.
- Developing life and career skills by creating opportunities for students to become self-directed learners who take responsibility for their own learning and who learn how to work effectively with others.
- Helping students make connections between subjects, concepts and ideas and with others, including those outside of the classroom. The keys to integrating 21st century skills into the classroom are application, connections and participation.

German psychologist Herman Ebbinghaus first advanced our understanding of learning and retention over 125 years ago. His research showed that retention is very low when there context for the learning and when the learning is not reinforced with practice. “Most humans tend to forget 50% of newly learned knowledge in a matter of days or weeks ... meaningful material (e.g. things that make sense because they relate to things we already know) takes only about one tenth the effort to learn and the forgetting is relatively gradual.” (Haines, 2006) Infusing 21st century skills with subject area content, and especially cross-curricular content, provides students with strong learning capacity and helps them retain the learning for ongoing use.

While 21st century skills are relevant to all areas of schooling and academic study, and the skills may be taught in a wide variety of in-school and outside-of-school settings, there are a few primary ways in which 21st century skills intersect with efforts to improve schools:

- Teachers may be more intentional about teaching cross-disciplinary skills in subject-area courses. For example, in a science course students might be required to learn research methods that can also be applied in other disciplines; articulate technical scientific concepts in verbal, written, and graphic forms; present lab results to a panel of working scientists; or use sophisticated technologies, software programs, and multimedia applications as an extension of an assigned project.
- States, accrediting organizations, and schools may require 21st century skills to be taught and assessed in courses. For example, states can adopt learning standards that explicitly describe cross-disciplinary skills, and assessments may be designed or modified to evaluate whether students have acquired and mastered certain skills.
- Schools and teachers may use educational approaches that inherently encourage or facilitate the acquisition of cross-disciplinary skills. For example, educational strategies such as authentic learning, demonstrations of learning, or project-based learning tend to be cross-disciplinary in nature, and students—in the process of completing a research project, for example—may have to use a variety of applied skills, multiple technologies, and new ways of analyzing and processing information, while also taking initiative, thinking creatively, planning out the process, and working collaboratively in teams with other students.
- Schools may allow students to pursue alternative learning pathways in which students earn academic credit and satisfy graduation requirements by completing an internship, apprenticeship, or volunteer experience, for example. In this case, students might acquire a variety of practical, job-related skills and work habits, while also completing academic coursework and meeting the same learning standards required of students in more traditional academic courses.

How Should Instruction Change to Prepare Students for Success in the 21st Century?

The 21st century skills are not really different. We have always wanted students to be creative thinkers and problem solvers who have the skills necessary to function effectively in society and in the workplace. However, the way in which these skills are incorporated in the classroom and how technology is integrated will greatly change instruction. Indeed, with technology, today’s classroom transcends physical walls and

reaches around the globe. In addition, we need to plan instruction with an understanding of the “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001) who have grown up in the Digital Age and who expect learning to be interactive, engaging and up-to-date. Instruction that meets the needs of today’s students will incorporate

- A variety of learning opportunities and activities
- The use of appropriate technology tools to accomplish learning goals
- Project- and problem- based learning
- Cross-curricular connections
- A focus on inquiry and the student-led investigations
- Collaborative learning environments, both within and beyond the classroom
- High levels of visualization and the use of visuals to increase understanding
- Frequent, formative assessments including the use of self-assessment.

The role of teachers in a 21st century classroom shifts from that of the “expert” to that of the “facilitator.” The focus for instruction shifts from “knowing” to being able to use and apply information in relevant ways. Students who are being prepared for the 21st century will be involved in “continuous cycles of learning” (Lemke, et al, 2003) that lead to deeper understanding of the subject area content and that develop the critical skills for meeting the challenges of the future.

References

Books:

1. Facilitator's Manual on Enhancing Life Skills. Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development
2. Life Skills Education: Std. I to VIII. Maharashtra State Council of Educational Research and Training

Websites:

1. http://cosee.umaine.edu/files/coseeos/21st_century_skills.pdf
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_skills
3. <http://thoughtfullearning.com/resources/what-are-21st-century-skills>
4. <http://thoughtfullearning.com/resources/what-are-life-skills>
5. <http://www.essentiallifekills.net>
6. <http://www.lifekillsbook.com/TOC.pdf>
7. <http://www.skillsyouneed.com/general/life-skills.html>
8. <http://www.unicef.org/lifekills/index.html>
9. http://www.unicef.org/lifekills/index_whichskills.html