

THE IMPACT OF LIFE SKILLS TRAINING ON EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN SOUTH PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT

This study used a quantitative research approach to examine the impact of life skills training on emotional intelligence and mental health among college students. A quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design was used. The study included 300 college students (150 in the experimental group and 150 in the control group), aged 18–22 years, selected through purposive sampling. During the pretest, participants were assessed using the Life Skills Assessment Scale (LSAS), the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue), and the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS). During the posttest, the Youth Life Skills Scale (YLSS), the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), and the WHO-5 Well-Being Index were administered. The experimental group received a Higher Education Department (HED) module-based life skills training program consisting of 15 sessions covering interpersonal, social, cognitive, wellness, and digital skills, while the control group received no intervention. The findings indicated that the experimental group showed significant improvements in life skills, emotional intelligence, and mental health compared with the control group. The study concludes that life skills training is an effective intervention for promoting emotional intelligence and mental health among college students. Policy implications and future recommendations have been provided.

I. INTRODUCTION

The move to college marks an important developmental phase in which students face rising academic pressures, social expectations, career worries, and personal responsibilities. These challenges can impact their emotional and mental health and make adapting to college life difficult. In this situation, life skills are crucial in helping students build the psychosocial abilities needed to handle everyday challenges successfully. Skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, communication, interpersonal skills, decision-making, problem-solving, and stress management can help students develop healthy coping strategies and maintain good mental health. (Arnett, 2000; Credé & Niehorster, 2012; WHO, 1997).

Life skills training has therefore gained importance as an educational and psychological approach to enhance students' emotional competence, resilience, coping skills, and overall well-being. By offering practical skills for managing emotions, solving problems, making suitable decisions, and building positive relationships, life skills training can help students respond more effectively to academic, social, and personal challenges. These skills are especially relevant to emotional intelligence and mental health, as students who are better at understanding and

regulating their emotions may experience better psychological adjustment and improved interpersonal skills (Botvin & Griffin, 2004; Goleman, 1995; Mayer et al., 2004).

Despite growing recognition of the importance of life skills education, there has been limited focus on the effectiveness of structured life skills interventions in improving emotional intelligence and mental health among college students in Pakistan. Specifically, there is a need for empirical evidence on the effectiveness of well-structured life skills programs in higher education. The present study therefore aims to assess the effectiveness of the Higher Education Department's life skills training module in boosting emotional intelligence and promoting mental health among college students (Nasheeda et al., 2019).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of life skills training in boosting students' emotional intelligence, psychological resilience, coping strategies, and overall well-being cannot be overstated (Botvin & Griffin, 2004; Nasheeda et al., 2019). College students frequently encounter academic pressures, exam anxiety, uncertain career paths, peer competition, family expectations, and interpersonal conflicts, all of which can contribute to stress, anxiety, and psychological distress (Beiter et al., 2015; Auerbach et al., 2016). Life skills education aims to equip students with essential psychosocial tools—such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, effective communication, interpersonal skills, decision-making, problem-solving, empathy, and stress management—that are crucial for healthy psychological adjustment and successful functioning (WHO, 1997; Mangrulkar et al., 2001).

Previous research compellingly demonstrates how life skills training significantly boosts students' emotional and psychological development. Botvin and Griffin (2004) showed that structured interventions in life skills can notably enhance coping mechanisms and foster positive developmental outcomes among youth. Likewise, Nasheeda et al. (2019) found that life skills education is crucial in helping young people manage emotional challenges, build resilience, and improve mental health. Studies on emotional intelligence further reveal that individuals proficient in perceiving, understanding, and regulating their emotions tend to form stronger interpersonal bonds, manage stress more effectively, and exhibit greater psychological resilience (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer et al., 2008). Additionally, Keyes argued that positive mental health is directly linked to effective psychological and social functioning, while Auerbach et al. (2016) highlighted the alarming prevalence of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress among college students, underscoring the urgent need for impactful preventive measures. Overall, these compelling findings confirm that life skills training not only enhances emotional intelligence but also plays a vital role in improving mental health by reinforcing students' emotional regulation, coping skills, resilience, and adaptive functioning (Botvin & Griffin, 2004; Nasheeda et al., 2019).

Pakistan's education system primarily emphasizes academic achievement and examination performance, with limited focus on developing life skills, emotional intelligence, and mental well-being. Although educational policies recognize the importance of 21st-century skills, their implementation remains limited because of inadequate teacher training, outdated curricula, and the lack of structured life skills programs. As a result, many students have limited opportunities to develop essential competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, communication, and emotional regulation. Therefore, integrating structured life skills training into educational institutions is essential for promoting students' holistic development, emotional intelligence, and mental well-being (Haider & Burfat, 2017; Barlas et al., 2022; Jamil et al., 2024).

Objectives

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of life skills training in enhancing students' life skills competencies.
2. To investigate the impact of life skills training on emotional intelligence and mental health with life among students.

Hypotheses

1. The students who attended life skills training will have a higher emotional intelligence than students who do not receive training.
2. Students who have life skills training will score higher on mental health than students who do not have it.
3. There will be a significant difference in emotional intelligence and mental health between students who receive life skills training and those who do not receive life skills training.

III. METHOD

Research Design & Sample

In this study, a quantitative, quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group was used to examine the impact of life skills training on emotional intelligence and mental health among college students. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. The design enabled comparison between the pre-test and post-test of both the experimental group and the control group that received assessment training. The sample consisted of 300 college students. The experimental group comprised 150 participants, while the control group also comprised 150 participants. The participants were aged 18- 22 years and included both male and female undergraduate students from two colleges in Punjab, Pakistan. The intervention for the experimental group consisted of a life skills training program based on the Higher Education Department (HED) Life Skills Module, delivered over 15 sessions. The control group did not receive any training during the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Life Skills Training Modules

Based on the HED Government of Pakistan Life Skills Module (2021), the program is divided into five key life skill areas. Below is a brief academic summary suitable for a thesis methodology or intervention description. **[1]** Interpersonal Skills. Interpersonal skills focus on helping students develop the ability to build healthy relationships, communicate effectively, and manage emotions. The module covers topics such as self-awareness, money management, and anger management to help students regulate emotions, make responsible choices, and interact positively with others. **[2]** Social Skills. Social skills focus on improving students' interactions with others through effective communication, active listening, and conflict resolution. These skills strengthen teamwork, empathy, cooperation, and the ability to resolve disagreements peacefully, all while fostering respectful and positive social relationships. **[3]** Cognitive Skills. Cognitive skills strengthen students' thinking and reasoning abilities. The module emphasizes decision-making, problem-solving, and logical reasoning, enabling students to analyze situations critically, evaluate alternatives, and make informed and responsible decisions. **[4]** Wellness Skills. The wellness component encourages holistic health by emphasizing mental well-being, stress reduction, and mindfulness. Students learn techniques for maintaining emotional stability, managing stress efficiently, practicing self-care, and adopting healthy habits that enhance overall wellness. **[5]** Digital Skills. Digital skills prepare students to use technology responsibly and effectively. The module promotes digital literacy, safe internet habits, responsible social media use, online communication, and awareness of digital citizenship to help students navigate the digital world ethically and productively.

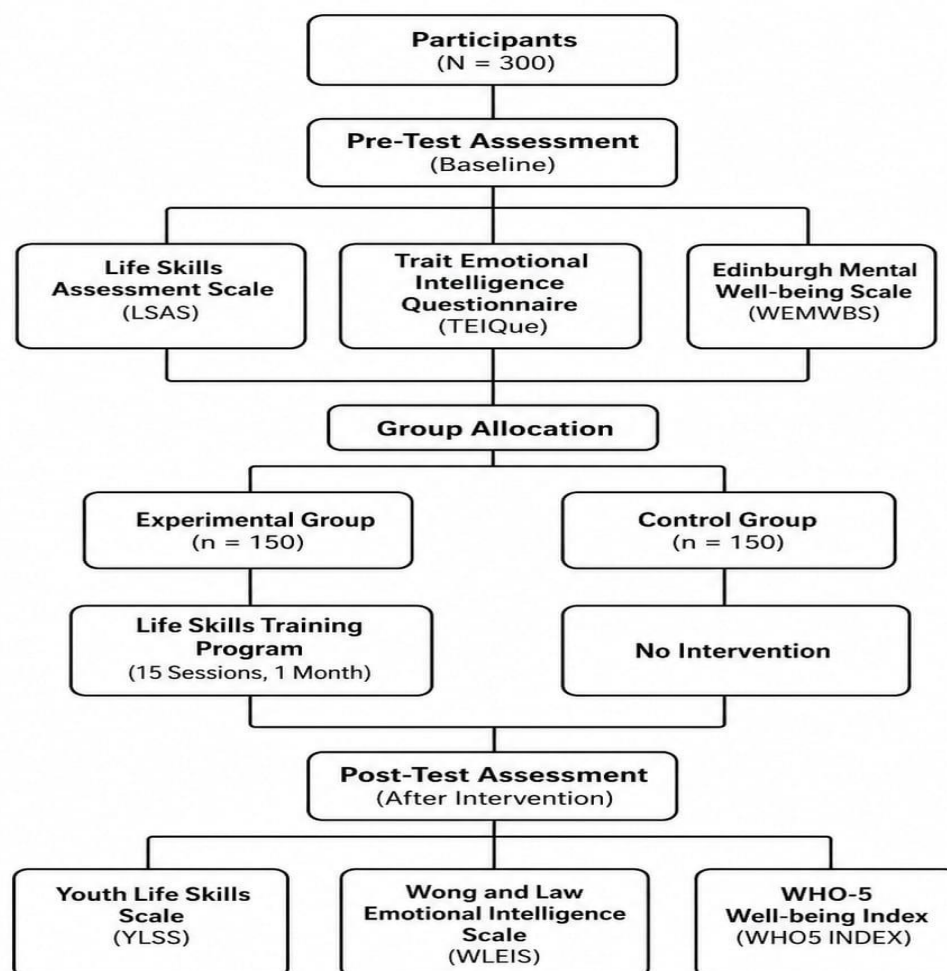
Measures

The study used standardized instruments to assess the study variables. In the pretest, life skills were assessed using the Life Skills Assessment Scale (LSAS), emotional intelligence using the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Adolescent Short Form (TEIQue-ASF), and mental well-being using the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS). Following the intervention, posttest life skills were measured using the Youth Life Skills Scale (YLSS), posttest emotional intelligence using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), and posttest psychological well-being using the WHO-5 Well-Being Index. All instruments employed Likert-type response scales, with higher scores indicating higher levels of the respective constructs. All instruments have demonstrated adequate psychometric properties and have been used in past research. (Pearson et al., 2014; Petrides et al., 2006; Wong & Law, 2002; World Health Organization, 1998).

Procedure

The study used a pretest-posttest control-group experimental design with 300 students, equally divided into an experimental group and a control group. Initially, participants were informed about the study's aims, provided informed consent, and shared their perspectives on key challenges and opportunities. Both groups completed baseline pre-tests assessing emotional intelligence and mental health using alternative versions of the assessment tools to minimize measurement bias. Over a one-month period, the experimental group participated in 15 structured training sessions, each lasting 30 to 35 minutes, based on the standardized Life Skills Module jointly developed by the Higher Education Department (HED) in July 2021. This publicly available open resource focuses on interpersonal, social, cognitive, wellness, and digital skills—including decision-making, emotional regulation, and stress management—delivered in an interactive environment to foster personal growth. Meanwhile, the control group received no intervention, enabling us to accurately measure the true impact of the training program. Following the training, both groups completed post-test evaluations using conceptually related tools, and all data were statistically analyzed, with all procedures strictly adhering to ethical guidelines for participant safety and confidentiality without requiring separate permission for the published module. Ethical guidelines were followed in accordance with APA VII standards to ensure participants' safety and rights. Before participation, individuals were informed about the study purpose, procedures, and the one-month life skills training, and informed consent was obtained. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by not collecting identifiable information, and data were used only for research purposes. The study was designed to avoid any psychological harm, and all procedures ensured respect for participants' privacy and dignity.

Figure I: Research Model about Study



IV.RESULTS

Table I: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=300)

Characteristic	Category	<i>n</i> (%)
Gender	Male	30(10.0)
	Female	270(90.0)
Age	18–22 years	300(100)
Marital Status	Single	276(92.0)
	Married	24(8.0)
Family System	Nuclear	221(73.7)
	Joint	79(26.3)
Socioeconomic Status	50,000–100,000	196(65.3)
	100,000–200,000	89(29.7)
	Above 200,000	15(5.0)

Note. *n*= Frequency, % = percentages

The demographic characteristics of the participants ((*N* = 300)) indicated that the sample consisted primarily of female participants (90.0%, (*n* = 270)), with males representing 10.0% ((*n* = 30)). All participants were between 18 to 22 years of age. Most participants were single (92.0%, (*n* = 276)) and belonged to nuclear families (73.7%, (*n* = 221)). In terms of monthly household income, the majority reported an income between 50,000 and 100,000 (65.3%, (*n* = 196)), followed by 100,000–200,000 (29.7%, (*n* = 89)) and above 200,000 (5.0%, (*n* = 15)).

Table II: Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Emotional Intelligence and Mental Health (N=300)

Outcome	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Pre-Emotional Intelligence	LSAS	.183	3.16	.002
	YLSS	.065	1.12	.265
Pre Mental Health	LSAS	.062	1.05	.294
	YLSS	-.017	-1.27	.205
Post Emotional Intelligence	LSAS	.508	10.78	.001
	YLSS	-.244	-5.17	.001
Post Mental Health	LSAS	.082	1.40	.164
	YLSS	.014	0.23	.818

Note. LSAS= Life Skills Assessment Scale, YLSS = Youth Life Skills Scale

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether the Life Skills Assessment Scale (Pre) and the Youth Life Skills Scale (Post) predicted participants' psychological outcomes. The results showed that the Life Skills Assessment Scale (Pre) significantly predicted mental well-being ($\beta = .508$, $p < .001$) and trait emotional intelligence ($\beta = .183$, $p = .002$). Additionally, Youth Life Skills Scale (Post) significantly predicted mental well-being ($\beta = -.244$, $p < .001$). It suggests that the life skills training was successful in enhancing participants' psychological outcomes. Life skills strongly predicted mental well-being and emotional intelligence, showing that students who improved their life skills after the intervention also experienced better mental well-being and higher emotional intelligence. These results support the effectiveness of the life skills training program.

Table IV: Analysis of Paired-Sample t-test of pre- and post-test (N=300)

Variables	Mean Differences	SD	t	df	p
LSAS Pre – YLSS Post	33.3	96.07	5.99	299	.000***
TEIQue Pre – WLEIS Post	51.86	16.28	55.19	299	.000***
WEMWBS Pre – WHO Post	26.28	8.24	55.22	299	.000***

Note. SD = Standard Deviation, DF = Degrees of Freedom, LSAS= Life Skills Assessment Scale, YLSS = Youth Life Skills Scale, TEIQue = Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, WLEIS = Wong Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, WEMWBS = Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale, WHO = WHO-5 Well-Being Index. *** $p < .001$

The data clearly demonstrate that the intervention significantly enhanced participants' life skills, emotional intelligence, and mental well-being. Paired-samples t-tests revealed highly significant improvements in all measures: a mean difference of 33.23 in life skills scores ($t = 5.99, p < .001$), 51.86 in emotional intelligence ($t = 55.19, p < .001$), and 26.28 in mental well-being ($t = 55.22, p < .001$). These significant changes demonstrate the program's effectiveness, emphasizing its positive and meaningful influence on participants. It suggests that participants experienced notable improvements in life skills, emotional intelligence, and mental well-being following the intervention. These findings show that the life skills training successfully enhanced students' psychological functioning and overall well-being.

Table V: Independent-samples t-test mean differences in Experimental and Control groups (N=300)

Scales	Experimental M(SD) (n=150)	Control M(SD) (n=150)	t	df	Mean Differences	p
LSAS	483.66(33.93)	355.39 (77.60)	18.55	203.98	128.27	.001
TEIQue	124.48(15.67)	120.95 (11.13)	2.25	268.77	3.53	.025
WEMWBS	42.61(7.72)	42.76 (7.46)	-0.17	297.64	-0.15	.867
YLSS	391.89(16.88)	380.89 (32.59)	-3.60	223.58	-10.80	.001
WLEIS	75.21(7.54)	66.50 (9.23)	8.95	286.64	8.71	.001
WHO Index scale	16.75(3.25)	16.07 (3.11)	1.84	297.43	0.67	0.67

Note. LSAS = Life Skills Assessment Scale, TEIQ = Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, WEMWBS = Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, YLSS = Youth Life Skills Scale, WLEIS = Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, WHO-5 Well-Being Index Scale = The World Health Organization Five Wellbeing Index Scale.

The results indicated that the significant improvements observed in the Life Skills Assessment Scale, $t(203.98) = 18.55, p < .001$, Trait Emotional Intelligence, $t(268.77) = 2.25, p = .025$, Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, $t(286.64) = 8.95, p < .001$, and Youth Life Skills Scale, $t(223.58) = -3.60, p < .001$. These findings strongly highlight the intervention's significant effect on improving both life skills and emotional intelligence. Although some measures did not reach statistical significance, the steady upward trend in well-being among participants in the experimental group after the intervention convincingly confirms the approach's effectiveness. This suggests that participants' life skills and emotional intelligence increased following the intervention. Notable changes were seen in the Life Skills Assessment Scale, Youth Life Skills Scale, Trait Emotional Intelligence, and Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, demonstrating that the life skills training effectively enhanced participants' abilities in these areas.

Table VI: Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) for the Impact of Life Skills on Emotional Intelligence and Mental Health (N=300)

Analysis	Outcome Variable	Test Statistic	F	df	p	Partial η^2
Pretest	Combined dependent variables	Pillai's Trace = .017	2.63	(2,297)	.074	.017
	Emotional Intelligence (TEIQ)	—	5.05	(1,298)	.025	.017
	Mental Well-Being (WEMWBS)	—	0.03	(1,298)	.867	.001
Posttest	Combined dependent variables	Pillai's Trace = .223	42.59	(2,297)	.001	.223
	Emotional Intelligence (WLEIS)	—	80.01	(1,298)	.001	.212
	Mental Well-Being (WHO-5)	—	3.37	(1,298)	.067	.011

The post-test MANOVA revealed a significant overall effect of the life skills training program on the combined outcome variables, Pillai's Trace = .223, $F(2, 297) = 42.59$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .223$. Follow-up analyses showed a significant improvement in emotional intelligence, $F(1, 298) = 80.01$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .212$, indicating that the life skills training program effectively enhanced students' emotional intelligence. The MANOVA results showed a significant multivariate effect of life skills on the combined pretest and post test scores. Further analyses indicated that life skills significantly impacted emotional intelligence and mental well-being.

V. DISCUSSION

The present study examined the effectiveness of life skills training in improving emotional intelligence and mental health among college students. The results supported the proposed hypotheses and showed that the intervention produced positive and encouraging outcomes. The first hypothesis was confirmed, as students who participated in life skills training demonstrated higher levels of emotional intelligence than those who did not. This suggests that the intervention helped develop students' self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal skills. These findings align with Goleman (1995), who proposed that emotional intelligence can be cultivated through structured learning and practice. (Goleman, 1995; UNICEF, 2023; WHO, 2024). The second hypothesis was also supported, as students in the life skills training group achieved significantly better mental health outcomes than those in the control group. This indicates that the intervention effectively enhanced participants' psychological well-being by strengthening coping skills, stress management, emotional regulation, and resilience. The results imply that structured life skills training can be an effective way to promote positive mental health among students. These findings are consistent with recent evidence showing that life skills-based training programs improve psychological well-being, resilience, and adaptive coping among adolescents and young adults, leading to better mental health outcomes (WHO, 2024; UNICEF, 2024; OECD, 2025).

The third hypothesis was confirmed by the significant differences seen between experimental and control groups after the training program. Overall, the findings are positive, suggesting that life skills training effectively improves students' emotional intelligence and mental health. These results align with earlier studies indicating that life skills programs foster positive emotional and psychological development in students (Mahoney et al., 2021; McCall et al., 2023). The study emphasizes the need for life skills training during school years, especially since Pakistan's education system primarily emphasizes academic success while neglecting the development of social-emotional skills. Therefore, many students lack core abilities such as emotional regulation, communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving, which are crucial for navigating academic and personal challenges. Recent educational reports recommend incorporating life skills into the curriculum to promote overall student development and enhance educational results (OECD, 2023; Cipriano et al., 2023).

Limitations

This study involved short-term training program. Conducting long-term follow-up would be more effective in assessing whether the improvements are maintained over time. Second, the focus was solely on quantitative data, which does not offer detailed qualitative insights into students' personal experiences with life skills training; Including interviews or open-ended responses could have provided a deeper understanding of how students viewed the training.

Recommendations for Future Research

- It is recommended that life skills training programs be regularly integrated into educational institutions to enhance students' emotional intelligence, coping skills, and psychological growth.
- Educational institutions should organize workshops, seminars, and structured training sessions focused on communication skills, emotional regulation, decision-making, problem-solving, and stress management.
- Future life skills programs should be carried out over a longer period, as psychological well-being may require ongoing practice and support to achieve noticeable improvement.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study compellingly demonstrates that life skills training has a profound impact on students, significantly enhancing their emotional intelligence, mental health, and their capacity to navigate social and psychological challenges. The evidence clearly supports the urgent need to adopt such programs, which can foster positive psychological growth, boost overall well-being, and empower individuals with vital emotional skills. In Pakistan, the escalating academic, social, and emotional difficulties faced by students make it imperative to integrate life skills training into the education system. Recognizing this critical need, the Higher Education Department (HED) Punjab and the National Curriculum Council have prioritized the inclusion of Life Skills-Based Education (LSBE) modules. These modules focus on essential competencies such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, self-awareness, and mental well-being—tools that are essential for students to effectively handle academic pressures and real-world challenges. Embracing these life skills is not just beneficial but vital for shaping resilient, capable individuals prepared for the demands of the modern world, reflecting a forward-thinking approach to education in Pakistan.

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