

Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy of Education and Life Skills Education: A Conceptual Study

Dr. A. Radhakrishnan Nair¹
Dr. Gauri Hardikar²

¹ Former Registrar, Central University of Kerala & 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

Education plays a crucial role in the development of individuals and societies. Since education is governed by its socio-cultural contexts, the purpose of education has been considered from different perspectives over time, space and cultures. However, a common thread which emerges on the analysis of the purpose of education propounded by educationists and reformers from all over the world is that education is for the harmonious development of mind, body and soul of the learner. It is critical for development of the innate capacities and competencies of the learner for living a more fulfilling life, and for a positive contribution to the society. The competencies to empower learners to achieve this are life skills, defined as 'a group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills which can help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathise with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy, productive manner' (WHO, 2003). Hence life skills education is an enabler for achieving the purposes of education. Mahatma Gandhi, who led the Indian struggle for freedom from colonial rule, advocated education as a tool for developing these innate human capacities. These themes are also reflected in the four pillars of education articulated in the Delors report, *Learning: The Treasure within*. The four pillars of education, viz., learning to know, learning to live together, learning to do and learning to be are the philosophical underpinnings for life skills education. The UNICEF MENA has conceptualised a four-dimensional model of life skills built around these four pillars of education, and adopts a rights-based approach to life skills education. This study aims to analyse the educational philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, the four pillars of education according to the Delors report and the UNICEF MENA framework of life skills in the light of the purpose of education and life skills education. The study analyses the writings of Mahatma Gandhi pertaining to education, the Delors report, *Learning: The Treasure Within* and the UNICEF MENA four-dimensional model to develop a framework for correlation of Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy and life skills education. The developed framework highlights the relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy to the philosophical underpinnings of life skills education in the present times.

Keywords: Purpose of Education, Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy, Life Skills Education.

Date of Submission: 14-06-2021

Date of acceptance: 28-06-2021

I. Introduction

Education has always been at the centre stage as a powerful force for individual and social development. Education shapes the personality of the individual through its long-term goal of moral and values development. Ancient systems of education all over the world have been modelled with these ends in mind. But, as the demand for skilled labour force to work in factories grew by the industrial revolution, educational systems adopted the factory model of education. As Cubberley (1905) observed, "our schools are in a sense, factories, in which the raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned to meet the demands of life. The specifications for manufacturing come from the demands of the 20th Century civilisation and it is business of the schools to build its pupils according to the specifications laid down." Thus, mass education, aimed at development of narrow skills for repetitive work in the factories became the norm. The purpose of education was construed as catering to short range economic aims rather than the long range aims of development of individual potential. Focus was on development of narrow skills for success in school and then later on at work. But this model of education is sadly out of sync in the present times. In a world of increasing fast paced change and complexity, education focused on development of narrow skills does not equip learners with the abilities needed to face challenges of an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world.

What is the purpose of education? There is no common understanding on the purpose of education. Different people have defined it differently according to their perceptions, beliefs and the society in which they live. The core words which come up in the discussions on purpose of education are knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and character building. To John Dewey (1934), "the purpose of education has always been to everyone, in essence, the same—to give the young the things they need in order to develop in an orderly, sequential way into members of society". Though not eloquent, this observation covers the themes, like knowledge, skills, values, attitude, character building and man making, etc. Martin Luther King Jr. (1947) in his Morehouse College lecture argued that education has both a utilitarian and a moral function. He said, "education has a two-fold function to perform in the life of man and in society: the one is utility and the other is culture.... Education must enable a man to become more efficient, to achieve with increasing facility the legitimate goals of his life. Education must also train one for quick, resolute and effective thinking. To think incisively and to think for one's self is very difficult.... The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the man gifted with reason, but with no morals."

Jonathan Cohen, Co-founder and President of the National School Climate Centre (Sloan, 2012) has opined that, "the purpose of education is to support children in developing the skills, the knowledge, and the dispositions that will allow them to be responsible, contributing members of their community—their democratically-informed community. Meaning, to be a good friend, to be a good mate, to be able to work, and to contribute to the well-being of the community." To famous author and philosopher Ayn Rand, "the only purpose of education is to teach a student how to live his life—by developing his mind and equipping him to deal with reality. The training he needs is theoretical, i.e., conceptual. He has to be taught to think, to understand, to integrate, to prove. He has to be taught the essentials of the knowledge discovered in the past—and he has to be equipped to acquire further knowledge by his own effort." Thus, the aim of education should be to teach how to think, than what to think. It is not rote learning or memorisation skills or mere work skills. Education may help one to think for oneself and for the society to which one belongs. Education is enabling one to explore oneself, enabling one to question the things happening around and at the same time to develop the capacities and competencies to face one's life.

Paulo Freire (1972) argues that the purpose of education is to liberate human potential... 'Problem-posing' education, responding to the essence of consciousness—intentionality—rejects communiqués and embodies communication. It epitomizes the special characteristic of consciousness: being conscious of, not only as intent on objects but as turned in upon itself ... as consciousness of consciousness. To him education is not to create labourers or careers, it is for preparation for a self-managed life and develop critical thinking abilities among the children and adult to liberate themselves from the problems of poverty and underdevelopment. Education is to, help them to stand on their feet. The International Education Commission appointed by UNESCO under the leadership of Edgar Faure in their report also echoed the same sentiment of purpose of education as learning to be. Edgar Faure (1972) has defined that the purpose of education is to enable man to be himself, to 'become himself'. He further added lifelong learning and learning society. The education should make a person stand in his own feet with self-confidence to face the challenges to lead a life of contentment. A renowned educationist and professional Graham Brown-Martin (2018) also has aired similar opinion that, the purpose education is "balancing learning with doing and what it takes to live a long, happy and healthy life. Thinking about artisanal teaching and learning to thrive in a rapidly transforming world for a better future for all". Melissa Kelley (2020) has defined seven core purposes of education as, knowledge to get by, knowledge of subject matter being taught, creating thoughtful citizens, self-esteem and confidence, learn how to learn, lifelong habits for work and teach students how to live.

In his book *Pilgrimage*, Paulo Coelho (2006) says, "Teaching is only demonstrating that it is possible. Learning is making it possible for yourself." In *The Alchemist* (Coelho, 2005), the story of the treasures Santiago finds along the way teaches us, as only a few stories can, about the essential wisdom of listening to our hearts, learning to read the omens strewn along life's path, and, above all, following our dreams. If we look at this observation of Coelho in terms of education, then we can observe that the education is for the development of self, it's about the heart, how to listen to our heart and to follow its directions.

During 1994, UNESCO has appointed the 2nd International Commission of Education to study and submit report on the education for the 21st Century under the chairmanship of Jacques Delors. In 1996, Delors submitted the Report, titled *Learning: The Treasure Within*, in which Commission has redefined the purpose of education. They have considered the report of Faure Committee submitted in 1972 and the declaration of the World Conference on Education for All 1990 at Jomtien, Thailand in detail. The Delors Commission does not see education as a miracle cure or a magic formula opening the door to a world in which all ideals will be attained, but as one of the significant means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war. It is the view of the Commission that, while education is an ongoing process of improving knowledge and skills, it is also - perhaps primarily - an exceptional means of bringing about personal development and building

relationships among individuals, groups and nations noted the various social tensions to be overcome in the society and the role of education. The tension between the global and the local; the tension between the universal and the individual; the tension between tradition and modernity; the tension between long-term and short-term considerations; the tension between, the need for competition and the concern for equality of opportunity; the tension between the extraordinary expansion of knowledge and human beings' capacity to assimilate it; and the tension between the spiritual and the material. According to the commission, the purpose of 21st Century education should be enabling the children to overcome these tensions and leading to a happy life. Delors report has highlighted four pillars of education as the purpose of education, learning to know, learning to live together, learning to be and learning to do. To Delors, education is also a social experience through which children learn about themselves, develop interpersonal skills and acquire basic knowledge and skills. This experience should begin in early childhood, in different forms depending on the situation, but always with the involvement of families and local communities. It further states the value of education as a manifestation of the spirit of concord, stemming from the will to live together, as active members of our global village, thinking and organizing for the good of future generations.

While thinking in terms of Indian education system, a question arises if the Indian system provides for the education that helps human being to lead a happy and contented life? What was the thinking of Indian leaders on the purpose of education? These are certain questions which need to be pondered while discussing the purpose of education in Indian context. India is known for its traditional education system for tens of thousands of years. The *pathshalas* (Schools) in the villages imparted education to the children in that area, where the students go to the house of the *Guru* (Master) to learn their lessons. In ancient times *Gurukul* system existed where the students stay in the house of the Guru and learn their lessons in literacy, numeracy, values, morals, martial arts and all the lessons required for the successful life of the persons. Holistic education was imparted in the *Gurukula* form of education. Moreover, the oldest Universities in the history provides higher education were in India. Over the years after the advent of British and the colonisation process, the British rulers imposed English education in India with a focus to educate the Indians in English to train them as clerks and other jobs in the British colonial government. Lord Macaulay(1835) rejected Indian knowledge and languages and thought them completely worthless. He commented that "...a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." The Britishers were successful in thrashing the Indian system of education in India and thus, the traditional holistic education prevailed in the country had to make way for English education to produce clerks. The very purpose of education was defeated with the implementation of the reforms in education suggested by Lord Macaulay in India.

Later, the discussions on the purpose of education in India got impetus with the lectures and writings of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. Education to Swami Vivekananda is the manifestation of perfection that one already possesses. 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. In short Vivekananda's scheme of education is holistic in nature.

Along with his leadership role in the freedom struggle of India against Britishers, Mahatma Gandhi gave a clear outline to future India on what would be the purpose of education. Like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi also stood for holistic education, in developing the hand, heart and head of the individual. Through his principle of *Nai Talim*, Mahatma Gandhi has outlined his principles of education suitable for India.

On analysing the purpose of education propounded by the educationists and reformers of the West and the East, one finds a common thread which unites all on why one needs education. From John Dewey, Martin Luther King Jr., Paulo Freire, Edgar Faure, Jacques Delors, Swami Vivekananda to Mahatma Gandhi all stood on a common ground that education is for developing the self, for self-management, values, morals, character building, man making-harmonious development of soul, mind and body and developing the capacities and competencies of the learner. Now the question is whether our present system of education provides all this to our children? And if not, what does the present system of education lack?

The stress on cognitive outcomes in the present school education as well as higher education has led to a generation which has the know how without the critical competencies to translate this know how into action, which is required for an efficient workforce. As life becomes more complex, pace of change accelerates and challenges never experienced before, arise the need to have a grounding into values, which act as a compass to guide informed decisions as well as creative solutions to known problems, with a firm ethical foundation is keenly felt. Thus, an education which stresses not only on knowledge and skills but also on attitudes and values and focused on development of competencies fostering individual as well as social development is the need of the hour. These competencies are life skills, defined as 'a group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills which can help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathise with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a

healthy, productive manner.' (WHO ,2003).The model of education, which aims to empower learners to realise their strengths through integration of these competencies through sustained practice, is known as the strengths-based competency building approach in life skills education.

II. Life Skills Education

The term life skills has its origins in the endeavours to provide skills which would help deprived out-of-school youth to live effectively through positive changes in behaviours and attitudes (Smith et.al, 1965). In one of the earliest known definitions of life skills, Conger defines life skills as problem solving behaviours appropriately used in the management of one's life (Conger, 1973).The term is widely interpreted by different agencies, according to their area of work and the outcomes expected.World Health Organisation (WHO), working in the area of health, defined life skills as "abilities for positive and adaptive behaviours that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (WHO, 1997). United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), views life skills through a rights-based perspective and defines life skills as "a set of abilities, attitudes and socio-emotional competencies that enable individuals to learn, make informed decisions and exercise rights to lead a healthy productive life and subsequently become agents of change" (UNICEF, 2012). In the initial stages, life skills programmes were initiated through non-formal education pathways. The Faure report, laid the foundation of integration of life skills into educational endeavours by recommending learning to be as the objective of learning (Faure, 1972). The report proposed education as a means for human development and more importantly as the "means to prepare human beings for the type of society that does not exist yet" (Faure et.al, 1972, p.13). Existential in its philosophy, the report stressed upon the role of education for the development of every individual's potential(Elfert, 2019). It broadened the view of education from formal schooling to including less traditional pathways such as non-formal and informal education, thus paving the way for inclusion of non-cognitive skills into the educational discourse as well.

In 1990 the World Conference on Education for All declared the purpose of education as, "every person - child, youth and adult - shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning." (World Declaration on Education for All, Art. 1, para. 1.). Jomtien declaration of Education For All has brought the need and importance of life skills education to the attention of educationists across the globe.

The Delors report *Learning: The Treasure Within* (1996) expanded the ideas elucidated in the Faure report and world declaration of education for all at Jomtien, Thailand. Delors report focused on 'learning throughout life' as the future of education. Alongwith learning to be, the Delors report included learning to know, learning to do and learning to live together as the holistic dimensions of education. These four pillars of education are the philosophical underpinnings of life skills education. The UNICEF- MENA framework for transformative education and citizenship builds on these pillars of education to develop a four-dimensional model for conceptualisation of the core life skills.

The pillar of learning to know deals with learning how to learn. In the UNICEF- MENA model, this is the cognitive dimension which comprises of the thinking skills like critical and creative thinking and problem solving. Learning to know builds the foundation to learning throughout life and is needed for making the most of the opportunities provided by education. The pillar of learning to live together, refers to developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of mutual interdependence. This is the social dimension in the UNICEF- MENA life skills framework and includes the social skills of empathy, respect for diversity and participation. These skills help in resolution of conflict and active citizenship. The pillar of learning to do, is developing the competence to deal with situations. This is the instrumental dimension of the UNICEF-MENA framework and involves the skills of decision making, negotiation and cooperation. Learning to be, the development of personal autonomy, judgement and responsibility, is the individual dimension of the UNICEF-MENA framework. This includes the skills of self-management (including self-awareness, coping with emotion and stress), resilience and communication. The Delors four pillars of education emphasise on development of the abilities, cognitive and psychosocial by learning throughout life and provide an integrated vision of holistic education aimed at individual and social development. Hence, the Delors four pillars of education are widely referred to and included in educational policies across the world, and stressed the need to go beyond academic learning to the learning of abilities to live a fulfilling life.

While policies are often framed keeping in mind the future trends, there is great value in the thoughts propagated by eminent educationists in the past which may be revisited and contextualised to meet the needs of the present and future. The educational philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi is holistic in nature and focuses on

development of the individual to be a good human being. Hence, the authors propose to analyse the educational philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, in the light of the philosophy of life skills education. These themes are related to the Delors four pillars of education, which is widely accepted as the philosophical underpinnings of life skills education, and the understanding derived from this analysis connected with the life skills framework suggested by UNICEF-MENA (2017) for pathways to action.

III. Objective:

The objective of the study is:

1. To analyse Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy for themes pertaining to life skills education.
2. To correlate the themes of life skills education from Gandhiji's educational philosophy to the Delors four pillars of education and the skill clusters from the UNICEF- MENA life skills framework.

IV. Methodology:

The study analyses the writings of Mahatma Gandhi pertaining to education, the Delors report, Learning: The Treasure Within and the UNICEF MENA four-dimensional model to develop a framework for correlation of Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy and life skills education.

V. Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy

Philosophical foundations of education provide a base as well as a direction to educational endeavours. The educational philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi is unique in the fact that it is a harmonious blend of three philosophical thoughts, idealism, naturalism and pragmatism.

By education Mahatma Gandhi meant "an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education not even the beginning. It is one of the means whereby man and women can be educated. Literacy in itself is no education" (Harijan, 1937). Education went far beyond basic literacy. He considered literacy as only the means for education and not the end. He was a vociferous critic of the knowledge centric education culture, and considered it as a colonial system targeted at curbing of individual freedom and propagation of enslavement of the mind. For him, the ultimate aim of education is self-realisation. He envisaged education as development in cognitive, emotional, social, physical as well as moral domains. He strongly believed in the power of education to help the individual realise his/her complete potential. This required a holistic system of education, catering to the head, hand and the heart of the student. While the foundation of education was character building, the ends of education was service to community.

The two core principles which stand out in Gandhian educational philosophy are vocational education and community service. He also emphasised values as the core of education and was one of the forerunners for advocating the use of experiential methods in education. Gandhi's aims of education stressed on the vocational aspects of education. He firmly believed that students need to be taught skills through training in handicrafts, which would help them earn from the proceeds while they learn. Instead of regarding craft and industry different from education, he suggested making them the means of education. Gandhi upheld dignity of labour, and proposed that education needs to inculcate this in the students through inclusion of manual work in the curriculum. The experiential methods that he advised were ideal for students to practise the craft as they developed cognitive, psychomotor as well as affective abilities. Community service was an integral part of education, according to Gandhi. Education was to be gained through service, and was also to be used in service of fellow human beings.

He deemed the cultural aspects more important than the literary aspects, and saw education as a means of decolonization by acquainting the learner with the rich indigenous cultural traditions. Rooting education in the strong cultural traditions of the learners was needed to counter the alienation to one's own culture experienced through education based on the western model.

Character building, the foundation of education according to Mahatma Gandhi, was to be achieved through integration of morality and ethics in education. He termed an education which does not include these aspects as incomplete. He pointed out that morality and ethics lead to the development of self-discipline and self-regulation, which in turn contributes to cognitive and physical development. He stressed on the cultivation of critical thinking and decision-making skills based on ethics and morality so as to make informed decisions and taking actions leading to the greater common good. Considering education as an effective weapon against all vices, he advocated religious education (spiritual) for cultivation of morality and ethics, leading to character building.

The merging of idealism, naturalism and pragmatism is seen through the system of education that Gandhi proposed to realise these ideals. This system, named *Nai Talim*, involved education not designed only for development of cognitive skills, but holistic development centered around the learning and practice of a craft, and hence is also called Craft Centred education. The Wardha Committee report on education in 1937, headed by Dr Zakir Hussain, was based on a series of articles published by Mahatma Gandhi in Harijan. The

basic scheme of education has put forward the following four foundational principles (Panse, 2007 as cited in Takwale, 2010):

1. Education in mother tongue, alongwith learning of handicraft work.
2. Work linked with the most useful vocational needs of the locality.
3. Learning linked with vocational work.
4. Work which is socially productive and useful for making a living.

His vision of craft centred education, involved the students being taught to practice a handicraft, using the local materials available, such as spinning yarn. He called this education for the mind, body and heart. The physical faculties of the student would be engaged through the development of the psychomotor skill of practising the handicraft. The underlying reason was also to inculcate a sense of dignity of labour in the students, so that they place the same value on manual work as they do on cognitive work. He cautioned that, "Every handicraft has to be taught not only mechanically as it is done today, but scientifically, i.e., the child should know the why and whereof every process" (Gandhi, 1953). Hence, various subjects like science, mathematics, geography etc. should be taught to the student, linked to this handicraft. A unique feature of this education, which reflects the pragmatism in Gandhian philosophy was that this would serve to make the student economically independent through earning returns on the created product. It would also stand a good stead to the student in case s/he needs to fall back on in future life. Mahatma Gandhi proposed this scheme of education, when India was posed to attain independence. He foresaw the need to make education self-sustaining, as the young country would face paucity of resources. Hence, learning and practising handicraft according to him, was not only for self-sustenance of the students themselves, but also as an economic contribution towards their education. This therefore came to be termed as socially useful productive work, facilitating in the student an integration of abilities, cognitive, psychosocial as well as psychomotor for self and society. He said, "The function of *Nai Talim* is not to teach an occupation, but through it to build the whole man". Thus, Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy advocated an integrated approach in education for realisation of the potential of the individual.

VI. Gandhian educational philosophy and life skills education

Life skills refer to a set of "higher-order, transversal and transferable psychosocial skills". (UNICEF-MENA, 2017). These skills help individuals to face and respond positively to challenges that they face in life. Increasingly, life skills are being viewed not merely as the abilities needed to face challenges, but also to be able to actively participate in transforming situations. This transformative potential of life skills is realised through empowering individuals to realise their own potential. And this, is the core, emphasised in Delors pillars of education that links life skills education to the educational philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. The Delors report and Mahatma Gandhi's educational thoughts assert on the ultimate aim of education to help individuals realise their own potential.

Moral and cultural dimensions of education are at the core for both Mahatma Gandhi and Delors report. Mahatma Gandhi asserts that self-realisation is the ultimate aim of education. Delors report suggests that the process of education must involve self-understanding through knowledge, meditation and self-criticism. This focus on the individual dimension of education, for development of the self as well as the society, lends itself to the integration of life skills in education.

Mahatma Gandhi laid great importance on the vocational aim of education and similar thought is expressed in the Delors report. While learning a vocation, in fact making it central to education was for developing self-reliance, generating income as well as inculcating dignity of labour for Mahatma Gandhi. While the British regime in India had sought to destroy the handicraft industry which was a source of livelihood to many Indians, Gandhi insisted on the need to learn a handicraft, which was local to the region using locally available raw materials. While the British system of education for India laid great stress on learning of academic subjects, Mahatma Gandhi felt that these literary pursuits were needed but not central in education.

The main tenets of Gandhian education philosophy, related to life skills education include his conceptualisation of knowledge, character building and citizenship, holistic development and vocational education. These tenets and their relation with the four pillars of education according to the Delors report are outlined below:

Conceptualisation of knowledge and the Pillar of Learning to know:

The conceptualisation of knowledge and ways of gaining knowledge in Gandhian educational thought corresponds to the pillar of learning to know is the cognitive dimension of life skills. For Mahatma Gandhi acquiring knowledge is one of the important purposes of education. It enables the children to think critically and discriminate between good and bad, to take decision to assimilate the one and eschew the other, develop capacity in persistent questioning and healthy inquisitiveness for being creative and the will to learn for the sake of the creation of a new world. This cognitive dimension in the UNICEF-MENA framework includes the skills

of critical thinking, creative thinking and problem solving. Whereas in Delors scheme of learning to know include decision making skills also apart from critical and creative thinking and problem solving. According to Gandhi, "An education, which does not teach us to discriminate between good and bad, to assimilate the one and eschew the other, is a misnomer"¹ Hence, critical thinking and decision making were essential skills to be cultivated through education. He underlined the need to develop an enquiry-based mindset by pointing out that "Persistent questioning and healthy inquisitiveness are the first requisites for acquiring learning of any kind" (Ibid). Gandhi also believed that once the foundation of character was laid, children would be capable of learning on their own or learning from their friends. Connecting knowledge to the qualities of the self, he observed "can be no knowledge without humility and the will to learn."² He opposed the idea of education as it was practised in the British system of education for Indians and asserted that this kind of education, with its focus on learning of subjects, not only alienated Indians from their culture, but also made them helpless and godless. It left them fit only to be clerks and interpreters, which is a gross underutilisation of potential, in fact it amounts to stunting natural growth of the mind and the spirit. He considered that the British system of education had enslaved Indians. Hence, learning to know, for Mahatma Gandhi, involved inculcation of the skills of critical thinking, knowledge of local traditions and crafts, acquired through education in the mother tongue. Learning to know, for him, was to learn to develop oneself to achieve one's full potential. UNICEF-MENA (2017, p-37) points out that, "this dimension of learning includes the development of abilities involving concentration, problem-solving and critical thinking, and underscores the importance of curiosity and creativity for gaining a better understanding of the world and other people. It is foundational to the development of new life skills as well as technical skills, ensuring both acquisition and mastering of new knowledge. The concept of 'Learning to Know' has become increasingly prominent over 'Learning to Learn' as the latter's related skills are often related to the acquisition of fundamental basic skills". In Nai Talim, Mahatma Gandhi recommended craft education not only as a mechanism to teach a skill to the children to be self-reliant, but as a way to develop the critical and creative thinking abilities of the children to search for more knowledge and to be inquisitive.

Character building and active citizenship as the foundation of education and the pillar of learning to live together:

Character building, a cornerstone of Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy is explained in the context of Delors pillar of learning to live together, the social dimension. In the UNICEF- MENA framework this includes the skills of empathy, respect for diversity and civic participation. Learning to live together through appreciation of diversity, understanding each other's culture will lead to appreciation of shared values as well as appreciation of the differences between them, leading to a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect (UNESCO, 1998). In the present context of conflict at a regional and global level, the life skills of living together will contribute to development of a culture of peace and cooperation across the globe.

Mahatma Gandhi considered character building as the foundation of education and opined that knowledge without character building will only lead to students turning out to be "talented thieves and gentleman rascals"³ He aimed to inculcate values of humanity and brotherhood through education. The components of character building in Gandhi's scheme of education were: education of the heart and training the heart on the values and virtues of the society in which one lives with empathy and togetherness; learn and to grow from perfection to perfection; knowledge of God and self-realization, patriotism, discipline and humility, cultivate absolute purity of heart; develop essential brotherhood of mankind; and community service/social service. Knowledge without character is a power for evil only, as seen in the instances of so many talented thieves and 'gentlemen rascals' in the world.

He proposed a firm spiritual basis to education, including moral and ethical education. Education for him was essential for brotherhood of man. He furthered the idea of emancipation of the downtrodden through education, by encouraging students to use their vacations to work among the Harijans (children of God), the term that he coined for the class of people at the lowest rung of the society, who were marginalised and had suffered through the practice of untouchability. He aimed to cultivate the spirit of empathy in students through social services for upliftment of the downtrodden. He questioned, "What better education can there be, than to go, day in and day out to Harijan quarters and regard Harijans as members of one human family?" (Gandhi, 1953). Embodying the spirit of respect for diversity, balanced with respect for self, Mahatma Gandhi said, "I do not want my house to be walled on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown across my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, beggar or a slave" (Gandhi, 1953). Through his aim of education to provide

¹<https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/on-education/gandhi-views-on-education.php>

² <https://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chap79.htm>

³ <https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/on-education/to-students.php>

cultural education, Mahatma Gandhi sought to create a strong sense of pride in the cultural heritage of our society to students. This sense of a shared national culture would act as a connecting force amongst students, while the sense of respect of diversity would lead to peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society.

Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts on education reflected his nationalist ideals. He was a staunch believer in national education, rooted in the culture of the nation, throwing off the yoke of colonialization in terms of thought and through the education in the mother tongue at the primary level and the vernacular languages at the higher levels. His ideas of education reflected the context of the times, the struggle for independence from the British. He exhorted students to be the true servants of people, willing to live and die for the country. Patriotism was the key value, to be imbibed through education. He advocated education for the service of mankind and liberation meaning freedom from all manner of servitude. He considered schools as a means of bringing people of different religions and castes together, thereby inculcating in students the skills to live together. Education prepared the students for active participation in civic life and created awareness about their duties towards their motherland.

One of the core purposes of education for Mahatma Gandhi is understanding citizenship. Mahatma Gandhi believed that through citizenship education the children will learn the virtue of true servants of the people who will live and die for the country's freedom, learn the need and importance of freedom, understand the need to learn our own culture and the need to build on our own heritage, peaceful coexistence, Swaraj, self-reliant villages, democratic values and respect of other religions. To him, these learnings will make a man a social being and enable them to be responsive to the societies needs and aspirations. Multiculturalism is the core strength and uniqueness of India and the education should enable the children to understand it. Gandhi stressed on empathy and tolerance as core themes to be trained in schools enabling the children to live in a diverse and multi-cultural society. Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy on understanding culture, respect and tolerance is well reflected in the philosophy of peace of Asia-Pacific Network for International Education and Values Education (APNIEVE), (UNESCO-APNIEVE, 1998) that, "knowledge and understanding of each other's cultural traditions, beliefs and practices will contribute to an appreciation of shared values and aspirations, as well as an appreciation of each other's differences, thus contributing to the development of mutual respect and tolerance". During his extensive travel across the country before entering into active political work and freedom struggle movements, to study the situation of India, Mahatma Gandhi understood that the deep-rooted divisions and inequalities in the society in terms of caste, religion, wealth, landholdings, education, language, etc. and resolved that fighting the inequalities in the society are a more difficult task than fighting the Britishers. Thus, in order to resolve these issues, he started the constructive programmes to involve the Congress workers to engage in community and social services on the one hand and advocated an inclusive education model with literacy, numeracy, crafts and values. His major thrust was on values like empathy, tolerance, respect for others and their culture enabling the people to live in harmony and peace.

Mahatma Gandhi's vision of education for active citizenship is in close alignment with the pillar of learning to live together in the Delors Committee report. The core value of respect for law and order was the basis for Gandhi's own life and he stressed on the same in education. Self-discipline and respect for law and order were a crucial value to be inculcated through education. Gandhi also strived for a balance between freedom and responsibility and argued that students need to learn this through the development of critical thinking in education. Openness to ideas was also to be encouraged through education and the very nature of the school and the curriculum were designed to inculcate a sense of solidarity not only with others of the same background but also those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Time and again, Gandhi asserted that these values taught in schools need to be put into practice, as students learn to be proactive citizens, with openness in their attitude, critical thinking, a proper balance of freedom and responsibility and all this to be channelled into working for the nation as active citizens. According to UNICEF-MENA (2017) 'learning to live together' or the 'social dimension' of life skills pertains to skills for active citizenship, i.e., respect for diversity, empathy and participation. This exhorts the same sentiments of Gandhi on citizenship education. It says, "this is the ethical dimension that underpins the vision for citizenship education in MENA. It adopts a human rights-based approach consistent with democratic and social justice values and principles, and constitutes the ethical foundation of the three other dimensions" (ibid, p-38).

Holistic development of a person through education and the pillar of learning to be:

Mahatma Gandhi's definition of education stands testimony in his belief of an integrated education, targeted as holistic development, reflected in the pillar of learning to be in Delors's report. Holistic education is all-round drawing out of the best in the child and man- body, mind and spirit. It is to promote all-round development of the pupil and to bring out the best from the boys and girls. Education should develop the whole man enabling him to stand in his own feet. Gandhi's concept of Nai Talim (new education) brought out the concept of integrated education- integration of craft, art, health and education into one scheme. Physical drill, handicrafts, drawing and music should go hand in hand to draw the best out of the boys and girls and create in

them real interest in their tuition. This individual dimension are the skills for self-empowerment in the UNICEF-MENA framework which includes the skills of self-management, communication and resilience.

Mahatma Gandhi believed that the present system of education had led to atrophy in the hands of the learner, and soul ignored. As a solution to this issue, he advocated integrated education-*Nai Talim* with focus on the development of the head, hand and heart, through craft centred education. He strove for training the students in self-reliance and self-discipline through the act of spinning yarn. The aim of learning to be, is realisation of potential of the students. Gandhi believed that education must empower learners to take initiative, while being self-disciplined. He believed that education must establish an equilibrium between the mind, body and spirit. Education when seen as an integrated endeavour for holistic development, would result in the drawing out of the best in the student, leading to the ultimate aim of self-realisation. The UNICEF-MENA (2017, p37-38) document on Conceptual and Programmatic Framework for Life Skills Education and Citizenship Development explains the concept of Learning to Be or the Individual Dimension of life skills as:

“‘Learning to Be’ or the Individual Dimension enshrines the principle that education should be concerned with maximizing the potential of each and every individual learner by aiming at the development of the complete person, thus allowing the individual to act with ever greater autonomy, judgment and personal responsibility. Learning in the framework of this Dimension includes cognitive, intra-personal and interpersonal life skills, brings self-fulfilment and personal growth, and is supportive of self-empowerment, thus promoting self-protection, violence prevention and resilience. Because the individual dimension involves the all-round personal development of a learner, it is a composite of and an enabler for all the other dimensions. Empowered and resilient children, youth and individuals can make thoughtful, positive life and work choices for themselves, their families and their society, and can be engaged citizens with respect for others. Education with an ethical, equality-driven and human rights-based underpinning promotes self-awareness, self-management, resilience, and complex communication skills in MENA children and youth, and other learners. This offers them the ability and the voice to constructively address, both at the individual and collective level, the risks linked to unhealthy behaviours, violence, extremism, conflicts and inequalities of treatment. With personal growth the result of both individual as well as social factors, the Individual Dimension promotes empowered individuals, who, because they are self-aware, know to respect themselves and others to be socially appropriate”.

This may be analysed in the background of the period in which Mahatma Gandhi lived and the societal situations. He was fighting against the British colonial administration on the one side for freedom and social inequalities and injustice of Indian society on the other. He wanted to convert education as an instrument to prepare the people to empower, to self-manage and to resilient themselves to fight the colonial powers and social injustice and inequalities in the society. Mahatma Gandhi advocated holistic education-developing the hand, heart and head of the person through *Nai Talim* in 1937, whereas the UNICEF-MENA came out with their conceptual framework during 2017.

Vocational education and the pillar of Learning to do:

Mahatma Gandhi was a firm believer in education for self-reliance coming through the integration of vocational education which relates to Delors's pillar of learning to do. The instrumental dimension of the UNICEF-MENA framework involves the skills of cooperation, negotiation and decision making. According to Mahatma Gandhi, education through handicrafts rises from the contemplation of truth and love permeating life's activities, taught the dignity of manual labour, the education of the hand, handicrafts are to be taught not merely for productive work but for developing the intellect of the pupils, exercise for body, experiential learning, working in garden, vocational training, domestic work, work in farm, to imbibe self-reliance and self-supporting. Underlining the importance of vocational training, Gandhi observed, “do not imagine that this (manual and industrial training) will dull your wit. It is not by making our brains a storehouse for cramming facts is our understanding opened. An intelligent approach to industrial training is often a more valuable aid to the intellect than indifferent reading of literature” (Gandhi, 1953). Since the vocational training was aimed at generating income for the students and also as a support for the school, this would necessitate the development of the skills of cooperation, negotiation and decision making in the process. The process would also ensure inculcation of dignity of labour in the students. Thus, for learning to do, Mahatma Gandhi proposed the integration of the cognitive and psychomotor domain by bringing out the inherent relationship in them. Advocating craft education Gandhi proposed the idea of application of knowledge into practice. The learning in the classes may be practised in their life so that they are become self-reliant and the entrepreneurial skills are nurtured in them. The training of hand coupled with the training of head enable them to manage their heart to be able to withstand the challenges. This is the philosophy outlined by UNICEF-MENA (2017, p-37) in the conceptual framework on learning to do. It says, “with the concept of application, considers how children and youth can be supported to put what they have learned into practice and how education can be adapted to better serve, in particular, the world of work. By being able to put theoretical learning into practice in everyday contexts, children, youth and other learners learn how to concretely navigate demanding situations while being efficient and productive.”

The educational philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, the Pillars of Education of Delors Commission and Conceptual Framework of UNICEF-MENA is depicted as follows:

Fig. I. Conceptual Framework of Gandhian Philosophy of Education and Life Skills Education



The common underlying theme of Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy and Delors four pillars of education is education for realisation of individual potential through integrated development in the cognitive, physical, emotional and social domains. This education needs to be based on a firm foundation of values and needs to focus on the development of abilities, to live a fulfilling life for self and to ensure proactive contribution to the society i.e., life skills.

The core life skills or in that sense, the pillars of education are not stand-alone skills or pillars. The life skills work in a person in its totality. It is interconnected and over-lapped to give desired results. The competency of person is developed or the vision of holistic education of person-development of mind, body and brain is possible by acquiring all the life skills. For Mahatma Gandhi holistic development of the person, character building and citizenship development are the purpose of education for which craft-oriented education and experiential learning are vehicles to reach that objective. In modern era, life skills education is considered as the vehicle to achieve potentiality development or holistic development of the children.

VII. Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography, aptly titled "My Experiments with Truth" is a testimony of his spirit of learning throughout life. His thoughts on education stress the importance of development of competencies for a fulfilling individual life, based on sound morals and values, grounded in self-respect and self-sufficiency and contributing effectively to the community as a proactive conscientious citizen. This could be achieved through craft centered experiential education aimed at harmonious development of mind body and spirit. Thus Gandhi, through his *Nai Talim*, stressed on learner centred education, which is now the most popular thought in educational discourse.

Delors observed that choosing a type of education, means choosing a type of society. His four pillars of education are aimed at helping students to realise the potential within them, through learning throughout life. As framework of education for transformation, with life skills at its core, the insights gained from Gandhi's educational philosophy and Delors vision of learning to realise the treasure within are indeed invaluable to provide a roadmap for rethinking and reframing education, to empower individuals as change agents to transform societies for a peaceful and progressive world. Finally, adopting the philosophy of education propounded by Mahatma Gandhi with timely modification is a pragmatic way for holistic development of individuals with capacities and competencies to face the challenges in day-to-day life.

References

- [1]. Brown-Martin, G. (2019, 02 05). *What is the purpose of education?* Retrieved 06 13, 2021, from Learning Re-imagined: <https://medium.com/learning-re-imagined/what-is-the-purpose-of-education-cdf78d7a4ca8>

Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy of Education and Life Skills Education: A Conceptual Study

- [2]. Coelho, P. (2005). *The Alchemist*. Harper Collins.
- [3]. Coelho, P. (2006). *The Pilgrimage*. Harper Collins.
- [4]. Dewey, J. (1934). *What is the Purpose of Education?* Retrieved 06 13, 2021, from ASCD: https://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_update/eu201207_infographic.pdf
- [5]. Elfert, M. (2019). Revisiting the Faure Report and the Delors Report: Why Was UNESCO's Utopian Vision of Lifelong Learning an "Unfailure"? In *Power and Possibility* (pp. 17-25). Brill Sense.
- [6]. Freire, Paulo. (1996). *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York, Continuum.
- [7]. Gandhi, M. (2008). *My experiments with truth: An autobiography*. Jaico Publishing House.
- [8]. Gandhi, M. K. (1953). *Towards new education*. Prabhat Prakashan.
- [9]. Martin Luther King, J. (1947). *The purpose of Education*. Retrieved 06 13, 2021, from The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/purpose-education>
- [10]. Melissa, K. (2020, 08 26). *The many purposes of education*. Retrieved 06 13, 2021, from ThoughtCo: [thoughtco.com/what-is-the-aim-of-education-8417](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-the-aim-of-education-8417)
- [11]. *Minute by the Hon'ble T. B. Macaulay, dated the 2nd February 1835*. (2021, 06 13). Retrieved from http://www.columbia.edu/tic/mealac/prichett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html
- [12]. Prabhu, R. K., & Rao, U. R. (Eds.). (2010). 7th Reprint. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House (Original work published in 1967)
- [13]. Radhakrishnan Nair, A & Gauri Hardikar. "Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy of Life Skills Education." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 26(05), 2021, pp. 01-07
- [14]. Rand, A. (n.d.). *Education*. Retrieved 06 13, 2021, from The Ayn Rand Lexicon: Objectivism from A to Z: <http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/education.html>
- [15]. Takwale, R., Sawant, V., & Deshmukh, M. (2010). *Nai Talim and Gandhian Approaches to Development*. Retrieved from http://oasis.col.org/bitstream/handle/11599/2050/2010_Takwale_et_al_NaiTalin&GandhianApproachestoDevelopment.pdf?sequence=1
- [16]. UNESCO. (1990). *World Declaration on Education for All , Jomtein, Thailand*. Retrieved 06 13, 2021, from UNESCO: https://bice.org/app/uploads/2014/10/unesco_world_declaration_on_education_for_all_jomtien_thailand.pdf
- [17]. UNESCO. (1998). *Learning to Live Together in Peace and Harmony: Values Education for Peace, Human Rights, Democracy, and Sustainable Development for the Asia-Pacific Region. A UNESCO-APNIEVE Sourcebook for Teacher Education and Tertiary Level Education*. [Ebook]. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED440028>
- [18]. UNESCO. (2010). *Learning: The Treasure Within*. Second (paperback) edition. (Original work published in 1996). Paris, UNESCO Publishing.
- [19]. UNESCO. (2013). *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow*. Paris: UNESCO.
- [20]. UNICEF. (2012). *Comprehensive Life Skills Framework Rights-based and life cycle Approach for building skills for employment*. UNICEF. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/india/sites/unicef.org/india/files/2020-02/Comprehensive-lifeskills-framework.pdf>
- [21]. 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
- [22]. WHO. (1997). *Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools. Introduction and Guidelines to Facilitate the Development and Implementation of Life Skills Programmes*. Geneva. <https://www.scribd.com/document/32430059/Life-Skills-Have-Been-Defined-by-the-World-Health-Organization>.
- [23]. WHO. (2003). *Skills for Health, Skills-based Health Education including Life Skills: An Important Component of a Child-Friendly/Health-Promoting School*, WHO Education Series on Schools' Health. Document 9. Available at: www.who.int/school_youth_health/media/en/sch_skills4health_03.pdf
- [24]. Willona, S. (2012, 07). *What is the purpose of education?* Retrieved 06 13, 2021, from ASCD Education Update: <http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/education-update/jul12/vol54/num07/What-Is-the-Purpose-of-Education%20A2.aspx>
- [25]. <https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/on-education/gandhi-views-on-education.php>
- [26]. <https://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chap79.htm>
- [27]. <https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/on-education/to-students.php>

Dr. A. Radhakrishnan Nair, Dr. Gauri Hardikar "Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy of Education and Life Skills Education: A Conceptual Study" *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)*, 11(3), (2021): pp. 01-11.