



PAPER

THE PECULIARITIES OF DEVELOPING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS LIFE SKILLS IN ENGLISH CLASSES

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Abstract

This article examines the pedagogical peculiarities of developing high school students life skills in English classes. The relevance of the topic is determined by the growing understanding that secondary education should prepare learners not only for examinations but also for communication, collaboration, decision-making, problem-solving and responsible participation in social life. In this context, English lessons possess a specific educational potential because they are naturally oriented toward interaction, interpretation, negotiation of meaning and the performance of social roles through language.

Key words: life skills, English classes, high school students, communicative competence, mediation, task-based learning.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary education, the idea of school success can no longer be reduced to the accumulation of subject knowledge alone. International educational frameworks increasingly stress that adolescents must learn how to communicate effectively, make decisions responsibly, cooperate with others, regulate emotions, interpret information critically and act with a sense of purpose in changing social environments. UNICEF's global evaluation of life skills education describes life skills as personal, interpersonal and cognitive psychosocial skills

that help young people interact appropriately, manage emotional states and make choices for an active, safe and productive life [1]. The World Health Organization likewise treats school-based life skills education as an important part of health-promoting and behaviour-shaping educational practice [2]. For this reason, the question is not whether schools should develop life skills, but how each subject can contribute to that task in a systematic way. English, as a school subject built around communication, meaning-making and social interaction, offers especially favourable conditions for such development.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

One of the first peculiarities of developing life skills in English classes lies in the integrative nature of the subject itself. In many disciplines, social and emotional skills must be added deliberately to a content-heavy curriculum. In English, however, the curriculum already revolves around interaction, interpretation, participation and response. Students listen, speak, read, write, summarize, explain, agree, disagree, ask for clarification and adapt their language to different people and situations. These are not merely language operations; they are life-oriented actions. When students discuss environmental problems, peer pressure, digital safety, intercultural misunderstanding or future career choices in English, they do not only practise vocabulary and grammar. They also learn how to formulate judgments, negotiate differences, justify claims, consider consequences and respond to others with respect. This makes English classes uniquely suited to embedding life skills into routine learning activities rather than treating them as an external moral supplement [1], [3].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A second feature concerns the communicative character of language teaching. Communicative learning does not simply train students to produce correct sentences; it requires them to use language purposefully in relation to others. Task-based language teaching, as described by Nunan, places interaction, needs-based content selection and the use of the target language for communicative purposes at the center of classroom practice [4]. This has direct implications for life skills development. If a high school class is organized around meaningful tasks rather than isolated grammar drills, students must plan, cooperate, interpret instructions, share information, solve problems and evaluate outcomes. A group task such as designing a school campaign against cyberbullying, producing a podcast about healthy habits, or preparing a debate on social media ethics simultaneously develops language competence and life skills such as teamwork, responsibility, initiative and decision-making. The peculiarity here is methodological: life skills in English are best developed not through direct moral instruction, but through carefully designed

communicative situations in which such skills become functionally necessary.

A third distinctive characteristic is mediation. Recent developments in language education have moved beyond the traditional four-skills model toward broader social uses of language. The CEFR Companion Volume and Cambridge's pedagogical materials emphasize mediation as a central dimension of language learning: learners summarize information, adapt messages, facilitate understanding, support group interaction and help others access meaning [3]. This is highly important for life skills education because mediation sits at the intersection of language ability and social intelligence. A student who explains a complex text to classmates, rephrases instructions for a weaker peer, or manages disagreement during group work is using English while also exercising empathy, perspective-taking, cooperation and responsibility. Mediation therefore transforms the English classroom into a micro-social environment where students learn how to act not only as speakers or writers, but as intermediaries between people, ideas and contexts. That function corresponds closely to real-life communication outside school.

A fourth aspect is related to the age profile of high school learners. Adolescence is marked by identity formation, increased sensitivity to peer relations, emerging independence and a strong need for recognition and voice. OECD materials on student agency stress that agency is not a fixed personality trait but a learnable capacity involving responsibility, purposeful action and the ability to influence circumstances constructively [6]. In English classes, this means that life skills develop most effectively when students are not passive recipients of textbook content, but active participants who make choices, set goals, evaluate information and shape classroom interaction. High school learners respond more productively to lessons in which they are invited to interpret authentic issues, express disagreement, design projects, participate in debates and reflect on their own communication strategies [5]. The teacher's task is therefore not only linguistic scaffolding but also the creation of pedagogical space for agency. If the classroom remains overly controlled and reproductive, students may acquire discrete linguistic items but fail to develop the life skills that

communicative language education can cultivate.

Another important peculiarity is the contextual nature of life skills formation in English classes. Life skills cannot be developed effectively in abstract, decontextualized exercises. They emerge when students face situations that resemble the communicative demands of actual life [7]. For this reason, high school English teaching should incorporate realistic themes, authentic materials and situational tasks. Topics such as mental health, academic pressure, social inclusion, online communication, ecological responsibility, volunteering, part-time work, public speaking and intercultural contact are not merely motivational add-ons; they provide the social content through which life skills become meaningful. UNICEF's evaluation notes that life skills education often fails when it remains limited to knowledge transmission instead of moving toward psychosocial skills, attitudes and behavior [1]. In English classes, this warning is particularly relevant. A lesson about conflict resolution, for instance, should not stop at reading a text about disagreement. It should require students to role-play conflicting positions, practise de-escalating language, identify misunderstandings and reflect on effective solutions. The peculiar strength of English as a subject is precisely its ability to simulate such encounters through language.

CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that the development of high school students life skills in English classes has a number of distinctive features that differentiate it from life-skills work in other school subjects. Its most important peculiarity is integration: English lessons can develop communication, collaboration, critical thinking, mediation, responsibility and learner agency precisely because these capacities are embedded in language use itself. High school students are at an age when they are able to engage with values, identities and social problems in increasingly complex ways, and the English classroom can provide a structured environment in which such engagement takes the form of meaningful communicative action rather than abstract discussion alone.

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