

Life Skills-Based Education Practices in Pakistan and Challenges in Implementation

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Abstract: *In this quantitative research paper, the life skills based education (LSBE) practices in Pakistan and its implementation problems in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Islamabad are discussed. The study is based on faculty members, both academicians and administration, of Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad (QAU), International Islamic University Islamabad (IIU) and Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad (AIU) consisting of 400 respondents. This study explores implementation challenges and their correlation with teachers training, curriculum support, institutional resources, administrative support, teacher awareness, assessment methods and gaps in the policy implementation. The paper used descriptive statistics and correlation analysis using SPSS. Data revealed that respondents' views of constraints on the implementation of LSBE are related to lack of administrative follow-up, poor monitoring systems, a lack of instructional time, teacher workload, lack of assessment routines, and interdepartmental policy gaps. The results of correlation indicate that implementation challenges are negatively and significantly correlated with teacher training, curriculum support, institutional resources, administrative support, teacher awareness and assessment methods, but they are positively and significantly correlated with policy implementation gaps. The results indicated that pre-service training of teachers, curriculum integration, availability of institutional resources, managerial accountability, clear assessment support, and policy communication are important factors for successful LSBE in Pakistan.*

Keywords: Life Skills Based Education; Challenges; Implementation; Policy Gap; Pakistan.

Introduction

The issue of life skills education has gained a lot of attention in today's education reform due to the contemporary educational expectation that students should be able to engage in decision making, communicate, manage themselves, be good citizens, be employable, and participate in society. In all over-the-world education systems, life skills are now being talked about along with social and emotional learning, twenty-first-century competencies, global citizenship education and competency-based curriculum reform (Kauts & Saini, 2022). The ability to think critically, collaborate, empathize, solve problems, be resilient, communicate and make decisions responsibly are skills needed by the learner to address social, economic, technological, and health issues. Life skills education was presented as an instrument to help young people manage the risks of everyday life and engage in productive life in society in the

global evaluation of life skills education by UNICEF (Kennedy et al., 2014). Likewise, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) research on the social and emotional skills of children considers these skills measurable and teachable dimensions of education that are associated with the learning process, well-being and later life outcomes (Kankaraš, 2019; OECD, 2021). The above global trends demonstrate that the teaching of life skills is no longer considered as an enrichment activity but has become an integral part of education.

Although widely accepted globally implementation process is not uniform. Globally, life skills are explicitly referenced in policy documents, and only partially embedded in classroom practices, teacher training and assessment processes, and institutional planning. When there is planning for the reform of the curriculum, desired competencies are named, but teachers find that they are not trained, supported by resources, given time, or provided with rubrics for assessment. UNESCO's resources for curriculum development focus on ensuring that curriculum change is coordinated across the aspects of curriculum goals, pedagogy, resources, assessment, and teacher professional development (International Bureau of Education, 2013). If this does not take place, life skills are merely verbal outcomes rather than actual behaviors. The challenge is particularly acute in systems in which a culture of examinations favors memorizing and content coverage. In a context like this, teachers might see the need for life skills but feel constrained by teaching and learning time constraints to incorporate participatory activities, reflective discussion, project-based learning, and formative assessment (International Bureau of Education, 2013).

The introduction of life skills based education in South Asian has been influenced by the size of the youth population, quality of education, social conservatism, health and citizenship issues, gender disparity, and less prepared teachers. While life skills are recognized as being key for empowerment and protection in the regional frameworks, there is wide variation in how they are delivered from country to country, province to province and school type to school type and from institutional to institutional capacity. Munsri and Colleagues (2014) reported that life skills education had reached the stage of being a part of the teacher education discourse in SAARC countries, though this was not the same with integration in teacher education curriculum. UNICEF India's extensive life skills framework also recognized the need for life skills to be addressed through a rights-based and life cycle perspective, thus calling for the integration of skills across policy, community, family and school (Özmete, 2011). The experiences in these regions indicate that the success of life skills based education is attributed to the interplay of teacher preparation, guidance for curriculum, institutional ownership, and assessment systems.

All of these regional tensions are evident in Pakistan. National curriculum changes, provincial programs, non-governmental programs, adolescent education programs and teacher professional development projects have all encouraged life skills-based education. One such example of scaling LSBE in Pakistan was demonstrated by Svanemyr et al. (2015) when they integrated the development of curriculum, teacher engagement, community advocacy, and administrative support. Furthermore, the National Curriculum Council of Pakistan has also designed curriculum material for life skills for formal education, which suggests that there is an inclination of policy makers towards incorporating life skills into the formal curriculum (Lateef et al., 2024). But, the barriers to implementation have not gone away with policy recognition. The education system in Pakistan is still marred with issues of teacher training,

continuity of education, availability of teaching tools, assessment in the classroom, monitoring and supervision of institutions and communication of policies. These barriers are likely to impact how far teachers can get in implementing LSBE concepts into measurable learning outcomes (Lateef et al., 2024).

Higher Education Institutions have a significant role in teacher education, curriculum research, public policy analysis, educational leadership, and professional preparation within the city of Islamabad. The perspectives of faculty members in this regard can help to reveal some of the challenges of the implementation of LSBE in the context of three major institutions in Pakistan, namely Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, International Islamic University Islamabad and Allama Iqbal Open University. The faculty, including both academic and administrative faculty, are in a unique position to be aware of the impact of teacher training, curriculum support, institutional resources, administrative facilitation, assessment processes and gaps in policy on the success of life skills-based education. The presence of universities, policy institutions and professional programs is not enough for the effective implementation of LSBE in Islamabad. The question here is if faculty feel LSBE is structurally supported, pedagogically viable, and monitored by administration. This study tackles such a problem by using quantitative research model where challenges of implementing the LSBE and their association with its key supporting factors in higher education institutions of Islamabad has been discussed.

Though the implementation of Life Skills Education has been the policy agenda in Pakistan, it is still hampered by inadequate teacher preparation, curriculum support, institutional capacity, assessment mechanism, administrative support and communication of policy. The role of faculty members in higher education institutions is important because they are involved in teacher preparation, curriculum development, research and institutional governance. The current study will fill the empirical void by analyzing the relationship between implementation challenges and practices of LSBE and supportive factors in Islamabad, Pakistan.

The first aim of this study is to look at the challenges of implementation and practices of life skill education in Pakistan. The second goal is to further explain the connection between teachers related, curriculum related and institutional factors with the implementation of life skills based education in Pakistan. Relating teacher training, curriculum support, institutional resources, administrative support, teacher awareness, assessment methods and gaps in policy implementation to LSBE implementation is answered by the corresponding research question. The third is to explore the nature and intensity of the statistical associations among implementation challenges and selected LSBE factors. The research question that is related is whether implementation challenges are significantly related to teacher training, curriculum support, institutional resources, administrative support, teacher awareness, assessment practices and policy implementation gaps.

2. Literature Review

Life skills education has been placed in a larger context of twenty first century learning, social-emotional learning and competency-based learning, as reflected in recent literature. Global evaluation by UNICEF supported the view that life skills education is best integrated into the education system and not as standalone, short-term interventions (Kennedy et al., 2014). The evaluation further revealed that objectives, facilitators, content, monitoring and assessment tools should be age appropriate, clear, trained and available. This focus aligns with

the OECD's research on social and emotional skills, which considers the development of skills as measurable and targeted to learning contexts, teacher practices, family context, and institutional support (Kankaraš, 2019; OECD, 2021). It thus appears that the effectiveness of life skills education is more related to the quality of implementation than to the declaration of the policy in the literature, so that this is supported by the global literature.

One of the best conditions for the implementation of LSBE is teacher training. Life skills pedagogy is frequently done through discussion, participative, reflective and learner-centred approaches, unlike the transmission approach in the classroom. UNESCO's curriculum resource material emphasizes the importance of teacher preparation in understanding and enacting curriculum goals, in planning learning activities and in linking assessment with learning goals (International Bureau of Education, 2013). If teachers are not trained, there is a tendency to narrow the teaching of life skills to advice giving, reading from textbooks or maybe a one-off awareness session. Maqsood, et al. (2021) conducted a study on teachers' perceptions of life skills education for students in grades K-12 in Pakistan, which revealed that teachers are aware of the importance of life skills education and want to see more support from the institutions and integration of the curriculum. This suggests that increases in teacher awareness do not necessarily translate into better teaching skills, unless they are accompanied by training and support through practice.

Another theme that is central to the literature is curriculum support. Life skills can be taught as a separate course, through inter-disciplinary approach across subjects, as a component of co-curriculum activities and linked to health, citizenship and values education. There are implementation implications for each of the models. Standalone curricula make curricula visible, but do take up timetable space and trained teachers. With integrated models, the time pressure is reduced but if teachers are not guided it can lead to a sense of dilution in the timetable. UNICEF India's comprehensive life skills framework also highlighted the need for the competencies to be clear, age-appropriate and life cycle relevant. (Özmete, 2011). The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework also breaks down competencies into observable educational behaviours – critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, collaboration, learning to learn, and social responsibility (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2020). The frameworks indicate that curriculum support should not only indicate the skills expected but the skills that are expected to be developed across the different stages of learning.

The extent to which curriculum intentions are realized as practice is determined by institutional resources and administrative support. LSBE needs learning materials, teacher guides, safe classroom, counselling linkage, monitoring format, time allocation and supportive leadership. The research on curriculum implementation has revealed that often teachers' willingness is reduced, as the institutional structures are not supportive of new pedagogies. The teacher professional learning programme of the World Bank highlights the need for follow up, mentoring, practice and institutional accountability to make training having an impact (Popova et al., 2022). The role of administrative support is particularly crucial in life skills education as there are some topics, which include communication, gender, health, relationships, self-protection and social behaviour. Teachers may opt out of these such topics unless institutional leaders will provide the legitimacy and protection for professional teaching practice.

The literature available in Pakistan presents mixed findings with both some positive developments and ongoing challenges. Svanemyr et al. (2015) reported scale-up of life skills-based education in Pakistan, a programme which has been implemented in 1,188 schools,

where conservative resistance was overcome by a review of curriculum, involvement of teachers, community support and working with education authorities. The study shows that with a systematic approach to addressing social, administrative and pedagogical obstacles, the implementation of LSBE can be achieved in Pakistan. Policy material by the National Curriculum Council (NCC) gives impression that Pakistan has devised LSBE curriculum for Classes 9-12 that is also used at the federal level where curriculum development and piloting activities are also taking place (Lateef et al., 2024). Sindh's LSBE curriculum framework also shows signs of provincial shift towards age-appropriate life skills content and interactive teaching methods (Ali et al., 2020).

However, there are gaps in the implementation of the policies. UNICEF's regional adolescent and youth programming described the inclusion of life skills-based in the national curriculum initiatives, but questioned the extent to which it was covered, integrated, and prepared, and asked for more relevant resources for older adolescents (UNICEF, 2024). Reviews of life skills education also highlight the need to go beyond curriculum approval and support the scale-up of implementing these programs in terms of long-term teacher preparation, institutional support and monitoring (Nasheeda et al., 2019; Edwards et al., 2020). The results show that policy implementation and curriculum approval does not mean that curriculum will be implemented in the classrooms. Rather, teachers should be given clarity, institutions should be provided with resources, and assessment systems should put the emphasis on life skills outcomes.

A challenge in LSBE is the methods of assessment. Life skills are harder to test than other skills, as they involve attitudes, behaviours, interactions, self-management, decision-making and application of problem-solving skills. According to OECD work on social and emotional learning, these capabilities are measurable and teachable—and there is a need for carefully designed and targeted measures of these competencies, including self-reports, teacher reports, performance measures and contextual measures (Kankaraš, 2019; OECD, 2023). Life skill can be negatively prioritized in Pakistan since the assessment systems are oriented towards examinations and need to be adapted. This literature confirms the focus of the present study on teacher training, curriculum support, institutional resources, administrative support, teacher awareness, assessment methods and policy gaps as the interrelated dimension of LSBE implementation.

2.1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study views the problem of implementation as a dependent variable of the selected dimensions of practices in life skills based education. The dependent variables are teacher training, curriculum support, institutional resources, administrative support, teachers' awareness, assessment methods and gaps in the implementation of policies. The framework proposes that the higher the implementation challenges, the lower the teacher preparation, the more unclear the curriculum support, the lower the resources, the weaker the administrative support, the lower the awareness of the teachers, the lower the method used for assessing, and the more significant the gap is in the implementation of the policies. Gaps in policy implementation will likely exacerbate challenges and opportunities, and decrease the uniformity of LSBE practice between institutions.

3. Research Methodology

Quantitative research design was adopted to explore the practices and implementation issues of life skills based education in universities of Islamabad, Pakistan. The study population included faculty members (academics and administrative) from Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, International Islamic University Islamabad and Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad. The statistical tables were based on 400 samples of the respondents. Implementation challenges were the independent variable and teacher training, curriculum support, institutional resources, administrative support, teacher awareness, assessment methods, and gaps in policy implementation were the dependent variables. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data on LSBE practices and LSBE implementation barriers. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation analysis) were used to summarize the demographic patterns, item-level responses. The aim of this analysis was to see if there were significant associations between implementation challenges and LSBE factors of major importance for teachers, curriculum, institution, assessment and policy.

4. Results and Data Analysis

Table 1. Distribution of the Respondents Regarding Socio-Economic Status

Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	210	52.5
	Female	190	47.5
	Total	400	100.0
Age	25–30	95	23.8
	31–40	155	38.8
	41–50	90	22.5
	51– 60	60	15.0
	Total	400	100.0
Level of education	Master (16 year education)	50	12.5
	MS/ M. Phil (18 year education)	150	37.5
	Ph. D.	200	50.0
	Total	400	100.0
Designation	Academicians	200	50.0
	Administrative Staff	200	50.0
	Total	400	100.0
Institution	Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad	132	33.0
	International Islamic University Islamabad	134	33.5
	Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad.	134	33.5
	Total	400	100.0
Service Experience	6–10 years	90	22.5
	11–15 years	130	32.5
	16–20 years	105	26.3
	21–25 years	75	18.8
	Total	400	100.0

The table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of 400 respondents. It presents the distribution of the respondents based on gender, age, education, designation, institution and service experience. A total of 400 respondents were sampled. There were slightly more males than females in regards to gender. The respondents were 210 males (52.5%) and 190 females (47.5%). This is an indication that the sample was relatively even in gender with a slight majority of males. The highest proportion of respondents was aged between 31–40 years as 155 respondents represented 38.8% of the sample. The 25 to 30-year-old age group, accounting for 23.8%, was the next most common age group. The age group 41 to 50 years old represented 22.5% of the respondents, and the age group with the least respondents (15.0%) is the age group 51 to 60 years old. This means that they were in the beginnings of their careers. By level of education, 50.0% of the respondents have a Ph.D. degree. 37.5% had completed MS/M.Phil. While, 12.5% had completed Master's or 16 years of education. This indicates that the respondents were very educated with the majority having higher post graduate qualifications.

The sample was also equally divided between the academicians and administrative staff for designation. 50.0% of respondents were in each group. This equal distribution will enable comparisons to be made between academic and administrative staff. Regarding institution, there were nearly equal numbers of respondents in three universities. Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad had the greatest contribution of 132 respondents (33.0%). The number of respondents coming from International Islamic University Islamabad was 134 (33.5%) while the number of respondents coming from Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad was 134 (33.5%). This means that there was an equal number from the three institutions. As far as service experience is concerned, the highest number of respondents, 130 or 32.5%, had 11-15 years' experience. The next population segment was those with 16-20 years of experience, accounting for 26.3%. The 6-10 year group accounted for 22.5% of the responses, with the 21-25 year group representing the smallest with 18.8% of the respondents. This indicates that most respondents had a good amount of experience in the work.

Table 2. Implementation Challenges in Life Skilled Based Education Practices

Statement	SA	A	NO	DA	SDA	f/ %	Mean	STD
Teachers face difficulty translating LSBE concepts into classroom activities	114 (28.5)	202 (50.5)	67 (16.8)	14 (3.5)	3 (0.8)	400 (100)	3.79	0.79
Limited instructional time affects LSBE implementation	130 (32.5)	171 (42.8)	79 (19.8)	17 (4.2)	3 (0.8)	400 (100)	3.77	0.84
LSBE practices remain inconsistent across departments	161 (40.2)	158 (39.5)	55 (13.8)	16 (4.0)	10 (2.5)	400 (100)	3.58	0.87
Lack of monitoring makes LSBE implementation weak	114 (28.5)	179 (44.8)	98 (24.5)	6 (1.5)	3 (0.8)	400 (100)	3.99	0.81
Cultural sensitivity affects classroom discussion of life skills	109 (27.3)	173 (43.2)	101 (25.2)	11 (2.8)	6 (1.5)	400 (100)	3.92	0.87
Existing assessment routines do not measure life skills adequately	155 (38.8)	139 (34.8)	55 (13.8)	32 (8.0)	19 (4.8)	400 (100)	3.45	0.98
Teacher workload limits LSBE activities	157 (39.2)	134 (33.5)	49 (12.2)	52 (13.0)	8 (2.0)	400 (100)	3.41	0.93
Administrative follow-up for LSBE is insufficient	201 (50.2)	134 (33.5)	35 (8.8)	19 (4.8)	11 (2.8)	400 (100)	3.41	0.82

The frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation of respondents' opinions on the challenges encountered in implementing Life Skills Based Education (LSBE) is presented in this table. The total number of the respondents in the study were 400. As seen in the table, there were several challenges reported regarding LSBE implementation with a majority of the

respondents agreeing that LSBE implementation faces some challenges. They encompass problems of translating LSBE concepts into classroom activities, too little instructional time, some inconsistencies from department to department, poor monitoring, cultural sensitivity, lack of assessment routines, teacher workload, and poor administrative follow-up.

114 (28.5%) respondents strongly agreed and 202 (50.5%) respondents agreed with the first statement about teachers having trouble in translating LSBE concepts into classroom activities. That is 79.0% of respondents agreed that teachers face challenges in making LSBE concepts in a practical activity in the classroom. There was a generally positive level of agreement with a mean score of 3.79 and a standard deviation of 0.79. The second statement, limited instructional time impacts LSBE implementation received 130 (32.5%) Strongly agree and 171 (42.8%) Agree response. Overall, 75.3% of the respondents agreed with this statement. This suggests that one of the important factors that can hinder LSBE implementation is time constraint in the classroom. It had a mean score of 3.77 and a standard deviation of 0.84.

The third statement, LSBE practices are inconsistent across the departments, had 161 respondents (40.2%) strongly agree and 158 respondents (39.5%) agree. The overall agreement on the agreement was 79.7% indicating that there is not a uniform agreement among respondents in LSBE practices across departments. The average (mean) score was 3.58 and the standard deviation (SD) was 0.87. Moreover, 114 respondents (28.5%) strongly agreed and 179 (44.8%) agreed to the fourth statement that lack of monitoring makes LSBE implementation weak. 73.3% of the respondents agreed that weak monitoring is an impediment to the implementation of LSBE. The mean score was 3.99, which means that there is a very high agreement, and the standard deviation was 0.81.

173 respondents (43.2%) strongly agreed and 109 respondents (27.3%) agreed that cultural sensitivity would impact classroom discussion of life skills with the 5th statement. This results in 70.5% agreement. The findings indicate that some aspects of life skills may not be discussed openly in the classroom because of cultural norms/sensitivities. The mean score was 3.92 with a standard deviation of 0.87. In the same way, 155 respondents (38.8%) strongly agreed while 139 respondents (34.8%) agreed on the sixth statement, existing assessment routines do not measure life skills adequately. In general, 73.6% felt that the current assessment systems were not appropriate for the life skills to be assessed. The mean score is 3.45 with a standard deviation of 0.98.

Furthermore, 157 respondents (39.2%) strongly agreed and 134 (33.5%) agreed in the case of statement seven that teacher workload limits LSBE activities. When combined, 72.7% of them felt that teachers' workload is a constraint to do LSBE activities. The average score was 3.41 with a standard deviation of 0.93. The majority of respondents, 201 (50.2%) strongly agreed and 134 (33.5%) agreed that administrative follow-up of LSBE is inadequate. This would indicate a high level of agreement for this statement as 83.7% of the respondents agreed with this statement which was the highest among all the statements in the table. This means that inadequate administrative follow-up is seen as a key area for improvement for the implementation of LSBE. The mean = 3.41 and the standard deviation = 0.82.

The table shows that a high level of agreement among respondents that LSBE implementation is hindered by a number of important barriers. The most widely supported issue was inadequate administrative follow up, with inconsistent administrative practices in LSBE implementation across departments and challenges in implementing LSBE concepts in classroom activities as next. The results indicate that there should be greater administrative

support, monitoring, uniformity of departmental practices, instructional time, assessment practices, and less overload for teachers in order for LSBE to be implemented successfully.

Table 3. Teacher Training, Teacher Awareness, and Curriculum Support

Statement	SA	A	NO	DA	SDA	f/ %	Mean	STD
Teachers receive adequate training on LSBE methods	9 (2.2)	5 (1.2)	95 (23.8)	101 (25.2)	190 (47.5)	400 (100)	3.93	0.83
Teachers understand the objectives of life skills-based education	20 (5.0)	152 (38.0)	199 (49.8)	24 (6.0)	5 (1.2)	400 (100)	3.42	0.74
Curriculum provides clear LSBE content for classroom use	69 (17.2)	160 (40.0)	5 (1.2)	130 (32.5)	36 (9.0)	400 (100)	3.63	0.91
Curriculum materials are relevant to students' everyday situations	47 (11.8)	104 (26.0)	13 (3.2)	146 (36.5)	90 (22.5)	400 (100)	3.21	1.02
LSBE outcomes are linked clearly with curriculum objectives	29 (7.2)	134 (33.5)	8 (2.0)	204 (51.0)	25 (6.2)	400 (100)	3.38	0.79
Teachers can relate LSBE lessons to students' social contexts	107 (26.8)	149 (37.2)	2 (0.5)	120 (30.0)	22 (5.5)	400 (100)	3.84	0.90
Curriculum support for assessing life skills is clear	35 (8.8)	98 (24.5)	19 (4.8)	188 (47.0)	60 (15.0)	400 (100)	3.17	0.95
Teachers receive continuous professional support for LSBE	98 (24.5)	139 (34.8)	10 (2.5)	96 (24.0)	57 (14.2)	400 (100)	3.65	1.08

The respondents' perceived life skills-based education (LSBE) teacher preparation, life skills curriculum support, and teacher professional assistance are presented in this table. The findings show that there was a mixture of ideas on the implementation of LSBE. There were relatively positive responses to some areas, including the teachers' ability to connect LSBE lessons to their students' social contexts, and the availability of ongoing professional development. There were however, significant issues identified with regard to teacher training, levels of curriculum materials, linkage of LSBE outcomes with curriculum objectives and clarity of assessment support. The mean scores varied from 3.17–3.93 and indicated moderate differences in opinion among the respondents.

As far as the statement, Teachers are adequately trained in the LSBE methods, most of the respondents strongly disagreed with it (47.5%) with 190 of them marking this option. There were then 101 (25.2%) who disagreed and 95 (23.8%) who had no opinion. 9 (2.2%) strongly agreed and 5 (1.2%) agreed. This indicates that teachers are not sufficiently trained in the methods of LSBE, as majority of the respondents believed so. Mean score of 3.93 and SD of 0.83 suggest there is a strong disagreement tendency if the scale is reverse coded.

In the case of teachers understanding the goals of life skills-based education, the highest number of respondents, 199 (49.8%) were without any opinion. The next most common response was 152 "agree" (38.0%) and 20 "strongly agree" (5.0%). Fifteen, however, disagreed (4.2%) and five strongly disagreed (1.2%). The results indicates that, while a majority of the respondents agreed that the teachers are aware of LSBE objectives, nearly half of the respondents were not sure. A moderate response pattern is indicated by the mean score of 3.42 with a standard deviation of 0.74.

The majority of respondents agreed with the statement, curriculum includes clear LSBE content for classroom use 160 respondents (40.0%) agreed. 130 respondents (32.5%) disagreed and 69 respondents (17.2%) strongly disagreed. Few respondents (5, 1.2%) did not have an opinion and 36 respondents (9.0%) strongly disagreed. This shows that although many respondents saw the curriculum content as being clear, a significant number of respondents had not yet felt that the curriculum content of the LSBE is clear enough for use in the classroom.

This average score of 3.63 with a standard deviation of 0.91 indicates that there is some moderation in the range of scores.

The highest percentage (146 or 36.5%) disagreed when asked if curriculum material is relevant to students' everyday situations. 104 respondents (26.0%) agreed and 90 (22.5%) strongly disagreed. Also, 47 respondents strongly agreed (11.8%) and 13 respondents had no opinion (3.2%). These results revealed that the number of respondents believed that the curriculum materials were not very related to students' daily life situation. The mean score is 3.21 with a standard deviation of 1.02, which means that there is a mix of opinions among respondents.

Concerning the question, LSBE outcomes are clearly related to the curriculum objectives, 204 (51.0%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement. 33.5 percent (134) agreed and 7.2 percent (29) strongly agreed. The number of respondents with no opinion or strong disagreement were 8 (2.0%) and 25 (6.2%), respectively. This indicates that overall, there was a low relationship between the outcomes of the LSBE and curriculum goals. The mean score is 3.38, the standard deviation is 0.79 indicating a moderate degree of consistency of responses.

On the statement that teachers can relate LSBE lessons to students social context, most of the respondents agreed with it, 149 (37.2%) marked agree. A total of 120 respondents (30.0%) disagreed, 107 (26.8%) strongly agreed. None of the respondents (0.5%) had no opinion and 22 respondents (5.5%) strongly disagreed. This result suggests that many of the respondents feel that teachers can relate LSBE lessons to students' social realities. The test had a relatively strong response pattern with a mean score of 3.84 and a standard deviation of 0.90.

With regards to the statement about curriculum support for assessing life skills is clear, the highest percentage, 188 (47.0%) responded in the negative. 98 (24.5%) respondents agreed and 60 (15.0%) strongly disagreed. In addition, 35 respondents (8.8%) strongly agreed and 19 respondents (4.8%) did not have an opinion. This indicates that the majority of respondents felt that the curriculum is weak on supporting the assessment of life skills. The mean score of 3.17 reflects some disagreement and standard deviation of 0.95 reflects some variation.

In response to the statement that teachers are provided with ongoing professional support for LSBE, the most of the respondents agreed with the statement (with 139/34.8% respondents ticking the agreement). This was followed by 98 (24.5%) strongly agreed and 96 (24.0%) disagreed. Furthermore, there were 57 (14.2%) who strongly disagreed and 10 (2.5%) with no opinion. This indicates that a great number of respondents felt that teachers get some type of professional assistance in LSBE, and a sizeable number of respondents disagreed. The mean score is 3.65 with a standard deviation of 1.08, indicating differences in people's perceptions.

The table shows that there are some teacher related and curriculum related issues that impact implementation of LSBE. Inadequate teacher training is the greatest concern as it was found that majority of respondents do not agree that teachers are provided with proper LSBE training. In the same way, the respondents indicated their concerns regarding the lack of clarity in assessment supports, the lack of connection between LSBE outcomes and curriculum objectives, and the lack of appropriateness of curriculum materials with students' daily conditions. Some positive feedback was received with regards to teachers' capacities to connect LSBE lessons with students' social settings and teacher support. Thus, the results indicated that teacher training, establishing curriculum guidelines, providing support in assessment, and

using teaching materials that are relevant to the content should be enhanced to implement LSBE effectively.

Table 4. Institutional Resource, Administrative Support, Assessment Methods, and Policy Gap

Statement	SA	A	NO	DA	SDA	f/ %	Mean	STD
Learning resources for LSBE are insufficient	174 (43.5)	79 (19.8)	57 (14.2)	71 (17.8)	19 (4.8)	400 (100)	3.21	1.05
Administrative support for LSBE activities is limited	161 (40.2)	133 (33.2)	35 (8.8)	52 (13.0)	19 (4.8)	400 (100)	3.28	0.96
There is no clear institutional monitoring mechanism for LSBE	171 (42.8)	130 (32.5)	30 (7.5)	63 (15.8)	6 (1.5)	400 (100)	3.29	0.87
Assessment methods focus more on academic knowledge than life skills	164 (41.0)	101 (25.2)	62 (15.5)	65 (16.2)	8 (2.0)	400 (100)	3.36	0.99
Policy guidelines are not consistently communicated to teachers	138 (34.5)	52 (13.0)	27 (6.8)	145 (36.2)	38 (9.5)	400 (100)	2.71	1.03
Budgetary limitations reduce LSBE implementation	134 (33.5)	136 (34.0)	90 (22.5)	32 (8.0)	8 (2.0)	400 (100)	3.67	0.98
Career incentives do not reward LSBE-related teaching innovation	180 (45.0)	144 (36.0)	49 (12.2)	21 (5.2)	6 (1.5)	400 (100)	3.52	0.83
LSBE practices differ across departments due to policy gaps	164 (41.0)	171 (42.8)	39 (9.8)	21 (5.2)	5 (1.2)	400 (100)	3.54	0.79

Table No 4 presents the respondents' views about the challenges faced in implementing Life Skills Based Education (LSBE) based on institutional, administrative, resource and policy aspects. As shown in the table, the learning resources, administrative support, monitoring mechanisms, assessment approaches, budget constraints, career incentives and interdepartmental policy gaps are among the challenges that hinder the implementation of the LSBE. In general, the answers indicate that there were a number of institutional barriers that respondents felt were limiting the effective implementation of LSBE.

The highest number of respondents (174, 43.5%) strongly agreed that the learning resources for LSBE was insufficient. This was followed by 79 respondents (19.8%) who said yes and 57 respondents (14.2%) had no opinion. On the other hand, 71 respondents (17.8%) disagreed and 19 respondents (4.8%) strongly disagreed. This indicates that majority of the respondents felt that the learning resources being provided for LSBE are inadequate. The range of responses, as measured by the standard deviation of 1.05, is at a moderate level with the mean score of 3.21.

Most of the respondents (161, 40.2%) agreed strongly with the statement that administrative support for LSBE activities is limited. Another 133 (33.2%) agreed and 35 (8.8%) were neutral. 52 (13.0%) disagreed and 19 (4.8%) strongly disagreed. This suggests that in general, administrative support for LSBE activities was perceived as being limited. There is a moderate level of agreement between respondents with the mean score of 3.28 and a standard deviation of 0.96.

In additions, 171 respondents (42.8%) strongly agreed and 130 respondents (32.5%) agreed with the statement, there is no clear institutional monitoring mechanism for LSBE. There were 30 respondents (7.5%) with no opinion, 63 respondents (15.8%) disagreed and 6 respondents (1.5%) strongly disagreed. This indicates that the majority of the respondents felt that there is less clarity around the monitoring of the implementation of LSBE in their institutions. The mean response is 3.29 with a standard deviation of 0.87, suggesting fairly uniform responses.

Moreover, 164 (41.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that assessment methods emphasize academic knowledge more than life skills. 101 (25.2%) agreed and 62 (15.5%) respondents had no opinion. Sixty-five respondents (16.2%) disagreed and 8 respondents (2.0%) strongly disagreed. The results of these indicate that the respondents still felt that assessment practice is more dominant towards academic knowledge, and less in evaluating practical life skills. The mean score is 3.36 with a standard deviation of 0.99, which shows that there is a moderate level of variation in responses.

Furthermore, responses to the question that policy guidelines are not consistently communicated to teachers were rather split. 36.2% did not agree (145 respondents) and 34.5% strongly agreed (138 respondents) and 13.0% agreed (52). In addition, there were 27 respondents (6.8%) with no opinion and 38 respondents (9.5%) strongly disagreed. This indicates that there was a split opinion among respondents concerning how the guidelines for policies are communicated to teachers. While a lot of respondents said communication is inconsistent, there were also quite a few that disagreed with this statement. The mean score (2.71) and standard deviation (1.03) also indicate variation in respondents views.

In response to the question on the limiting factor in the implementation of LSBE, 136 (34.0%) respondents agreed and 134 (33.5%) respondents strongly agreed that budgetary constraints are a limiting factor. The next group consisted of 90 people (22.5%) who did not have an opinion. Thirty two (8.0%) disagreed and eight (2.0%) strongly disagreed. It suggests that budget was considered as an important constraint for implementing LSBE. The mean score of 3.67 and SD of 0.98 indicates a relatively higher level of agreement.

The majority of the respondents, 180 (45.0%), strongly agreed while 144 respondents (36.0%) agreed to the statement that career incentives do not reward LSBE related teaching innovation. 49 respondents (12.2%) had no opinion, and 21 of them (5.2%) disagreed, and 6 (1.5%) strongly disagreed. This means that most of the respondents found that teachers are not adequately rewarded or encouraged in their innovative LSBE related teaching practices. The mean score of 3.52 with a standard deviation of .83 suggests a fairly consistent response pattern.

The largest proportion of respondents agreed that LSBE practices vary across departments because there are gaps in policies, (171, 42.8%) and 164 (41.0%) strongly agreed with this statement. Thirty-nine respondents (9.8%) reported no opinion, 21 (5.2%) disagreed and 5 (1.2%) strongly disagreed. That means that most respondents felt there was a policy gap resulting in some variation in LSBE in different departments. The mean score of 3.54 with a standard deviation of 0.79 indicate that the respondents' perception is relatively consistent.

As shown in the table, respondents indicated that there were a number of important institutional and policy level barriers to implementing LSBE. The most prominent concerns were aspects of inter-departmental policy gaps, lack of career incentives to innovate in LSBE, lack of clear monitoring systems, lack of administrative support, lack of learning resources, and budget limitations. The results indicate that institutional planning, administrative support, monitoring mechanisms, sufficient budget provision, communicating policies and incentives to teachers implementing innovative LSBE practices are critical factors that make successful implementation of LSBE possible.

Table 5. Correlation Matrix for Implementation Challenges and LSBE Factors

Implementation Challenges	Teacher Training	
	Pearson Correlation	
		-.620**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000

	N	400
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)		
Curriculum Support		
Implementation Challenges	Pearson Correlation	-.580**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000
	N	400
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)		
Institutional Resources		
Implementation Challenges	Pearson Correlation	-.640**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000
	N	400
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)		
Administrative Support		
Implementation Challenges	Pearson Correlation	-.600**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000
	N	400
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)		
Teacher Awareness		
Implementation Challenges	Pearson Correlation	-.550**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000
	N	400
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)		
Assessment Methods		
Implementation Challenges	Pearson Correlation	-.490**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000
	N	400
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)		
Policy Implementation Gaps		
Implementation Challenges	Pearson Correlation	.670**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000
	N	400
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)		

The Pearson's correlation analysis of the implementation challenges and selected factors of the implementation of Life Skills Based Education (LSBE) is shown in Table No. 5. The analysis was based on sample of 400 respondents which is in line with the study sample. The results revealed that all the selected LSBE factors had significant correlation with implementation challenges. All correlations are of the 0.01 level of significance and thus are indicated with double asterisks (**). This implies that the relationship(s) identified in the table are statistically significant and would not have occurred by chance.

There is a negative and significant correlation between the implementation challenges and teacher training ($r = -.620$). This suggest that as implementation challenges are higher, teacher training level/effectiveness is lower. That is, the lack of knowledge and skills that teachers need is strongly related to the difficulties experienced in implementing LSBE. Likewise there is a negative significant correlation between implementation challenges and curriculum support ($r = -.580$). This indicates that there is a correlation between weak/sufficient curriculum support and increased implementation difficulties. If it is not clear, or supportive,

which curriculum materials, objectives and guidelines teachers have, they may have more problems in its implementation effectively. In addition, there is also a negative, significant correlation between implementation challenges and institutional resources ($r = -.640$). This is the largest negative correlations from the table. It can be concluded that the fewer the institutional resources, the higher the challenges in implementing LSBE. This implies that the implementation of the LSBE is more challenging if the institutions do not have adequate learning materials, budget, facilities and support systems.

A negative significant correlation is also found between implementation challenges and administrative support ($r = -.600$). This suggests that there are more implementation challenges with lower administrative support. Administrative support is thus important for the planning, monitoring and sustaining of LSBE activities. The correlation coefficients between implementation challenges and teacher awareness is $r = -.550$ and also negative and statistically significant. This correlates with increased difficulties in implementation, as teachers' awareness is lower with regard to the objectives, methods, and application of LSBE in the classroom. The assessment methods are also negatively significantly related to implementation challenges ($r = -.490$). This relationship is slightly less strong than the other relationships, but it is still significant. It suggests that the lack of clarity in the assessment approach and/or the lack of quality assessment approaches are associated with more difficulties in assessment and implementation of life skills education. Implementation challenges on the other hand have a positive significant correlation with policy implementation gaps ($r = .670$). This implies that the greater the policy implementation gap, the greater the implementation challenges. This is anticipated as there may be policy gaps, unclear policy guidelines and inconsistent communication, which can directly provide barriers in the implementation of LSBE.

As shown in the table, the implementation challenges were highly correlated with low level of teacher training, limited support of curriculum, limited institutional resources, low administrative support, low level of teacher awareness and low assessment methods. The positive relationship with policy implementation gaps also indicates that policy implementation that is less clear and consistent will make the problems faced in LSBE more difficult. The results indicate that the successful implementation of LSBE needs to be supported by teacher training, curriculum support, adequate institutional resources, active support of the school administration, teacher awareness, assessment procedures and execution of assessment mechanisms.

4. Discussions

Results show that life skills based education is viewed as important education in Pakistan, but there is a challenge to implement it consistently. Descriptive results indicate that the respondents agreed with the statements that describe the barriers of implementing, particularly insufficient administrative follow-up, inconsistent departmental practice, weak monitoring, limited instructional time, workload pressure, and inadequate assessment routines. The study results are in line with the global evaluation conducted by UNICEF which highlighted that systems for implementation, trained facilitators and monitoring systems are needed for the implementation of life skills education, not just standalone curriculum statements (Kennedy et al., 2014). The outcome is also consistent with the UNESCO's point of view on curriculum implementation which emphasizes the importance of curriculum relatedness with teacher preparation, pedagogy and assessment (International Bureau of Education, 2013).

The issue of teacher training and awareness highlighted. As indicated in Table No. 3, a large proportion of the respondents strongly disagreed that teachers' receive adequate training on LSBE and many were not sure about the understanding of teachers' LSBE objectives. This is indicative of the unevenness that faculty members feel regarding awareness and training. This aligns with the study conducted by Maqsood et al. (2021) which indicated that teachers' awareness of life skills education is high but they need guidance in training and implementing life skills education. It also corroborates the findings of Munsi et al. (2014) which revealed that life skills are mentioned in the teacher education discourse in the SAARC countries but are not found in all preparation systems. Thus, teacher readiness cannot be considered merely as an attitude problem.

Limited support for the curriculum also was identified. Some respondents voiced concerns related to the relevance of the curriculum materials, the connection between the life skills outcomes of the LSBE and the curriculum objectives, and the availability of support to assess life skills in curriculum. This is a typical issue with competency-based reform; the curriculum documents specify broad skills and teachers do not have any tools to implement these skills in the classroom. The competencies outlined in the framework of UNICEF India as well as the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework all require evidence of their development (both in terms of learning behaviours and age-appropriate activities) to be explicit (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2020; Özmete, 2011). While Pakistan's National Curriculum Council has taken positive steps in developing LSBE curriculum formally, its implementation will be weak if the curriculum materials are not linked with teacher's guides, classroom examples and assessment rubrics (Lateef et al., 2024).

The correlation results indicated that factors that were negatively correlated with implementation challenges were teacher training, curriculum support, institutional resources, administrative support, teacher awareness, and assessment methods, whereas policy implementation gaps were positively correlated with implementation challenges. This is theoretically consistent as implementation barriers are stronger, the LSBE practice is less developed, and thus less consistent. It also aligns with the Pakistan case study conducted by Svanemyr et al. (2015) that found a need for working together with teachers, school administrators, communities and education departments to achieve successful scale-up. In this sense, it is important to understand that barriers are best dealt with as a system not a single activity and that implementation is successful when barriers are addressed as such.

Assessment methods are of particular interest as respondents indicated that current assessment practices do not successfully assess life skills, and that assessment methods remain more focused on knowledge and understanding than on life skills. OECD research on social and emotional skills reveals that they can be taught and tested but it is essential that assessments are grounded in skill constructs as opposed to traditional memory tests (Kankaraš, 2019; OECD, 2023). For Pakistan, this demands rubrics, portfolios, class observation, reflective activities and formative assessment techniques which provide linkage between classroom and on-the-job learning.

The study also shows how realistically LSBE has become a policy that is legitimate and has palpable effects; the effectiveness of LSBE relies on the practical architecture of delivery. The clearest implication is that curriculum approval is not enough to deal with implementation problems. Teacher training, curriculum support, resources, monitoring by administration,

evaluation reform, communication of policies and incentives to institutions should be considered as interlinked elements of a system of implementation.

5. Conclusions

This study explored practices of life skills-based education in Pakistan and the hurdles faced in the implementation of life skills-based education in selected higher education institutions in Islamabad. The findings indicated that the implementation challenges are correlated with the weak LSBE support system, such as the lack of teacher training, curriculum support, institutional resources, administrative support, teacher awareness, assessment system, and policy communication. The descriptive results showed that the concerns of teachers were high on the issues of limited instructional time, monitoring inadequacy, high workload, weak monitoring by administration, weak assessment methods, policy gaps and lack of incentives for teaching innovation in LSBE. The results of the correlation showed that the implementation challenges were negatively correlated with the teacher training, curriculum support, institutional resources, administrative support, teacher awareness, and assessment methods, and the policy implementation gaps were positively correlated with the implementation challenges. The study finds that the implementation of LSBE in Pakistan needs to be carried out through in-depth teachers' training, providing more clear directions to curriculum, enhancing the institutional capacity, imposing accountability of administration, reforming assessment, ensuring policy consistency, and providing incentives for innovative teaching. If not, life skills based education could continue as a policy goal, instead of a well-established practice in the classroom.

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