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Schools Promoting Social and Life Skills among Secondary School Students in Pakistan

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Abstract

In the 21st century, schools around the world are expected to focus on the holistic development of children, inclusive of non-cognitive domains, such as Social and Life Skills (SLSs), since they can enable students to demonstrate social adaptability. International large-scale assessments emphasise non-cognitive domains, globally. Similarly, Pakistan and other developing countries consider the non-cognitive domain in educational policies to be important; however, little is known about the schools developing SLSs among students. This study aims to present evidence around schools promoting SLSs. The research employs a qualitative design, with the sample being selected purposively: students (16), teachers (8), and head teachers (4). Qualitative individual and group interviews were conducted and analysed thematically. The findings reveal that schools seem not to promote SCs and LSs among students explicitly, however, schools implicitly provide certain avenues for promoting such. Particularly, teachers have the power to stimulate social and life skills as teachers are considered role models for students. Moreover, the paper highlighted the unintended contribution of students' socioeconomic status in the development of their SCs and LSs. Finally, it presents the implications and recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

Keywords: holistic development, role of schools, schooling systems, social and life skills, Pakistan

Introduction

Globally, schools have been accounted to prioritise holistic development over a narrow focus on academic progress, because schools promote holistic development among students with the provision of authentic learning experience beyond academics. Since students spend a significant portion of their time in schools, it is important to engage them both intellectually and socially to ensure holistic development. Schools

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ensure giving inclusive opportunities to develop their intellectual and social skills alongside moral values as well as emotional understanding. These experiences help shape young individuals to take an active part in society which is an important skill, specifically in the 21st century. Putting it differently, developing non-cognitive or 'soft' skills encourages positive behaviour by reducing negative habits and supporting overall well-being which potentially leads to noticeable benefits in students' academic, social, and economic lives (Davies, 2013). Research shows that such skills improve academic achievement and attitudes towards learning, for instance, CASEL programmes have been linked to better test results (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Likewise, students get help from social skills in order to communicate and work in collaboration with others (Burns et al., 2018). Thus, students who have skills related to academic knowledge and interpersonal relationship building with good communication can have better career prospects and economic growth (Martinson et al., 2020). In today's world, these social skills are equally important for success in professional life (Kivunja, 2015). Therefore, students who are assisted in learning 'soft' aspects, including social and life skills, are enabled to compete in school as well as in social lives. This is because students get confidence and capability to handle social circumstances and live independently as responsible members of society.

Globally, education systems emphasise upon students' social and life skills as part of developing social adaptability in addition to academic knowledge. The trend is reflected in international assessments such as PISA and PIAAC (2015). These assessments have now included measures on students' social and emotional skills to capture their understanding about belonging and well-being (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2016). PISA 2018 is also introducing the concept of global competence to explore students' understanding and engagement with diverse perspectives (OECD, 2019). In line with this, countries are transforming their curricula to provide social and emotional learning in order to support students' holistic development (Balázs, 2019; Ghafar, 2020; Gouëdard et al., 2020). Therefore, it is suggested that schools should provide more than traditional teaching for students to foster social and life skills with the provision of inclusive environments that support their emotional well-being (Ansari, 2024). These approaches then help students to build confidence, adaptability, and competence as essential parts of their personal growth and academic success (Bussey, 2011). With this backdrop,

this paper explores the role of schools in developing social and life skills among students.

The key terminologies of non-cognitive development include social and life skills. Social skills include more than one's understanding of self, it encompasses the awareness of others as well as everyday situations. The life skills include keeping good personal and environmental hygiene, making decisions, and solving problems. The cumulation of these skills help students confidently deal with varying everyday situations (Gresham & Elliott, 2014). These skills also influence children's behaviour, their social interaction, and their participation in group activities which affects students' performance in school (Rashid, 2010). On the other hand, schools become central learning points of such social and life skills, because schools are not only dedicated to providing academic lessons but also social exposure where students constantly learn from their teachers and peers. This places schools in a strong position to help children grow in a holistic way. However, schools overlook this role which raises concerns about them being a fair entity for students to get prepared for survival beyond school.

In general, social and emotional skills are becoming more important for children. These skills largely include leadership, critical thinking, communication, and other related skills for the 21st century (Kautz et al., 2014; Murphy-Graham & Cohen, 2022; Kwauk & Braga, 2017). However, in countries like Pakistan, the education system still struggles with a learning crisis. Schools focus heavily on completing the syllabus, often at the expense of children's personal development. Resultantly, many students after finishing school may have skills such as reading and writing but are unaware of themselves as well as about the society around them (Imtiaz et al., 2020). This is because schools only focus on factual understanding and ignore key skills and attitudes which are broadly needed for modern life (Ahmad & Pendry, 2022; Ansari, 2022; 2023; Memon, 2010; Rashid & Mukhtar, 2012; Zulfiqar et al., 2019). However, for life-long learning, it is essential to consider relevant educational experiences that help children grow as responsible citizens. Unfortunately, many current goals in Pakistan's education system do not fully support or empower passing out students which is making a noticeable gap between what children learn and the social responsibilities they are expected to take on (Ahmad & Pendry, 2022; Ansari, 2023; Aamer, 2009; Jumani & Abbasi, 2015).

Having said that, the current paper poses the following critical question:

do schools in Pakistan genuinely contribute to students' holistic development? Despite national policies emphasising holistic development, empirical evidence on their implementation in instructional processes is lacking. The paper aims to address this gap by exploring the role of schools in promoting SLSs among students in Pakistan.

Research Question

This paper is guided by one major and three subsidiary questions as presented below:

- How do school experiences enable children to acquire social capabilities and life skills in the Pakistani context?

  o How do schools promote SCs and LSs among students?

  o How do school stakeholders contribute to SCs and LSs development?

  o What other factors contribute to SCs and LSs development?

Literature Review

Social capabilities refer to an individual's ability to maintain psycho-socio-emotional well-being, social capabilities involve adaptive and positive behaviour in interactions with people, community, and the environment (Jonsson & Lillvist, 2019; Sen, 1999). Being socially adaptable is balancing personal freedom with daily life structures which is crucial for effective navigation (Bhaskar, 1986; Sen, 1999). Social capabilities impact well-being broadly, encompassing physical, mental, and social aspects. They include self-awareness, a progressive worldview, interpersonal and communication skills, and social awareness (Greshman, 2007; Durlak et al., 2011).

Life skills are adaptive attitudinal characteristics that enable effective handling of daily life expectations and challenges. Life skills encompass physical and social abilities, aiding individuals in making informed choices, finding solutions, and thinking creatively and critically to cope with daily concerns productively. Life skills encompass everything ranging from fundamental tasks, like household management and basic personal hygiene, to dealing with more complex everyday health related concerns. This makes life skills essential for daily life.

Schools Contributing to Social and Life Skill Development

Schools are widely recognised as primary settings for child development and learning. Schools operate under certain policies and guidelines set by national authorities which play a role in students' academic and personal growth (Meece & Eccles, 2010; Meece & Schaefer, 2010). The experiences students get within classrooms and in the broader school environment serve as an important factor in their social and life skills. In line with this, prominent developmental theorists, such as Piaget and Vygotsky, argue that the influence of schooling weighs far beyond academic learning because schools are social places and provide an avenue for students' socio-emotional skill development (Zins & Elias, 2007).

Schools initially planned to cover formal curricula and guide students through pre-defined set of learning areas which focuses on narrow learning experiences, resulting in the neglection of non-cognitive skills, which are equally essential for social life (Hannon et al., 2019). This phenomenon is reflected in schools which are only focusing on content delivery. On the flip side, some schools are making attempts to bring a multifunctional approach which provides academic learning along with platforms for social interaction and co-curricular experiences to help children build interpersonal skills (Kirimi et al., 2018; Vetter et al., 2019). Therefore, there is a clear focus on more balanced and holistic learning for students (Ferreira et al., 2020).

School Stakeholders Contributing to Social and Life Skill Development

Within schools, students encounter with school stakeholders which include the head of school as well as teachers. Both of them play an important role in student learning and development (Meece & Eccles, 2010). On the one hand, school leaders decide on policies and guidelines which are used as directions. These decisions influence on school environment by ensuring that the school feels safe organised and encouraging. Moreover, these leaders influence overall student learning experiences (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011; Pelnēna & Medveckis, 2022). On the other hand, teachers work closely with students. They translate school policies and use a range of teaching-learning methods to facilitate student learning (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Hare, 2010). Pedagogical practices are shifting to include behavioural, emotional, and social learning as essential parts of the classroom experience (Tirri, 2011).

Finland offers a strong example of this shift where teachers are prepared to support students' overall development beyond their academic work (Niemi, 2015). Alongside this, Finland is also providing increased attention on supporting teacher well-being through positive psychology and other initiatives (State et al., 2019).

Therefore, both teachers and school leaders help shape students' holistic development. On one side, leaders guide the direction of the school, and on the other side teachers carry that vision into daily practice to create meaningful and supportive learning experiences for every student.

External Factors in Developing Social and Life Skills

Children learn far more than what is taught inside classrooms. The social skills they pick up often come from a range of everyday experiences outside school (Beames & Ross, 2010). These learning scenarios, whether through structured programmes or simple day-to-day interactions, help shape students' character, moral understanding, and sense of purpose. Globally, person-centred approaches increasingly connect students' personal growth with their academic and future goals (Meadan et al., 2010). In addition to this, students learn most of the social aspects from their family lives. This is because the family serves as the first social institution for children, where they learn to socialise, show behaviour, understand values, and recognise themselves. These family-driven lessons exert long lasting impressions on children's perspectives, social skills, and decision-making abilities throughout their lives (Heorhadze, 2020; McDevitt et al., 2010).

Furthermore, students acquire social skills and understanding from their surroundings such as familial relationships, neighbourhoods, and community settings. These social interactions play a fundamental role in shaping their worldview and enable them to develop social skills (Bhardwaj, 2016). Arguably, schools have no control over the external lives of students, but they are uniquely positioned to guide students in making sense of these experiences in a meaningful way. In this way, students' social and life skills are developed with the help of schools, teachers, families, and society by providing an interdependent ecosystem that supports children as they grow in their life and academic stages.

In the context of Pakistan, which is a social and multicultural country, considering this broader developmental perspective is important. Although social and life skills are generally acknowledged as integral to student

development, but the provision of formal programmes is limited to help students (Ansari & Rizvi, 2023). This paper explores the current provision for these skills within schools and the roles of school stakeholders in developing social and life skills among students. At last, these cumulative perspectives indicate that a direct link between schools and society need to build for holistic development of students.

Methodology

In order to generate results in response to the research questions, qualitative research design was used to explore the role of schools in facilitating students' learning of social and life skills. Qualitative design was strategically aligned with the research question which appropriately suited to capturing the dynamics of real-life school settings and school stakeholders' understanding and meaning from their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Although the focus here is on the qualitative strand, this work is extracted from a mixed-methods study. That larger study drew its sample from eight randomly selected public and private schools from Sukkur district. In total, 263 Grade 10 students took part in the main survey.

Participants

For the study, purposive sampling was used to select the sample. The sample was drawn from the schools surveyed during the quantitative part of the study and identified as high-performing schools. From those schools, sixteen students, eight teachers and four headteachers were invited for semi-structured interviews while ensuring balanced representation of gender and school type.

Data Collection

Data were collected using several sources so different perspectives could be compared. The author carried out semi-structured individual interviews with the school heads and group interviews with students and teachers. Three interview guides were prepared, one for each stakeholder group containing six core questions as well as probes; these guides were piloted and refined before the fieldwork. Interviews were started with conversations by asking participants how they understood social and life skills and later moving on to discuss school practices such as teaching methods, co-curricular activities, rules and policy engagement. They were also asked about experiences outside the school that might shape these skills and finished by inviting suggestions for strengthening school policies and

practice.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data which were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The analysis was carried out following a step-by-step process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Interviews were transcribed and broken into manageable segments. Interview data were first coded using open coding where significant ideas related to the role of schools in developing social and life skills were picked. Second, the open codes were grouped using axial coding which were catergorised to make micro-themes. These were further grouped into broader themes that better captured responses to the research questions. For reliability of analysis, the coding was carried out in different cycles along with review of coded data by an independent educational researcher. Meanwhile, analytic memos throughout the process were maintained to note reflections and to make meanings transparent. Triangulating data from students, teachers and headteachers also helped strengthen the study's credibility. At last, short quotation, where necessary, were included within the themes.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical practice was central throughout the process. The study received approval from the Aga Khan University ethics review committee, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Additionally, confidentiality was maintained.

Findings

This section brings together the views of students, teachers, and school leaders on how schools shape students' social and life skills, and the factors that either support or limit this development.

How Do Schools Promote Social and Life Skills Among Students?

Participants consistently described schools as important spaces for developing the whole child. In practice, however, most felt that schools mainly concentrate on academic work. Teaching is often centred on covering the textbook and preparing students for exams. One of the students told that "Our teachers keep saying that if we do not learn the book by heart, we will fail" in line with this, another student added that "Teachers suggest us to spend most of our time preparing for exams and avoid learning other things which are not relevant." Likewise, teachers recognised the same

pattern of overburdened exam preparation on students, as one of them explained, "We are asked to complete the syllabus and get students ready for exams… there is very little room for us to change or try out things."

This exam-driven mindset also makes schools more competitive, especially in private schools. A student described that "Our parents put pressure on us to come first in exams..." This fact was confirmed by teachers who noted that many parents judge the school almost entirely through their children's grades. This phenomenon is aligned with the literature that parental expectations and pressures also shape the way private schools function (Lubienski & Myers, 2015; Gill & Booker, 2014).

Other than academic aspects, students have opportunities to co-curricular experiences such as sports, debates, drama, and the kinds of activities that normally enrich children's learning; however, these activities are nearly missing from daily school life. Some stakeholders viewed them as distractions or even unnecessary. A principal said, "Sports and drama or things like that only waste students' time… instead of these, students must focus on their studies." A teacher from a government school added, "Our time is very short to cover the lengthy syllabus, so we cannot manage activities like debates or sports." Students, however, felt their absence quite strongly. One of them shared, "We want to play and take part in competitions, but teachers say these activities can be done afterwards and are distractions right now from exams." These insights underscore that, regardless of school system, the underlying message is similar that the co-curricular activities are not given attention as important learning opportunities.

The difference in facilities provided in schools also shaped the role of schools in students' development of social and life skills. Private schools described having access to laboratories, libraries, and sports spaces that made broader learning experiences possible. A private school head put it simply by stating that "Our students have labs, a library, and sports grounds, which help them build confidence and teamwork." On the other hand, teachers in government schools painted a very different picture. One said, "We do not even have enough chairs for students… how can we think about sports or a library... these are luxuries." In some cases, students brought their own materials because the school had none to give. A teacher summed it up by saying, "Private school children have so many opportunities, but our children in government schools have nothing beyond the classroom."

In summary, these views show that although schools can play a meaningful role in helping students to develop social and life skills, the current structure of teaching and the lack of resources often restrict that role. The exam-centred culture with the limited space for co-curricular activities, and the inequalities among school systems make it difficult for many students to experience learning beyond narrow academic demands.

How Do School Stakeholders Contribute to Developing Social and Life Skills?

Schools do not solely teach academic subjects but also provide learnable social environments where students understand and experience how to interact, cope, communicate, and make sense of their individual selves and their surroundings. As part of this study, teachers were found to be the most immediate influence who not only facilitate students' conceptual understanding but also help them develop positive attitudes, behaviours, and social habits.

School heads also played a visible role which is largely coming from their decisions including policies and the routines they set. One of the students shared their frustration by stating that, "The principal decides our school life... means everything, from what and when we can play to what and how we must do in the classroom. Sometimes it feels like there is no space to express ourselves." Similarly, one of the teachers expressed their position that "We have strict policies because the principal wants the school to secure top grades in exams... it affects how much we can focus on other skills of students." These insights suggest that leadership choices, more specifically those driven by academic targets, have ripple effects on overall school experience of students and their ability to develop social and life skills.

Similarly, teachers play a crucial role in students' social and life skills. Teachers were repeatedly recognised to be the main direct influencers who can shape students' non-cognitive skills. Students spoke about the everyday interactions that mattered to them. One of the students said that "Our teacher always listens to us and encourages us to help each other. That makes us more responsible." Another explained, "Even if the teacher does not explicitly teach life skills but the way she treats us teaches respect and patience."

Teachers themselves were aware of this subtle influence on students'

social and life skill learning. One noted that "I do not have formal lessons on teamwork or responsibility, but when I ask students to work in groups or take ownership of their tasks, the tasks enable students to experience the skills and they learn." Another pointed out, "We model prosocial behaviours like respect and honesty, luckily, students notice these things even though they are not part of the syllabus." At the same time, some teachers admitted that teaching life skills explicitly was inconsistent in their practice by stating that "We do not always know how to teach life skills, but it depends on the students, their needs, and the situation." This indicates that while many social skills develop naturally in the flow of school life, structured approaches to develop social and life skills education are not given attention.

In summary, the findings highlight that social and life skills often emerge through daily routines of school life rather than formal instruction. Principals influence the policies and expectations of school life, teachers shape everyday experiences, and together their actions create a learning environment that can either support or limit students' broader development.

What Other Factors Contribute to Social and Life Skills Development?

In addition to schools and the stakeholders' roles in students' social and life skills development, many participants were clear that a great deal of this learning takes place beyond school premises. Repeated emphasis was placed upon families and everyday interactions in the community as important spaces where students learn skills to manage and regulate their social lives as well as relationships. For example, at home setting, most of the students shared their views on helping their parents in household chores and supporting their younger siblings in academic tasks. These responsibilities shape their interdependent role in family life which also encourages them to support their peers in learning. One of the students shared that "because I am elder, so I help my younger brother with his homework and help my mother in chores at home. It has taught me to be patient and responsible." Another student added that "When my parents are busy in their tasks, I manage the household related stuff... this makes me feel proud to help my parents by doing things on my own." Teachers recognised this as well and pointed out that students who take on such roles often show more confidence and maturity in their behaviour. As one teacher put it, "Students learn important life skills at home. Those who help their families or care for siblings often show better responsibility and confidence

in school."

Some students also spoke about working part-time, after school jobs, to financially support their families. These experiences seemed to expose them to a different kind of learning. A student explained that "I work at a shop after school to help my family. I am supposed to talk to customers, manage money calculations, and be on time every day... it is hard, but I have learned a lot about responsibility and dealing with people." Another student noted that mixing school with part-time work and home tasks is very much demanding, but such a mix also help in recognising true potential at an early age which helps gain confidence. Teachers viewed similar patterns and commented that those students who are involved in part-time work often developed a stronger sense of discipline and were more aware of social aspects by stating that "Some students who work part-time handle challenges better because they are more disciplined and socially aware than others."

In summary, participants' views highlight that students' social and life skills are shaped by a range of experiences, many of which come from outside school. Important contributions are drawn from family responsibilities, community interactions, and part-time work which are challenging but provide real-world situations that help students practise and refine these skills in ways that formal instruction alone may not offer. While schools remain an important site for learning, these outside experiences influence students' holistic development.

Discussion

The findings generated in this study point to a noticeable gap between school stakeholders' perspectives on the 'ideal' role of schools in students' holistic development and the 'actual' role of schools in doing so. On one hand, school leaders and teachers often speak about the importance of social and life skills, on the other hand, these stakeholders pay very little attention to this aspect because they do not consider it their responsibility. Schools are dominantly focusing on transferring academic content and completing the syllabus to prepare students for reproducing the same in exams. This leaves a wider developmental gap in students' social learning which is largely unattended. At the same time, the findings also show that school environment and behaviour of school stakeholders help students' learning of non-cognitive skills.

To unpack it in the light of existing policy documents, it is explicit to witness that national policies and curriculum of Pakistan (i.e., Government of Pakistan, 2009a, 2017; Government of Pakistan, 2009b) acknowledge the importance of social, emotional, psychological, and moral development. These documents emphasise the development of holistic children, but the processes are not clearly mentioned, and the content learning dimensions are under-weighted. Despite this, the practices observed in schools remain centred on exam preparation and syllabus completion. This disconnect is not without consequences. Many students leave school with academic certificates but have limited preparedness for independent social survival, and in extreme cases, large numbers of children leave school without completing basic levels of education (Malik & Courtney, 2011).

The persistent reliance on rote learning and memorised pattern to reproduce knowledge in exams restricts the development of necessary 21st century skills. This potentially widens the gap between students learning in the school and their needs in real-life settings. Apparently, the gap affects each individual learner, but it goes beyond with creating hinderance in national progress and slows achieving the signed SDGs to quality education and economic participation. These findings are eye openers for schools to understand the need and intentionally integrate non-cognitive skills into their everyday routines to help students meet the demands of contemporary life. Thus, schools should move beyond strengthening pedagogy to enhancing school life experience for children.

The findings are consistent with existing research. Evidence highlights that there is widespread use of rote methods in Pakistani classrooms and these need to be converted into guided discovery as a way to build deeper engagement and positive learning attitudes among students (Ishartono et al., 2019). Review of school-based interventions shows that schools often overlook psycho-social and emotional learning which create momentum for whole-school approaches to involve teachers and parents in nurturing students' behaviour and wellbeing inside and outside the school (Ansari & Rizvi, 2023; Sancassiani et al., 2015).

Although sports and co-curricular activities are well-established contributors to students' physical, social, and life skills (Weiss et al., 2020), the findings reveal that such opportunities were scarce in the sampled schools. This absence represents a missed opportunity for students to practise teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving in practical settings,

thus, their long-term impacts could create social imbalance in lives. Evidence from Asian contexts suggests that interventions grounded in parental collaboration, schools with emotionally supportive environments, and their consistent programme delivery potentially foster positive social and emotional outcomes (Siddiqui & Ventista, 2018). In other countries (e.g., Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore) statistics reveal that non-cognitive traits like resilience and self-concept remain strong predictors of success even against longer study hours and cultural emphasis on effort support academic achievement (Boman, 2022). Additionally, there is a varying trend in students' non-cognitive skills across contextual settings. Studies from China report that students, who experienced life in urban set up, generally demonstrate stronger non-cognitive abilities than those in rural areas (Abbasi et al., 2022). The findings of the present study mirror the same pattern where students with more opportunities both inside and outside schools tended to show stronger social skills, although some lacked certain practical life skills which were more evident in their less advantaged peers. These contrasting results indicate a need to consider cultural, educational, and psychosocial contexts when designing interventions.

To sum it up, the discussion of findings points towards several ways forward. These include: i) using individual development plans, ii) adopting guided discovery, iii) active learning approaches, iv) utilising maximum of co-curricular learning experience such as sports participation, v) building whole-school social skills programmes, and vi) integrating these skills across subject areas. These can better expand chances of students' holistic learning. Additionally, a contextual framework grounded in four components for Pakistan is provided. This framework encompasses four aspects: embedding non-cognitive skills in the curriculum, identifying behavioural concerns early, strengthening teacher development, and involving parents to reinforce positive behaviour at home which can potentially result in positive social behaviours among children. Therefore, schools and parents should try to implement such approaches to help students grow in a more balanced way which not only support their academic pathways but also their personal and professional futures.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this paper points to the importance of non-cognitive and co-academic skills as part of students' holistic development.

Schools have placed their accountability on continuing academic learning. One of the possible reasons they provide for this, is the strong split in responsibilities between schools and families. According to school stakeholders, it is the family that is expected to shoulder much of the work related to social and life skills because schools concentrate mainly on academics and cannot go beyond it. Whereas the split is neither communicated nor understood by both parties. Therefore, it creates an imbalance which pushes students towards memorising content and performing well in exams, solely, and resultantly leaving little room for the development of broader social and life skills.

These findings align with the generic discourse in several other Asian education systems, where there is a tension between academic expectations and holistic development. The fault is not in the policy documents because most of the policies are successful in documenting the importance of social, emotional, psychological, and moral development as part of education. But the failure comes when we put these ideas into practice which are nearly invisible. In consequence, students are still rote memorising the content and reproducing in exams and are getting the label of being 'educated' who lack essential social skills including communication, collaboration, and problem-solving.

In order to address this, schools should rethink their vision of 'educating a child' and bring a more holistic view of learning in school life. This should also look at the assessment and exam-centred teaching practices which are causing a tension in learning versus development. Schools should make space for social and life skills within everyday classroom activities. Additionally, many stakeholders may not yet see these skills as part of the school's role, so building their awareness and understanding is an important first step. Moreover, teachers' development is equally important for these skills to be operationalised in schools. The ongoing professional learning of teachers can help them recognise their role and responsibilities in developing social skills among children, intentionally support them to go beyond content memorisation, and bring an integrated approach to teaching content. Similarly, pre-service teacher preparation programmes should also prepare prospective teachers to do this work from the start of their careers.

Furthermore, students need encouragement to avail opportunities outside formal lessons, such as peer collaboration, community engagement, volunteering, and participation in extracurricular activities can all help

students practise and enhance their social and life skills. These experiences provide students avenues to build confidence, resilience, and interpersonal skills in ways that complement classroom learning.

In conclusion, these shifts are not easy but can help schools offer a genuinely holistic education which values academic achievement without losing sight of the broader social skills students need beyond school. Therefore, it is important to create a balance of cognitive and non-cognitive learning experiences to prepare students for the complex reality of social world.

Author Contribution

Aisha Naz Ansari: sole author

Conflict of Interest

The author of the manuscript has no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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The authors did not used any type of generative artificial intelligence software for this research.

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