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Perceived Life Skills Development –
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DOI:
[10.32350/JITC.111.12](https://doi.org/10.32350/JITC.111.12)

Publication date:
2021

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Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

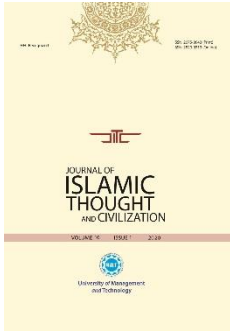
Citation for published version (APA):
Qureshi, N., Kalsoom, Q., & Khalil, I. (2021). Perceived Life Skills Development –: An Outcome of Madrassa Education in Pakistan. *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 11(1), 217-239.
<https://doi.org/10.32350/JITC.111.12>

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Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)

Volume 11 Issue 1, Spring 2021

pISSN: 2075-0943, eISSN: 2520-0313

Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc>

Issue DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.111>

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/JITC>

Journal QR Code:



Indexing



Article:

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Published:

Spring 2021

Article DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.111.12>

QR Code:



Naima Qureshi

Citation:

Qureshi, Naima, Qudsia Kalsoom and Iffat Khalil. "Perceived life skills development – An outcome of Madrasa Education in Pakistan." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 11, no. 1 (2021). 217-239.

[Crossref](#)

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Publisher Information:

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Perceived Life Skills Development – An Outcome of Madrassa Education in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study aims at assessing the development of life skills among madrassa students. The study has employed a mixed-method approach to explore the life skills of madrassa students. A questionnaire based on 5-point Likert type scale was used to measure self-reported life skills of 300 madrassa students. In addition, 20 semi-structured interviews were also carried out with madrassa students to explore their life skills. The quantitative data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics and qualitative data was interpreted through thematic analysis. Findings have revealed that the strongest life skill which madrassa students possess amongst all is effective communication skill followed by problem solving and decision-making. The least developed skill of madrassa students is creative thinking. The study findings suggest re-designing the curriculum of madrassa education to provide the students with more opportunities to polish their life skills especially creative thinking.

Keywords: life skills, madrassa students, madrassa education, *Dars-e-nizami*, creative thinking

Introduction

Life skills have been identified as predictors of emotional health, resilience, productive involvement in the community and overall personal success.¹ Research shows that life skills improve human capacities and train young people for survival and engagement in an increasingly skill-based world economy.² Scholars argue that life skills are important because they enable students to deal with the problems of everyday life. Life skills refer to a set of skills for adaptive and constructive actions that enable individuals to cope

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¹Preeti M Galagali, "Adolescence and Life Skills," *Recent Advances in Adolescent Health*, eds. Dilip Kumar Dutta and Roza Olyai (Kolkata: JAYPEE, 2011), 207-218.

²Daisy P. J., and A. Radhakrishnan Nair, "An Exploratory Study on Life Skills Intervention and Its Impact on the Study Skills Among Young Adolescents," *International Journal of Innovations in Engineering and Technology (IJJET)* 10, no. 3 (2018): 14-20.

effectively with the demands and challenges of daily life.³ Gould and Carson (2008) define life skills as “internal personal assets, characteristics and skills such as goal setting, emotional control, self-esteem, and hard work ethics.”⁴ The development of life skills is a process of helping students to learn to set goals, emotional control, self-awareness and confidence so that they can understand the importance of themselves and others; make the right decision; and resolve issues related to their emotions and stress.⁵

Researchers have highlighted the benefits of life skills education for youth, adolescents, children and adults.⁶ Gulhane (2014) found that education based on life skills through school education programs helps students to take a constructive approach in preserving themselves and fostering meaningful social connections.⁷ Yadav and Iqbal (2019) also noticed enhancement in self-esteem, emotional adjustment, educational adjustment, and empathy among the students who received life skills training.⁸ Hajia, Mohammadkhani, and Hahtami (2011) investigated the effect of life skills training on quality of life. They found that training in life skills made a big difference in the psychological wellbeing (satisfaction level and emotional control) of the individuals; thus, improving the quality of life significantly.⁹

Although benefits of life skills training and education have been extensively reported, there is a lack of systematic implementation, evaluation and monitoring of life skills education programs in many developing countries.¹⁰ It is also important to notice that there are relatively fewer studies on life skills in the context of Pakistan. Moreover, no studies have been conducted with reference to life skills development through madrassa education.

³Boniface Francis Kalanda, “Life Skills and Reproductive Health Education Changes Behavior in Students and Teachers: Evidence from Malawi,” *Educational Research and Reviews* 5, no. 4 (2010): 166-171.

⁴Daniel Gould, and Sarah Carson, “Life Skills Development through Sports: Current Status and Future Directions,” *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 1, no. 1 (2008): 60.

⁵World Health Organization, “Life Skills Education in Schools,” 1997, http://www.asksources.info/pdf/31181_lifeskillsed_1994.pdf

⁶A. Gautam, and MC Sharma, “Importance of Incorporating Life Skills among Adolescents,” *Navodit: An Annual Refereed Journal* 11, (2014): 48-51.

⁷T. F. Gulhane, “Life Skills Development through School Education,” *Journal of Sports and Physical Education* 1, no. 6 (2014): 28-29.

⁸Pooja Yadav, and Naved Iqbal, “Impact of Life Skills Training on Self-esteem, Adjustment and Empathy among Adolescents,” *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology* 35, no. 10 (2009): 61-70.

⁹Tahereh Mahdavi Hajia, Shahram Mohammadkhani, and Mohammad Hahtami, “The Effectiveness of life Skills Training on Happiness, Quality of Life and Emotion Regulation,” *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 30, (2011): 1843-1845.

¹⁰Aishath Nasheeda et al., “A Narrative Systematic Review of Life Skills Education: Effectiveness, Research Gaps and Priorities,” *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 24, no. 3 (2019): 362-379.

The current study was carried out with the students of Madrassas, one of the education providers in Pakistan.

Madrassa is one of the oldest Islamic education institutions which can be considered an alternative, parallel education institution.¹¹ Madrassas are mainly considered institution of social education.¹² The Madrassa system has been providing an alternative means to get education, which is religious in nature and is also affordable as the basic needs of life are provided free of cost to the students. The Madrassa system in Pakistan is performing the functions of an educational institution and promoting shared values and beliefs.¹³ In its current form, Pakistani madrassas are not only a place for religious training, but also an orphanage and shelter for poor children and teenagers. By offering these amenities to learners, madrassas expand the social impact of education by giving more students the opportunity to access learning opportunities. Madrassas are considered not only as educational organizations but also as social welfare institutions.¹⁴

According to Abbas (2018) there are currently 32,000 madrassas attended by almost 2.5 million students in Pakistan. According to an official survey, madrassas play a significant role in youth education in Pakistan.¹⁵ The key focus of madrassas is to teach Islamic education.¹⁶ In Islamic tradition, the aim of education is to develop human beings in a comprehensive manner, taking into account the intellectual, spiritual and moral development of a person.¹⁷ The focus is on promoting spiritual, ethical and physical welfare of the students.¹⁸

It is important to note that rising interest in madrassa education, since the last two decades, has generated a significant amount of literature.¹⁹ However, the most of these

¹¹Muhammad Nasir, “Pengembangan Kurikulum Berbasis Madrasah,” [Madrasah Based Curriculum Development], *Hunafa: Jurnal Studia Islamika* 6, no. 3 (2009): 273-300.

¹²Mohsin Bashir and Shoab U1-Haq, “Why Madrassah Education Reforms don’t Work in Pakistan,” *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (2019): 595-611.

¹³Jafar Riaz Kataria, and Umbreen Javaid, “Political Socialization in Pakistan: A Study of Political Efficacy of the Students of Madrassa,” *South Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (2020): 363-98

¹⁴Mohsin Bashir and Shoab U1-Haq, “Why Madrassah Education Reforms don’t Work in Pakistan,” *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (2019): 595-611.

¹⁵Azmat Abbas, *Madrassah Mirage: A Contemporary History of Islamic Schools in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Emel Publications, 2018).

¹⁶Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan Education Statistics* (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2016).

¹⁷Manar Eissa, and Madihah Khalid, “Development of Character and Life Skills through Islamic Methods of Teaching Acquired Science Subjects at Islamic International Schools in Malaysia,” *IJUM Journal of Educational Studies* 6, no. 1 (2018): 3-17.

¹⁸M. I. M. Jazeel, “Application of Outcome-Based Curriculum in Religious Studies: The Case of Madrasahs in Sri Lanka,” *Journal of Politics and Law* 13 (2020): 196.

¹⁹Madiha Afzal, *Pakistan under Siege: Extremism, Society, and the State* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2018).

studies focus on the problems of madrassa education in terms of extremist mind set. Only a few studies have investigated the outcomes of madrassa education. When a significant proportion of Pakistani society is enrolled in madrassa, it is very important to investigate the type of knowledge and skills they are learning in madrassas. This study is an attempt to examine the life skills that madrassa graduates develop over time. The following main research questions have guided this research

- How do madrassa students perceive the development of life skills while studying in a madrassa?
- To what extent do madrassa students develop different life skills (cognitive, social, and emotional)?

2. Study Framework

The current study adopted the ten core life skills proposed by World Health Organization (WHO).²⁰ According to this framework, there are three major categories of life skills i.e. Cognitive, Social, and Emotional. Cognitive skills embrace four different life skills, which are: Problem Solving, Decision Making, Critical Thinking and Creative Thinking. Social skills include effective communication and interpersonal skills. Emotional skills address Self-awareness, Coping with Stress, Coping with feelings, and Empathy.

The concept of life skills has been described differently in literature. One of the earlier definitions of life skills came from the World Health Organization (WHO). “Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.” This definition indicates that life skills are a set of different abilities that are necessary to cope with the challenging situations. WHO identified the following skills as core life skills i.e. problem-solving, critical thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions.²¹ Gould and Carson (2008) expanded the concept of life skills by including goal setting and hard work in it. To them, life skills are the “‘internal personal assets, characteristics and skills such as goal setting, emotional control, self-esteem, and hard work ethics.”²²

Earlier, Hendricks (1996) defined life skills as “the abilities individuals can learn that will help them to be successful in living a productive and satisfying life.”²³ Based on his conceptualization, he developed a 4-H Model of Targeting Life Skills (TLS). 4-H refers to

²⁰Daniel Gould, and Sarah Carson, “Life Skills Development through Sport: Current status and future directions,” *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 1, no. 1 (2008): 60.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Patricia Hendricks, *Developing Youth Curriculum Using the Targeting Life Skills Model: Incorporating Developmentally Appropriate Learning Opportunities to Assess Impact of Life Skill Development* (Ames: Iowa State University Extension, 1998), 4.

Head, Hands, Heart, and Health. Head refers to intellectual or cognitive abilities; hands encompass psychomotor abilities; heart refers to emotions or feelings, and health refers to one's dispositions and actions towards own body or health. Under this model, Hendricks (1996) identified 35 skills and broke them into eight categories i.e. leadership, teamwork, self-discipline, stress management, problem-solving, goal setting, communication, empathy. These categories are rooted in the 4-Hs model indicating that the concept of life skills is quite complex and not just limited to 'doing' dimension that is a feature of skills. Following Hendrick's 4-H Model, UNICEF (2012) categorized life skills into three broad categories, namely cognitive, emotional, and social/ interpersonal.

2.1. Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills refer to various dimensions of intelligence or thinking. According to Liu (2003) cognitive skills are those skills that require working of a human mind.²⁴ Anger (2012) describes cognitive skills as "various dimensions of intelligence, such as an individual's verbal fluency or their ability to solve new problems."²⁵ Bloom's original and revised taxonomy of objectives under the domain of cognitive learning provide a sketch of cognitive skills such as remembering, comprehending, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating.²⁶ The skills of remembering and recalling are lower level cognitive skills whereas the skills of problem-solving, decision making, reflecting, creating and evaluating are higher level cognitive skills.²⁷ The development of cognitive skills among students is a key aim of education because critical thinking, problem solving, and decision-making skills are needed frequently in everyday lives.²⁸ Higher-order cognitive skills such as problem solving, decision-making and creative thinking are essential skills to excel as leaders.²⁹

The skill of problem-solving refers to cognitive/ intellectual and behavioral strategies used by individuals to understand and manage problems systematically. Karabacaka, Nalbanta and Topçuoğlua (2015) believe that problems differ in their complexity. Some of

²⁴Min Liu, "Enhancing Learners' Cognitive Skills through Multimedia Design," *Interactive Learning Environments* 11, no. 1 (2003): 23-39.

²⁵Silke Anger, "The Intergenerational Transmission of Cognitive and Non-cognitive Skills during Adolescence and Young Adulthood," *SSRN*, (2012): 2.

²⁶Lauren A. Sosniak, and Lorin W. Anderson, *Bloom's Taxonomy: A Forty Year Retrospective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

²⁷Min Liu, "Enhancing Learners' Cognitive Skills through Multimedia Design," *Interactive Learning Environments* 11, no. 1 (2003): 23-39.

²⁸Songül Sonay Güçray, "The Analysis of Decision Making Behaviors and Perceived Problem Solving Skills in Adolescents," *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology-TOJET* 2, no. 2 (2003): 29-37.

²⁹Saman S Adair, "Islamic Education in Kenya: A Case Study of Islamic Integrated Schools in Garissa County," (PhD diss., University of Nairobi, 2010).

them can be solved with the habits gained before, while others require more advanced knowledge, prior experiences and skills of the individual.³⁰

The decision-making skill is another important cognitive skill. It refers to deciding about the actions to be taken from the available options. Kim and Lee (2013) also view decision making as a process of choosing a particular action from a range of alternatives to produce the most beneficial outcome.³¹ The process of decision-making involves five stages i.e. defining the objective for decision making; collecting relevant information; generating feasible options; making a decision; and implementing and evaluating the decision.³² Each stage is important to possibly make a useful decision.

Critical thinking is an important academic skill. It refers to a set of dispositions and higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, interpretation, evaluation, self-regulation, reflective judgment.³³ Stanovich and West (1997) elaborated the concept of critical thinking by focusing on open-mindedness.³⁴ They argued that decontextualized reasoning or open-minded thinking is a characteristic of good critical thought. The scholars from the field of cognitive psychology view advanced epistemological development as an indicator of critical thinking.³⁵

Like critical thinking, creative thinking is also a set of sub-skills such as generating ideas divergently, developing questions and hypotheses, and experimenting with alternatives.³⁶ Creative thinking is a skill as well as a disposition of creativity. The aim of creative thinking is to generate something new. Adair (2010) believes that the outcome of creative thinking is development of new ideas. It is also important to notice that creative thinking, problem-solving, decision-making and critical thinking are linked together.³⁷

³⁰Kerim Karabacak, Duygu Nalbant, and Pınar Topçuoğlu, "Examination of Teacher Candidates' Problem Solving Skills According to Several Variables," *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 174 (2015): 3063-3071.

³¹Soyoun Kim, and Daeyeol Lee, "Prefrontal Cortex and Impulsive Decision Making," *Biological Psychiatry* 69, no. 12 (2011): 1140-1146.

³²Saman S Adair, "Islamic Education in Kenya: A Case Study of Islamic Integrated Schools in Garissa County."

³³Peter A Facione, "Critical Thinking: What it is and Why it Counts," *Insight Assessment, California Academic Press* 102 (1992).

³⁴Keith E Stanovich, and Richard F. West, "Reasoning Independently of Prior Belief and Individual Differences in Actively Open-minded Thinking," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 89, no. 2 (1997): 342.

³⁵Barbara K Hofer, "Personal Epistemology Research: Implications for Learning and Teaching," *Educational Psychology Review* 13, no. 4 (2001): 353-383.

³⁶Panagiotis Kampylis, and Eleni Berki, "Nurturing Creative Thinking," *International Academy of Education* 6 (2014).

³⁷Saman S Adair, "Islamic Education in Kenya: A Case Study of Islamic Integrated Schools in Garissa County."

2.2. Social/ Interpersonal Skills

Social skills refer to a set of social behaviors (interpersonal and task-related) that produce positive consequences.³⁸ According to Soto-Icaza, Aboitiz, and Billeke (2015), social skills refer to a wide set of abilities that allow and enable people to communicate with each other.³⁹ In fact, social skills are a part of one's social cognition that allows individuals to predict others' behaviour by identifying, analyzing and understanding their behaviours. This social cognition helps the individuals to interact with others effectively. Gresham (1998) also defined social skills as "socially acceptable learned behaviors enabling individuals to interact effectively with others and avoid or escape socially unacceptable behaviors exhibited by others."⁴⁰ The most important abilities or sub-skills in this regard are effective communication and inter-personal skills.

2.3. Emotional Skills

Emotional skills or emotional intelligence may be defined as the ability to recognize, comprehend, label, express, and regulate emotions.⁴¹ Brasseur, Grégoire, Bourdu, and Mikolajczak (2013) view emotional skills as an ability to handle emotional information. They argue that emotional skills refer to regulating one's own emotions and those of others. Regulating emotions is an important aspect of emotional skills.⁴² In simple words, it refers to dealing with negative feelings or stress in a way that one's wellbeing is safeguarded. Like social skills, emotional skills also have cognitive and affective aspects. Considering these similarities researchers (such as Barry et al, 2018) have studied social and emotional skills under the title of social-emotional skills.⁴³

Researchers have investigated means of promoting youths' social and emotional skills. Barry et al. (2018) found that youth's engagement in social action programmes such as community service leads to emotional and social development (self-awareness, empathy

³⁸Gwendolyn Cartledge, and Joanne F. Milburn, "The Case for Teaching Social Skills in the Classroom: A review," *Review of Educational Research* 48, no. 1 (1978): 133-156.

³⁹Patricia Soto-Icaza, Francisco Aboitiz, and Pablo Billeke, "Development of Social Skills in Children: Neural and Behavioral Evidence for the Elaboration of Cognitive Models," *Frontiers in Neuroscience* 9 (2015): 333.

⁴⁰Frank M Gresham, "Social Skills Training: Should We Raze, Remodel, or Rebuild?," *Behavioral Disorders* 24, no. 1 (1998): 20.

⁴¹Sara Rimm-Kaufman, and Chris S. Hulleman, "Social and Emotional Learning in Elementary School Settings: Identifying Mechanisms that Matter," in *Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning: Research and Practice*, eds. Joseph A. Durlak, Celene E. Domitrovich, Roger P. Weissberg and Thomas P. Gullotta (New York: The Guilford Press, 2015), 151-166.

⁴²Sophie Brasseur et al., "The Profile of Emotional Competence (PEC): Development and Validation of a Self-Reported Measure that Fits Dimensions of Emotional Competence Theory," *PloS One* 8, no. 5 (2013): e62635.

⁴³Margaret M Barry et al., "A Review of the Evidence on the Effects of Community-based Programs on Young People's Social and Emotional Skills Development," *Adolescent Research Review* 3, no. 1 (2018): 13-27.

etc.). Barry et al. (2018) further examined the implementation of the National Citizen Service in England. They reported improvements in youths' problem solving skills, wellbeing, communication, social competence, and greater community engagement. They highlight that mentoring by teachers improves the youths' social and emotional skills. Moreover, residential training also positively influences students' social and emotional skills. Residential training allows people to solve problems, make decisions, work collaboratively and manage emotions.

3. Methodology

The study has employed a mixed-method approach by using a convergent parallel design. This approach was used as it enables researchers to investigate a problem through quantitative and qualitative means and draw the findings collectively.⁴⁴

3.1. Study Population and Sampling

The population of the study consisted of all the madrassa students (age 18-22 years) of *dars-e-nizami* (educational modules or curriculum employed in madrassas) studying in the Lahore district. The sample for the quantitative survey comprised 300 madrassa students. The return rate of the questionnaires was 75%. Three fourth (75%) of the respondents were males and one-fourth (25%) were female madrassa students. The study employed a convenient sampling technique.

To gather the data qualitatively, interviews of 20 madrassa students were conducted. The study participants were selected through purposive sampling. The researchers themselves approached the madrassa heads through telephone and asked for their permission to conduct the interviews. Most of the interviews were carried out telephonically since visiting the madrassa was not possible due to Covid. Sampling was done conveniently (for the quantitative phase) and purposefully and through snowballing (for the qualitative phase).

3.2. Instrumentation

The study employed two instruments: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was adapted from two standardized life skills scales i.e. Perkins and Mincemoyer's (2003) Youth Life Skills Scale⁴⁵ and Greene's (2008) Youth Life Skills Scale.⁴⁶ The questionnaire comprised three sub-scales i.e., cognitive skills scale, social skills scale, and emotional skills scale. Each sub-scale contained some reverse items to make the scale more reliable. The questionnaire was translated into Urdu (Pakistan's

⁴⁴John W Creswell, and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Method Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2011).

⁴⁵Claudia C. Mincemoyer and Daniel F Perkins, "Assessing Decision-making Skills of Youth," *The Forum for Family and Consumer Issues*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2003): 1-9.

⁴⁶Hillary Ayn Greene, "Learn from Yesterday, Live for Today, Hope for Tomorrow: The Development of a Life Skills Scale," (PhD diss., Miami University, 2008).

national language) since madrassa students lack English language proficiency. The researchers applied back-translation method to ensure the content equivalence of the scale.⁴⁷ The adapted instrument was pilot tested with 35 students and the Cronbach's alpha was calculated to measure the internal consistency of the scale. The Cronbach alpha value of the scale was 0.779. As per convention, a value of 0.7 or above indicates good reliability of the instrument. The researchers decided to administer the questionnaire at a large scale because the Cronbach alpha value was above 0.7.

The interview protocol was developed in the light of study framework to find out madrassa students' views about the contribution of madrassa education towards the development of their life skills. Expert opinion was sought to ensure the content validity of the instrument. In addition, it was pilot tested with five respondents to check the language of the questions. All the interviews were conducted through video calls and interview responses were recorded and transcribed.

3.3. Data Analysis Framework

The quantitative data were analyzed by applying descriptive statistics (mode and percentages). For the sake of simplicity, in the findings and discussion sections, the results of 'always' and 'often' categories have been added and reported as combined percentages. Similarly, the results of 'rarely' and 'never' categories have also been added. The qualitative data were analyzed using *a priori codes* of cognitive skills, social skills and emotional skills.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

The research was approved by the Board of Studies of Education, University of Education, Lahore. The questionnaire was completely anonymous and participation in the study was voluntary.

4. Findings

The findings have been presented under the categories of cognitive skills, social skills and emotional skills.

4.1. Cognitive Skills

The quantitative data from the sub-scale of cognitive skills (problem-solving skills, decision-making skills, critical thinking and creative thinking) indicate that madrassa students' rated themselves quite high on the scale of cognitive skills measurement. The detailed results have been presented in Table 1.

⁴⁷Eun-Seok Cha, Kevin H. Kim, and Judith A. Erlen, "Translation of Scales in Cross-Cultural Research: Issues and Techniques," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 58, no. 4 (2007): 386-395.

Table 1. Perceptions of Students Regarding Development of Cognitive Skills

S #	Statements	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Figuring out the problem	175	58.3	91	30.3	21	7	11	3.7	2	0.7
2	Try to let things work on their own	47	15.7	66	22	78	26	43	14.3	66	22
3	Don't know how to handle something bad	34	11.3	50	16.7	86	28.7	70	23.3	60	20
4	Look for information to understand the problem	118	39.3	118	39.3	37	12.3	14	4.7	13	4.3
5	Refusing to believe that problem happened	20	6.7	24	8	63	21	42	14	15	50.3
6	Determine cause of the problem	150	50	96	32	26	8.7	21	7	7	2.3
7	Break down the problem into smaller parts	49	16.3	112	37.3	81	27	37	12.3	21	7
8	Look at all possible solutions	92	30.7	141	47	45	15	13	4.3	9	3
9	Long-term results of each solution	82	27.3	126	42	61	20.3	22	7.3	9	3
10	Comparing solutions	87	29	140	46.7	49	16.3	14	4.7	10	3.3
11	Choose the easiest solution	155	51.7	76	25.3	43	14.3	14	4.7	12	4
12	Tend to doubt my decision	30	10	55	18.3	74	24.7	83	27.7	58	19.3
13	Never look back after taking a decision	60	20	80	26.7	79	26.3	40	13.3	41	13.7
14	If not working, figure out what is wrong	120	40	114	38	39	13	19	6.3	8	2.7
15	Step back to see how solution is working	69	23	111	37	71	23.7	37	12.3	12	4
16	If too difficult, I put it aside	67	22.3	103	34.3	81	27	31	10.3	18	6
17	Ready to bear consequences	132	44	83	27.7	54	18	24	8	7	2.3
18	Able to develop focused and systematic way of thinking	126	42	100	33.3	52	17.3	12	4	10	3.3
19	Approach complex issues in a variety of ways	98	32.7	108	36	61	20.3	25	8.3	8	2.7

S #	Statements	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
20	Make decisions in a logical and systematic way	85	28.3	108	36	58	19.3	37	12.3	12	4
21	Have talent to be creative	100	33.3	110	36.7	49	16.3	28	9.3	13	4.3
22	Influence others to adopt my creative thinking	44	14.7	121	40.3	78	26	35	11.7	22	7.3
23	turn creative ideas into workable solution	67	22.3	102	34	83	27.7	34	11.3	14	4.7
24	Read widely to come up with new ideas	81	27	98	32.7	78	26	29	9.7	14	4.7
25	Create new ideas by combining existing ones	49	16.3	111	37	77	25.7	44	14.7	19	6.3

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that overall 64.36 % of respondents reported that they possessed cognitive skills. The majority of the respondents reported that they always try to figure out the problem by determining the cause. Only 28% of participants mentioned that they frequently did not know how to handle a bad or undesirable situation. Nearly one fourth (28.7%) of the respondents said that sometimes they were not able to address a bad situation whereas 43.3 % of the respondents maintained that it was unusual that they could not handle a bad situation. This shows that majority of madrassa students perceive that they have the skills to handle undesirable situations. It is also important to note that the majority of the respondents (64.3%) claimed that they did not refuse the existence of problems. This shows that most of madrassa students have the ability to face the problems and to solve them. The data also indicate that there are some contradictions in madrassa students' responses. For example, the majority (59%) of the students claim to be interested in long-term results of each solution and 67.7 % maintained that they looked at all possible solutions when encountered a problem. However, on the other hand, 77% of them claimed that they mostly prefer the easiest solution if available. The findings further show that that madrassa students are not hesitant of making decisions. Most of them (67.7%) claim that they have the ability to take ownership of their decisions and their consequences. Critical thinking skills are key life skills under the domain of cognitive skills. The data indicate that the majority of the madrassa students (69.4%) claimed to be good at critical thinking on the three indicators (Table 1). The details are as follows: 75.3% of students claimed that they were able to develop a focused and a systematic way of thinking. Similarly, 68.7 % of students mentioned that they approach complex issues in a variety of ways while 64% maintained that they could make decisions in a logical and systematic way.

In contrast to critical thinking ability, a relatively lesser number of respondents claimed to be creative in their thinking. The last 5 items (Table 1) measured creative thinking skills and overall 59 % of respondents claimed to be creative. This percentage is relatively lower as compared to the overall percentage responses on the critical thinking skills.

The qualitative data corroborate the aforementioned findings by revealing that most of the participants possess cognitive skills and they have the capability to solve their problems on their own. For example, respondent 7 mentioned:

Madrassa students certainly can make good decisions. You can guess their abilities by the process they have to perform for the authentication of hadith.

Similarly, respondent R6] also shared her views in this regard indicating that madrassa education develops the ability to face different challenges calmly. She said:

I used to get upset when I had a problem but now if I have a problem I do not get panic I first try to solve it on my own.

Another respondent [R14] expressed that Islamic knowledge opens the mind and heart of a person; it brings calmness in the personality of a person:

My ability to solve problems has improved a lot. I used to start crying whenever I had a problem but now I am strong enough that I can solve my problems.

The respondents believed that *fiqh* (Jurisprudence) holds an important place in developing the critical thinking skills of the students. They argued that *fiqh* is a source of knowledge for them. The respondent [R12] stated:

Critical thinking is automatically generated in them because they read everything in depth in jurisprudence and they do all the work of da'wah with arguments.

The above responses show that madrassa students believe that their education is helping them to develop their problem solving and critical thinking abilities.

4.2. Social Skills

The quantitative data indicate that madrassa students believe that the education they receive is developing their social skills (communication skills and interpersonal skills). The detailed data analysis (modes and percentages) has been presented in Table 2.

The results in Table 2 indicate that 57% of madrassa students believe that they possess social skills. The majority of the students (73.7 %) reported that they can talk to others. Similarly, 70.3 % claimed that they speak to groups confidently. However, the percentage of students who claimed to be confident (mostly) while speaking to authority was relatively lower. They have the ability to give advice and present their ideas clearly. They can ask for help if needed which portrays that they keep good interpersonal relations.

The qualitative data also support the quantitative findings as almost all the participants reported that their social skills improved after joining the madrassa. Many of them reported

that they gained confidence and could now communicate effectively. They learned how to settle their matters and to maintain a good relationship with others. Some of the excerpts from the respondents regarding development of their social skills are mentioned below. One of the respondents [R6] highlighted the improvement in her communication ability as:

I have developed the ability to talk to others with confidence and learnt to verify all kinds of information before spreading it.

Another respondent [R17] shared that their teachers teach them respect through Ilm ul Kalam (the study of Islamic doctrine, literally the study of speech or words). He said:

Whenever we hesitate to do a task, the teachers guide us by saying that when a person who is acting or doing a theatre in front of people does not hesitate to do so, then why do you feel ashamed to perform a virtue.

While discussing communication skills a respondent [R18] signaled that madrasa students have the ability to talk harmoniously for hours without diverting from their topics.

Table 2. Perceptions of Students Regarding Development of Social Skills

S #	Statements	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Able to have conversation with people	137	45.7	84	28	53	17.7	16	5.3	10	3.3
2	Get nervous while talking to authority	41	13.7	40	13.3	72	24	47	15.7	100	33.3
3	Talk too fast	17	5.7	48	16	57	19	57	19	120	40
4	Get nervous talking to unknown people	29	9.7	45	15	56	18.3	59	19.7	112	37.3
5	respond by head nods and facial expressions	71	23.7	101	33.7	64	21.3	34	11.3	30	10
6	Talk to group confidently	103	34.3	108	36	53	17.7	24	8	12	4
7	Eye contact while talking	75	25	100	33.3	79	26.3	25	8.3	21	7
8	Able to give advice to friends	114	38	96	32	53	17.7	23	7.7	14	4.7
9	Excited while talking	63	21	75	25	68	22.7	57	19	37	12.3
10	Hold conversations very well	23	7.7	64	21.3	60	20	70	23.3	83	27.7
11	Ask for help when needed	67	22.3	104	34.7	74	24.7	36	12	19	6.3

S #	Statements	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
12	Clearly present my ideas	99	33	95	31.7	68	22.7	21	7	17	5.7
13	Ask questions to understand something	55	18.3	106	35.2	75	24.9	50	16.6	14	4.7
14	Compromise when disagree	56	18.6	102	34	77	25.7	37	12.3	28	9.3

Madrassa students are better from the mainstream as they can continue talking without deviating from his topic for two to three hours and can communicate very harmoniously. [R18]

The respondents further mentioned that madrassa education puts an emphasis on trade. Madrassa teachers do not suggest their students to take a limited role of mosque in-charge or sit on a pulpit. Instead, they guide their students in worldly matter/s too. A respondent [R3] expressed:

We are taught about all our transactions, matters of buying and selling and how to deal with others by going out in the community.

Another student highlighted the way madrassa life helps them to strengthen their relations with each other. He said:

The setting of our madrassa is that four people ate on one plate, which promotes a sense of brotherhood, living together also teach to manage their relations with others. [R5]

Similarly, respondent [R11] mentioned how madrassa education helps students to learn social skills. She said:

I have learned to deal with people. I have learned to maintain relationships. Elsewhere we read these things in books but in madrasa we have learnt this practically.

4.3. Emotional Skills

Table 3 presents the analysis of madrassa students' responses on the sub-scale of emotional skills (*Self-awareness, Coping with Stress, Coping with feelings, and Empathy*).

The results revealed that madrassa students rated their emotional skills quite high. They reported that they try to cope with stress in a positive manner with the help of others' suggestions instead of yelling and screaming. The majority of the madrassa students possess the ability to cope with stress (responses on items 1-6, Table 3). However, their responses on the indicators related to expressing emotions (items 7-13, Table 3) indicate that the majority (79 %) of the students express their emotion/ feeling of happiness more frequently as compared to expressing the feelings of worry or any other negative feelings.

The results (responses on items 14-21, Table 3) indicate that madrassa students are highly empathetic. More than 80% of respondents claimed that they help others without any personal interest and that helping others bring them satisfaction. The results (responses on item 22-27, Table 3) further indicate that madrassa students have self-awareness. Most importantly, they view themselves as a part of the larger society and follow regulations. It is interesting to note that more than 80% madrassa students positively responded to seven items in the questionnaire of 66 items and three items were related to empathy. This indicates that madrassas develop the attribute of empathy more as compared to other life skills.

Table 3. Perceptions of Students Regarding Development of Emotional Skills

S #	Statements	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Say things to escape unpleasant feelings	118	39.3	104	34.7	51	17	19	6.3	8	2.7
2	Get out and talk to others when depressed	62	20.7	77	25.7	75	25	38	12.7	48	16
3	Do reading to escape from stress	44	13.7	69	23	50	16.7	41	13.7	96	32
4	Explain my stress to get feedback from friends	75	25	121	40.3	57	19	38	12.7	8	2.7
5	Scream and yell when stressed	27	9	49	16.3	67	22.3	49	16.3	108	36
6	Trust other people to give advice	48	16	90	30	101	33.7	34	11.3	27	9
7	Express negative feelings	24	8	55	18.3	69	23	83	27.7	69	23
8	Can't express when something goes wrong	29	9.7	67	22.3	116	38.7	54	18	34	11.3
9	Can't handle conflicts	28	9.3	72	24	81	27	68	22.7	51	17
10	When angry can't talk without yelling	32	10.7	51	17	78	26	56	18.7	83	27.7
11	Express anger	70	23.3	99	33	89	29.7	30	10	12	4
12	Express happiness	120	40	117	39	51	17	6	2	6	2
13	Express worry	48	16	97	32.3	108	36	28	9.3	19	6.3
14	Get emotional when someone is in trouble	62	20.7	69	23	88	29.3	46	15.3	35	11.7

S #	Statements	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
15	when someone is in trouble I think I'm in his state	88	29.3	121	40.3	60	20	24	8	7	2.3
16	Feel satisfied when help others	201	67	44	14.7	37	12.3	7	2.3	11	3.7
17	I feel its my duty to help others	165	55	76	25.3	32	10.7	12	4	15	5
18	when someone is in trouble, I neglect him	27	9	45	15	27	9	62	20.7	139	46.3
19	when my friend is upset it affects me	108	36	113	37.7	52	17.3	15	5	12	4
20	I get upset when I see someone cry	86	28.7	136	45.3	54	18	18	6	6	2
21	Help others without own interest	146	48.7	103	34.3	30	10	13	4.3	8	2.7
22	Know what I want out of life	123	41	82	27.3	47	15.7	31	10.3	17	5.7
23	Talk about my abilities to others	94	31.3	104	34.7	62	20.7	29	9.7	11	3.7
24	Ability to appreciate my talents	119	39.7	78	26	70	23.3	23	7.7	10	3.3
25	Realize myself as a part of society	159	53	88	29.3	33	11	15	5	5	1.7
26	Do not break the laws	103	34.3	101	33.7	46	15.3	24	8	26	8.7
27	Follow the regulations	158	52.7	98	32.7	32	10.7	9	3	3	1

To understand the development of emotional skills in madrassa students, the researchers asked them if they feel any difference in managing the emotions after joining the madrassa. Most of the participants claimed that their ability to manage their emotions has improved after joining madrassa. The most common emotion that was referred to by the participants was the emotion of anger. While talking about anger, respondent [R14] said:

Now, I have the ability to control my emotions, whenever I get angry; the first thing that immediately comes to mind is "Anger is proscribed in Islam."

While responding to questions about stress management, a respondent [R13] stated that madrassa students have an ability to cope with stress. She stated:

You might have noticed that madrassa students are not or less worried as compared to other university students, even if their resources are limited. You might have heard that someone commits suicide but you may have never heard of a madrassa student committing suicide because they have the ability to cope with stress.

Moreover, all of the respondents/ participants mentioned that they were aware of their capabilities and limitations. The respondent [R14] said:

I can give good advice to others. I try to guide others to the right path. I think I have the ability to convince people.

It was found that all the madrassa students developed the emotion of empathy while living in madrassas. A respondent expressed:

I used to shout at home and did not care about other people. After joining madrassa, I have become empathic. [R6]

Similarly another respondent [R1] mentioned:

The greatest things that a person learns from a madrassa is equality, brotherhood, humanity and how to be a good Muslim as well as a good citizen.

5. Discussions

Before discussing the findings, the researchers want to ascertain that the study focused on investigating perceived life skills development among madrassa students in Pakistan. The perceived development of life skills is not necessarily the same as actual development of life skills.

The findings of the study show that the most of the madrassa students perceived that their education helped them improve their cognitive, social and emotional skills. This indicates that the system of madrassa education is successfully contributing towards developing life skills among its students. Madrassa students believe that their curriculum allows them to develop the skill of argument building and critical thinking. They also believe that teachers' guidance plays a role in developing their confidence and communication skills. These findings support Barry, et al. (2018) argument that mentoring by teachers contributes positively in developing youth's social and emotional skills.⁴⁸ The study finding that madrassa students possess cognitive, social and emotional skills strengthens argument of Barry, et al. (2018) who contend that service learning improves youth's problem solving skills, wellbeing, communication, and social competence. Madrassas in Pakistan are not only education providers but serve as shelter homes for a large number of youth. Moreover, they engage their students in activities of cooking for

⁴⁸Margaret Barry et al., "A Review of the Evidence on the Effects of Community-based Programs on Young People's Social and Emotional Skills Development," *Adolescent Research Review* 3, no. 1 (2018): 13-27.

others, serving others and house-keeping. Students also participate in social services such as fundraising campaigns during floods, earthquakes or any other emergencies. Community living and other social services allow students to develop their social and emotional skills.

The finding that madrasa students feel that madrasa life made them learn to live together with patience supports the view of Barry, et al. (2018) that residential training also positively influences students' social and emotional skills. This also supports Sheikh's (2013) finding that Islamic education aims at developing the person as a whole and empathy and adaptability are important elements of the whole.⁴⁹ Rayan (2012) also argued that the main objective of education in Islam is to reform and construct human life and develop a balanced relationship between the individual, the society and the world based on an ethical concept.⁵⁰ More than 80% of the madrasa students, in the current study, mentioned that they feel that they were a part of the larger society. This indicates that madrasa education is successful in inculcating the feeling of community among the students. The finding that madrasahs develop the attribute of empathy more as compared to other life skills needs further investigation because a large majority of the madrasa students belong to underprivileged socio-economic classes. There is a need to inquire if it is their family background that makes them more empathetic and helpful or it is madrasa education that promotes empathy in them.

More than 70% of the students claimed to be good at communication skills indicate that madrasa education focuses on developing communication skills. Teachers mentor their students and raise their confidence to communicate with others. Although teachers' mentoring and support is an important factor in developing students' social and emotional skills,⁵¹ the other major factor seems the subject of *Balaghat* in the curriculum of *Dars e Nizami*. The students of *Dars e Nizami* study argument development and conciseness as a part of their course. They receive extensive training in this area.

The finding that madrasa students developed relatively lesser creative thinking as compared to other cognitive skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making indicates that madrasa education is less successful in promoting creativity among students. The reason behind this could be lesser opportunities for creativity or the focus of the curriculum. This aspect requires further investigation.

⁴⁹Ali Akbar Sheikh, and Roghayeh Davari, "The Comparison of Life Skills in Male and Female Students of Village and City in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province," *International Academic Journal of Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2013): 35-41.

⁵⁰Sobhi Rayan, "Islamic Philosophy of Education," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 2, no. 19 (2012): 150-156.

⁵¹Margaret M. Barry et al., "A Review of the Evidence on the Effects of Community-based Programs on Young People's Social and Emotional Skills Development," *Adolescent Research Review* 3, no. 1 (2018): 13-27.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the study indicate that it is difficult to explain the development of life skills among madrasa students because of the complexity of madrasa education structure and working. However, the findings show that madrasa education is more than the implementation of a formal curriculum that is experienced by the students. Different informal aspects of living together contribute to life skills development of madrasa students. The community living aspect of madrasa education needs to be explored with reference to its contribution towards life skills development. In addition, it is not clear if madrassas contribute towards empathy development or it is the socio-economic background of the madrasa students that makes them more empathetic. In addition to perceived life skills, the study findings suggest an investigation into madrasa students' actual life skills. The comparison in terms of gender and locality i.e. urban and rural will be worth doing. The future researchers can also investigate the perceptions of the members of madrasa boards regarding the skills they develop in their students.

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