Enhancing Life Skills Among School Students Through Indian Knowledge Systems: Cultural Roots, Pedagogical Practices, And Contemporary Relevance

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***Abstract*—Schools in India are being asked to develop learners who can think independently, manage emotions, work with others, and act ethically, yet there is little guidance on how locally rooted cultural resources might support these aims. This conceptual paper examines how selected Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), namely the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Panchatantra and Jataka tales, Jain and Buddhist ethical thought, Yoga, and living community practices, can serve as teaching resources for life-skills education. Using a purposive narrative review of policy documents, research on life-skills and social-emotional learning, and scholarly translations of primary texts, I develop a framework that links each cultural resource to a target competency, a classroom method, and a form of assessment evidence. The framework rests on experiential learning, dialogic teaching, and culturally relevant pedagogy, and it is read against the National Education Policy 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023. Examples include a decision-making case study, a structured peace council, and a local water-practice inquiry. I argue that these resources are useful only when teachers treat them as open to interpretation, set them beside scientific reasoning and constitutional values, and avoid unsupported claims about psychological benefit. The paper closes with safeguards, a stage-wise progression, and a research agenda, because the framework has not yet been tested in classrooms.**

***Index Terms*—Indian Knowledge Systems; life skills education; experiential learning; culturally relevant pedagogy; National Education Policy 2020; social and emotional learning**

I. INTRODUCTION

A student can do well in every examination and still freeze when a close friend turns hostile, forward a rumour without checking it, or give up after a first failure. Most teachers have met such children, and most would agree that schools should help them. The harder question is how. The Delors Commission report (Delors, 1996) organised the purposes of education around learning to know, to do, to be, and to live together, and it is the last two that textbook-centred teaching has found hardest to reach. The World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) offered a practical answer in the form of core life skills, among them decision-making, critical and creative thinking, communication, empathy, self-awareness, and coping with emotions and stress.

There is a fair amount of evidence that organised school programmes of this kind can work. In a meta-analysis of 213 school-based programmes in social and emotional learning, Durlak et al. (2011) found gains in students' social and emotional skills, attitudes, and behaviour, together with better academic performance. Nasheeda et al. (2019) later reviewed the global literature on life-skills education and mapped its research gaps and priorities. Studies from India point in a similar direction. Srikala and Kishore (2010) compared 605 adolescents in two schools that had run a life-skills programme for a year with 423 peers in nearby schools that had not; the programme group reported higher self-esteem, better coping, and more prosocial behaviour, although no difference appeared in psychopathology. Tiwari and Bajpai (2021) reviewed research on life-skills education in Indian schools and described its current status in that setting. What I found much less often in this literature is a careful discussion of how India's own intellectual and cultural traditions might feed into such work. That gap matters now because of the policy climate. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020; Ministry of Education, 2020) asks schools to draw on Indian knowledge, languages, and arts, and the National

Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023 (NCF-SE 2023; National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT], 2023) repeats the call while stressing experiential and competency-based learning. The phrase Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) has become common shorthand in this discussion. In recent textbook treatments, such as Mahadevan et al. (2022), it covers a broad range of philosophical, scientific, artistic, ecological, and practical traditions developed over many centuries.

Enthusiasm for IKS carries a risk of its own. When "tradition" is invoked as a single, settled authority, the result can be a flattened history and a classroom in which students are told what to admire. Sen (2005) pointed out that Indian intellectual life has long been marked by public argument and dissent, with Buddhist, Jain, sceptical, and materialist positions flourishing beside orthodox ones. A fair use of IKS in schools should preserve that argumentative quality. A story from the Mahabharata becomes a life-skills resource when students weigh the choices of its characters, imagine other options, and connect the dilemma to something in their own lives. It does little for them when it is memorised as a moral.

This paper therefore treats IKS as a set of resources for inquiry rather than a body of answers. Its contributions are threefold. First, it proposes a framework that links selected cultural resources to specific life-skills competencies, classroom methods, and evidence of learning. Second, it sets out the safeguards that such work needs if it is to be inclusive and honest about what is known. Third, it identifies the research that would be needed before any claim about impact could be made. The sections that follow set out the theoretical grounding, the method and its limits, the framework itself, its alignment with current policy, and questions of assessment, risk, and future research.

II. THEORETICAL GROUNDING

Three bodies of educational thought hold the framework together.

Experiential and Reflective Learning

Dewey (1938) argued that experience educates only when it is reflected upon and connected to what comes next. Kolb (1984) later described a cycle that moves from a concrete experience, through reflection and abstract conceptualisation, to active experimentation. Most of the activities proposed in this paper follow that sequence. Learners meet a dilemma, whether in a story or a school conflict; they discuss what happened and why; they draw out a principle or strategy; and they test it in a new situation. The cycle matters for life skills because these skills are, by definition, practised rather than merely understood.

Narrative and Dialogic Learning

Bruner (1990) held that people make sense of experience largely through stories. Nussbaum (2010) went further, listing "narrative imagination", the ability to imagine the position of another person, among the capacities that democratic citizens need and that the humanities help to build. These claims give some theoretical support to the use of epics, fables, and folk tales, but they do not guarantee that reading a story will make a child more empathic. Something has to happen in the classroom conversation. Alexander (2008) describes dialogic teaching as talk that is collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative, and purposeful, and I draw on this description throughout when suggesting how teachers might handle discussion of difficult episodes.

Culturally Relevant and Critical Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings (1995) proposed that culturally relevant teaching should pursue three aims together: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness, the last meaning the ability to question the social arrangements that surround students. The theory grew out of work with African American learners in the United States, and its transfer to India is not automatic. Even so, the third aim is a useful check on the other two. If cultural roots are to be a resource for all students, and not only for those whose family traditions happen to be the ones most often quoted, teachers must keep asking whose voices a text includes, whose it leaves out, and how readers from different communities might respond.

III. METHOD AND SCOPE

This is a conceptual paper. Its aim is to build a framework, not to test a hypothesis, and in this respect, it follows the logic described by Jabareen (2009), in which a conceptual framework is assembled by reading across several bodies of literature and linking their concepts into a coherent whole. The literature work is a narrative review. Greenhalgh et al. (2018)

have argued that narrative reviews remain well suited to topics where the aim is interpretation and synthesis across different kinds of sources, and that they should not be regarded as inferior to systematic reviews when the question is of that kind.

I drew on four groups of sources, selected purposively. The first was Indian policy documents, namely NEP 2020 and NCF-SE 2023. The second was research on life-skills education and social and emotional learning, including meta-analyses and reviews (Durlak et al., 2011; Nasheeda et al., 2019; Tiwari & Bajpai, 2021). The third was research on the school use of yoga and mindfulness, which I examined chiefly to calibrate claims about psychological benefit (Khalsa & Butzer, 2016; Van Dam et al., 2018; Zenner et al., 2014). The fourth was scholarly translations of classical texts, used as the basis for the examples in the framework, together with commentary on how those texts have been read and retold.

Several limits should be stated plainly. The search was not systematic, did not follow a protocol such as PRISMA, and was restricted to sources in English. The classical texts are used as interpretive examples. I make no claim that any activity described here has been tested or shown to work. Readings of the epics also vary across languages, regions, and communities, and my selections and interpretations reflect my own reading, which others may reasonably contest. For these reasons the recommendations are offered as provisional and in need of classroom-based research.

IV. LIFE SKILLS IN SCHOOL EDUCATION

Life skills are psychosocial abilities that can be taught, practised, and observed. They are not personality labels. A child may speak confidently in assembly yet find it difficult to listen during an argument, and another may solve algebra problems with ease yet be overwhelmed by frustration when a project goes wrong. Programmes that work, as Durlak et al. (2011) found for social and emotional learning, tend to be sequenced, active, focused, and explicit about the skills they target; repeated practice in varied settings, with feedback, matters more than a single session of advice.

For classroom planning, the WHO (1997) skills can be sorted into three overlapping domains. Cognitive skills include critical and creative thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving. Emotional and self-management skills include self-awareness, recognising and regulating emotion, coping with stress, and resilience. Social skills include communication, empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Ethical reasoning and civic responsibility cut across all three, because every choice a student makes affects other people. The framework in this paper uses these domains as its organising grid.

The Indian literature adds two cautions. Tiwari and Bajpai (2021) draw attention to the school's role in supporting psychosocial competence, and their review, like the study by Srikala and Kishore (2010), suggests that outcomes depend heavily on how programmes are designed and delivered. Life skills cannot be confined to an annual lecture or a poster campaign. They need a place in language, social science, science, physical education, arts, assemblies, peer work, and service projects, and they depend on teachers who are prepared to run open discussion.

One teaching sequence runs through nearly all the examples in this paper. The teacher introduces a realistic dilemma. Students name the feelings and the stakeholders involved. They compare possible responses and examine the consequences and values behind each. They then rehearse a response through role-play or group work, and finally reflect on what they could carry into daily life. Throughout, the teacher's job is to keep the discussion safe and reasoned, not to steer students toward a conclusion decided in advance.

V. INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AS RESOURCES FOR LIFE-SKILLS LEARNING

The question for education is not whether every traditional practice should be adopted. It is which resources can help young people examine human choices and present-day problems, and under what conditions. The examples in this section are teaching possibilities, to be adapted for age, language, and context, and each is followed by a note on how it can go wrong.

The Bhagavad Gita: Discernment, Effort, and Responsible Action

The Gita opens with Arjuna in despair on the eve of battle, unable to act because duty, affection, and fear of consequences pull him in different directions (Easwaran, 2007). That opening can be read as a study

in deciding under pressure. A teacher might ask what information Arjuna lacks, which of his feelings may be distorting his judgement, who will be affected by whichever course he takes, and how a person tells an immediate reaction from a considered response.

The well-known verse on acting without clinging to the fruits of action (2.47) can open a conversation about effort and anxiety. Imagine a class whose team has just lost an inter-school quiz. The teacher invites students to sort the causes of the result into those they could influence, such as preparation, practice, and teamwork, and those they could not, such as the judges' rulings or the luck of the questions. Each student then writes a few lines on what they learned and one thing they will change. The skill being built is balanced effort and a realistic reading of outcomes. Nothing in the exercise asks students to become indifferent to results.

Two cautions apply. The Gita is a religious text for many families, so the teacher should present the episode as a question for discussion, without requiring agreement with any one reading. And the text also contains passages tied to a hierarchy of social duty, which deserve open and critical treatment and should not be quietly skipped or approved (see the section on challenges and safeguards).

The Upanishads: Questioning, Listening, and Intellectual Humility

Many Upanishadic passages take the form of dialogue between a questioner and a teacher. In the Katha Upanishad, the boy Nachiketa meets Yama, the lord of death, and is offered wealth, long life, and pleasure in place of an answer to his question about what lies beyond death; he declines them (Olivelle, 1996). The text draws a contrast between what is pleasant and what is good for a person, a distinction that maps neatly onto the difference between impulse and considered judgement. Teachers should resist turning the episode into a slogan about persistence. The more productive reading asks how a good question works, and what it costs to hold on to one.

A classroom routine that I call "Ask, Listen, Reconsider" turns this into practice. Students take up a real school issue, for example whether homework should be lighter on days with several tests. They prepare questions for the opposing side, listen to the answers, restate the other view in terms its holders would accept, and then either keep or change their own position, giving reasons. The restating step is the heart of the activity. It is difficult, and it is exactly what many adult arguments lack.

The Ramayana: Obligation, Relationships, and Plural Retellings

The Ramayana has circulated in a great many versions across languages and regions. Ramanujan (1991) famously wrote of "three hundred Ramayanas", and the tellings of Valmiki, Kamban, Tulsidas, and many folk and regional traditions differ, sometimes sharply, in what they emphasise and whom they admire. Narayan's (1972) prose retelling is one accessible entry point, but it is only one. For life-skills teaching this plurality is an advantage. Students can compare two renderings of the same episode and ask whose viewpoint each foreground, whose is faint or missing, and what assumptions shape the telling.

The epic's concern with promises, loyalty, and the weight of obligation also lends itself to modern scenarios that are not retellings at all. Consider a student who has promised to help a friend with a project but is also responsible for a group assignment due the same day. Learners list their obligations, consider who might be harmed by each choice, and draft a fair way to tell the friend that plans have changed. The aim is to practise balancing commitments and explaining a decision. No one is claiming that the school dilemma matches an episode of the epic.

The Mahabharata: Justice, Leadership, and Conflict

The Mahabharata contains some of the most searching treatments of conflict in the Indian literary tradition. Two episodes are especially usable. In the dice-game assembly, Draupadi asks the elders whether her husband had the right to stake her after he had already lost himself, and the assembled elders fail to give a clear answer (van Buitenen, 1973–1978). Later, in the Udyoga Parva, Krishna travels to the Kauravas on a mission of negotiation before the war begins (van Buitenen, 1973–1978). One episode concerns a failure of collective responsibility, and the other concerns an attempt, ultimately unsuccessful, to settle a dispute without violence. Together they invite students to examine power, fairness, accountability, and what escalation costs.

A mock peace council can bring this into the school's own life. Two groups of students each want the same

hall for different activities. Every group states its needs and its non-negotiable safety requirements, listens to the other, and proposes options. The class then asks of each proposal whether it is fair, feasible, and respectful, and whether authority alone is enough to make a decision just. Teachers can also ask students to retell the dice-game episode from the position of someone who had no power to speak in the assembly. The activity builds negotiation and ethical leadership, and it makes no suggestion that an epic provides ready-made answers to modern disputes.

Panchatantra and Jataka Narratives: Judgement, Empathy, and Consequence

The Panchatantra consists of fables, mostly with animal characters, framed as lessons in statecraft and worldly conduct (Olivelle, 2009). Many of them concern trust, friendship, haste, and calculated risk. "The Monkey and the Crocodile" lets students look at flattery, danger, and quick thinking; "The Lion and the Hare" shows a weaker party using cleverness against a tyrant, and invites the awkward question of whether deception can ever be justified and what the alternatives were. The collection's worldly, sometimes cynical, tone makes it good material for critical discussion. It does not simply preach.

The Jataka tales, which present earlier lives of the Buddha, place generosity, patience, compassion, and moral choice at the centre (Cowell, 1895–1907). After reading a story in which someone helps a vulnerable creature, students can draw a stakeholder map. Who is affected? What does each party need? Which action would lessen harm? They might then rewrite an ending, compare the consequences of the alternatives, or role-play characters explaining their reasoning to one another. These tasks turn listening to a story into active interpretation, and they show learners that decisions have both immediate and longer-term effects.

Jain and Buddhist Thought: Non-harm, Perspectives, and Mindfulness

Jain ethics gives central place to ahimsa, or non-harm, and to anekantavada, the doctrine that reality can be described accurately from several standpoints and that any single description is partial (Matilal, 1981). Chapple (1993) traces how non-violence toward other beings, the environment, and oneself runs through several Asian traditions. Buddhist teaching adds attention to compassion, moderation, and the changing nature of emotion. These ideas can support empathy and respectful disagreement, provided they are taught with proper context and without portraying any tradition as uniform.

In a "many perspectives" exercise, students examine a disputed class rule from the standpoint of a student, a teacher, a parent, and the principal. They then separate disagreements about facts from disagreements about priorities. A non-harm project might ask them to plan ways of preventing teasing, reducing waste, or conducting an online argument without humiliating anyone. Students should also discuss limits. Respecting several perspectives does not mean treating bullying, discrimination, or demonstrably false claims as equally valid, and a lesson on anekantavada that left students believing otherwise would have misread the idea.

Yoga: Attention and Self-regulation

Yoga is a varied tradition, and school use of it should be age-appropriate, optional, and attentive to safety. Simple posture awareness, gentle movement, and brief breathing or quiet-attention practices may help students notice bodily tension and settle before a demanding task. The evidence deserves honest handling. Khalsa and Butzer (2016) reviewed research on yoga in school settings and described promising findings alongside considerable variation in the quality of the studies. In the wider field of mindfulness, Van Dam et al. (2018) warned that enthusiasm has run ahead of the evidence, and Zenner et al. (2014), reviewing mindfulness programmes in schools, found benefits that varied with design and with the outcome measured. A teacher who promises that two minutes of breathing will cure anxiety is going beyond anything this research supports.

A "pause and notice" routine, lasting about two minutes, illustrates a modest use. Students sit comfortably, observe their breathing without trying to alter it, name one emotion, and choose a next step before they begin a hard task. Afterwards they record whether their attention shifted and list other strategies they might use, such as asking for help, splitting the task into parts, or talking to a trusted adult. Presented this way, self-regulation is a skill that can be learned and is neither suppression of feeling nor a cure for it. Any student should be free to decline.

Games, Arts, and Community Knowledge: Teamwork and Adaptability

Traditional games, folk theatre, music, crafts, food practices, and local ecological knowledge offer hands-on settings in which students work together and solve problems. Kho-kho and kabaddi, for instance, demand anticipation, communication, self-control, and cooperation under rules. A folk performance requires rehearsal, negotiation, persistence, and respect for different contributions. Artisans, farmers, and community elders hold practical knowledge built up over generations that textbooks seldom record.

A group of students might document a local water-conservation practice, or interview a weaver or potter about materials, design, and changing demand. Gadgil et al. (1993) showed how local practices can contribute to conserving biodiversity, which is a good reason to take such knowledge seriously. It is also a reason to record it carefully, because not every inherited practice protects the environment and students should test what they are told. They should seek consent, name their sources, verify claims, and report accurately. The community must not be treated as a museum exhibit. Local knowledge is living, varied, and constantly adapting.

VI. A FRAMEWORK FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICE

The educational value of IKS depends on the teaching design. A story does not guarantee empathy, any more than a discussion of courage makes anyone courageous. Each activity needs a clear competency, a realistic task, a chance to practice, and a way to reflect. Table 1 brings the examples together by linking each cultural resource to its focal skills, a method, and the kind of evidence a teacher might look for. The table is a planning aid. It is not an evidence-based programme.

Table 1 *Framework Linking Cultural Resources, Life Skills, Classroom Methods, and Evidence of Learning*

Cultural resource	Focal life skills	Classroom method	Evidence of learning
Bhagavad Gita (Arjuna's dilemma; verse 2.47 on action and outcome)	Decision-making; coping with stress; resilience	Dilemma analysis; sorting causes into controllable and uncontrollable; learning journal	Journal entries that name controllable factors and a realistic next step
Katha Upanishad (Nachiketa's questioning)	Critical thinking; listening; intellectual humility	"Ask, Listen, Reconsider" on a real school issue	Fair restatement of the opposing view; reasoned keeping or revising of a position
Ramayana (plural retellings)	Ethical reasoning; perspective-taking; managing obligations	Comparison of two retellings; role-conflict scenario	Identifies competing obligations and explains a decision respectfully
Mahabharata (the dice-game assembly; Krishna's peace mission)	Negotiation; conflict resolution; ethical leadership	Mock peace council over a shared-space dispute	Observation rubric covering listening, fairness, and feasibility (see Table 3)
Panchatantra and Jataka tales	Judgement; empathy; weighing consequences	Stakeholder map; rewriting endings; role-play	Maps that show every party's needs; justified alternative endings
Jain and Buddhist thought (ahimsa, anekantavada, mindfulness)	Empathy; respectful disagreement; non-harm	"Many perspectives" exercise; plan to prevent teasing or online hostility	States viewpoints other than their own; plan with specific actions
Yoga	Attention; self-regulation	Optional two-minute "pause and notice" routine followed by strategy reflection	Self-report on attention and the coping strategy chosen (not health outcomes)

Cultural resource	Focal life skills	Classroom method	Evidence of learning
Games, arts, and community knowledge	Teamwork; communication; environmental responsibility	Games followed by group reflection; local-practice inquiry	Project log; consent record; accurate presentation of findings

Note. This is a planning aid derived from the conceptual review. It has not been tested empirically.

The subsections below show how the framework works for five clusters of skills. They overlap, and a single task will often serve several of them.

Decision-making and Critical Thinking

A Panchatantra fable or an episode from the Mahabharata can serve as a case study. Students identify the decision-maker, the information available, the alternatives, and the short- and long-term consequences. They separate evidence from assumption and say what further information would help. The same questions can then be turned on a forwarded message on a phone. Who made it? What proof does it offer? Can the claim be checked elsewhere? What harm might follow if it is passed on? Wineburg and McGrew (2019) found that professional fact-checkers verify unfamiliar online material by leaving the page and consulting other sources, and students can be taught this habit of lateral reading. In this way a traditional narrative becomes an entry point to media literacy and does not replace evidence-based reasoning.

Empathy and Communication

After a Jataka story, or after comparing perspectives within a traditional narrative, students can write a short first-person account from the viewpoint of a character whose experience is often overlooked. In pairs, one student speaks for a minute while the other listens without interrupting and then paraphrases before responding. A class can agree on sentence openers for respectful disagreement, such as "I understood you to be saying...", "What I'm seeing as evidence is...", and "Could we also consider...?" Teachers should assess the quality of listening and explanation and should not reward agreement with their own views.

Emotional Regulation and Resilience

A reflection built on the Gita's treatment of effort and outcome can be combined with a personal learning journal. Students describe a setback, name the emotions it aroused, identify what lay within their control, and set one realistic next step. Gross (2015) describes emotion regulation as a set of processes that can be shaped at several points, from choosing situations to changing one's appraisal of them, which is a helpful reminder that regulation involves many strategies and is not simply self-control. Masten (2001) called resilience "ordinary magic", a product of everyday protective relationships and resources, and not a rare personal trait. This framing matters in school. Resilience should never be taken to mean enduring unfair treatment in silence. It includes asking for support, and teachers should make clear that lasting distress needs to be discussed with a trusted adult or a qualified professional.

Ethical Leadership and Teamwork

Students can plan a service project: improving waste segregation, creating an accessible reading corner, or auditing water use. Roles rotate so that leadership does not settle on the most outspoken students. The group agrees on a goal and on responsibilities, works through disagreements, and evaluates the result. Research on cooperative learning suggests that such work succeeds when members depend on one another, are individually accountable, and reflect on how they function as a group (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Discussion of leadership in the Mahabharata, or of cooperation in traditional games, can raise questions about accountability, listening, fairness, and the difference between authority and service.

Environmental Responsibility and Community Engagement

Many communities keep practices connected with water harvesting, seasonal foods, seed saving, local biodiversity, and shared resources. Students can document one such practice, compare it with current scientific information, and assess whether it still serves its purpose under present conditions. A school project could map water use, plant native species

chosen with advice from local people, or cut down on single-use plastics. Learners should separate documented evidence from inherited belief and should not assume that every traditional practice is sustainable. What the work should achieve is a respectful exchange between local knowledge and contemporary science.

Progression across School Stages

The same resource can be used differently as learners grow. Table 2 sets out one possible progression, organised by the stages of school education in NEP 2020. The tasks are suggestions, and teachers who know their students will adjust them.

Table 2 *Possible Progression across the School Stages Named in NEP 2020*

Stage (age range)	Typical tasks	Teacher emphasis
Preparatory (about 8–11 years)	Oral storytelling; picture sequencing; simple role-play; building an emotion vocabulary; short guided reflections	Models respectful talk; keeps dilemmas concrete and close to children's experience
Middle (about 11–14 years)	Comparing retellings; stakeholder maps; structured debate; short learning journals; simple community interviews	Separates evidence from assumption; teaches peer feedback; introduces more than one reading of a text
Secondary (about 14–18 years)	Critical reading of texts, including their social limits; mock councils; community inquiry projects; media-literacy tasks	Supports independent reasoning, ethical self-scrutiny, and careful handling of contested passages

Note. Stage names follow the school structure set out in NEP 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020). Age ranges are approximate.

VII. ALIGNMENT WITH NEP 2020 AND NCF-SE 2023

NEP 2020 calls for education that develops critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, ethical values, and problem-solving. It favours experiential, inquiry-based, discussion-oriented, arts-integrated, and sports-integrated learning, and it recognises the value of Indian languages, arts, and knowledge traditions (Ministry of Education, 2020). These emphases support bringing cultural material into ordinary classroom learning, and not confining it to occasional ceremonial events.

NCF-SE 2023 asks students to understand Indian cultures and traditions in their diversity, to engage in ethical and moral reasoning, and to explore how local practices bear on contemporary social and environmental questions (NCERT, 2023). A life-skills approach gives this work a practical form in which learners investigate a problem, work with others, reflect on values, test an idea, and communicate their conclusions.

Alignment, however, takes more than adding a story or a Sanskrit term to a lesson. A teacher needs to identify the competency and the curriculum outcome, select a suitable resource, design the activity, and decide what students must show. IKS also has to be taught alongside scientific temper and constitutional values. The fundamental duties listed in the Constitution of India include promoting harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood and developing scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform (Constitution of India, 1950, art. 51A). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) adds the child's right to express views and to be heard in matters that affect them. Taken together, these commitments make cultural rootedness compatible with critical inquiry and democratic participation.

VIII. ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Life skills are best assessed through several kinds of evidence, not through a single written test. Observation checklists, reflective journals, peer feedback, group-project rubrics, role-plays, and self-assessment all have a place. Black and Wiliam (1998), in their review of classroom assessment, concluded that formative assessment, in which evidence is used

to adjust teaching and give learners feedback, can raise achievement, and the same logic applies here: the purpose of assessing life skills is to help students improve, and ranking them is secondary. Table 3 shows an example of a rubric for a conflict-resolution task, using criteria taken from the peace-council activity.

Table 3 *Sample Rubric for a Conflict-Resolution Task (Mock Peace Council)*

Criterion	Emerging	Developing	Secure
Listening	Interrupts or waits only for a turn to speak	Listens, but restates the other side incompletely	Restates the other side in terms its holders would accept
Understanding of needs	Describes own group's needs only	Mentions another group's needs in general terms	Identifies specific needs of every party, including safety requirements
Quality of options	Offers one option that favours own group	Offers options that are partly workable	Offers several options that are fair and feasible
Reasoning about consequences	Gives no consequences	Names immediate consequences	Weighs short- and longer-term effects on all parties
Willingness to revise	Restates original position	Adjusts after pressure from others	Revises a view in response to a reason or evidence and says why

Note. Descriptors are illustrative and should be adapted to the age group and the task. Criteria describe observable behaviour, not character.

Assessment should address observable behaviour and growth. It should not pass judgement on a student's character or private beliefs. A learner should not lose marks for reading a traditional narrative differently from the teacher, provided the reading is reasoned and respectful. Baseline and follow-up reflections can help teachers see progress, but a claim that a programme improves well-being or behaviour needs a suitable research design, transparent measures, and attention to alternative explanations. Schools must also protect students' privacy and should avoid collecting sensitive emotional disclosures unless safeguarding and referral procedures are in place.

IX. CHALLENGES AND SAFEGUARDS

Several difficulties deserve attention. The first concerns teachers. Many will not know the source texts well, and many have had little training in leading open-ended ethical discussion. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), reviewing research on teacher professional development, found that effective programmes tend to be sustained, content-focused, collaborative, and to include coaching and modelling, which suggests that a single orientation workshop on IKS would not be enough. Professional development should cover contextual reading of the texts, lesson design, inclusive discussion, and assessment.

The second concerns representation. Cultural resources differ across languages and regions, and relying on a narrow canon can marginalise students whose traditions are less often quoted. Schools should include local and regional narratives and invite community knowledge where appropriate. The third concerns simplification. Stories are easily flattened into rigid morals even when their dilemmas are complex, so teachers need to invite questions about motive, consequence, power, and competing interpretations.

The fourth is the most serious. Cultural material must never be used to justify discrimination, gender stereotypes, caste hierarchy, exclusion, or unquestioned obedience. Some texts contain passages that explicitly or implicitly support social hierarchy, and these call for open critical discussion rather than silence or endorsement. Constitutional values, child rights, dignity, and inclusion are the necessary guardrails, and they are the reason Ladson-Billings's (1995) third aim, critical consciousness, belongs in the framework.

The fifth is the risk of unsupported claims about benefit. As noted above, the research on yoga and mindfulness in schools is encouraging in places but

uneven, and it has been criticised for overstatement (Khalsa & Butzer, 2016; Van Dam et al., 2018; Zenner et al., 2014). Claims should therefore be proportionate to the evidence, and any practice involving movement or breathing should be optional and safe.

Finally, teachers need time and institutional support. Life skills are more likely to be practised when classroom norms model respect, mistakes are treated as chances to learn, and students experience fair procedures. A school cannot teach empathy convincingly while everyday practice humiliates some learners or silences others.

X. LIMITATIONS AND A RESEARCH AGENDA

The framework has not been tested, and its sources are chosen, not exhaustive. Both limits point to work that should come next. A first step would be design-based research, in which teachers and researchers refine a small set of activities over several cycles in real classrooms and record what teachers actually do with the materials.

A second step would be quasi-experimental or cluster-randomised studies that compare students taught with IKS-based activities against comparison groups, using validated measures of the targeted skills; the Indian studies cited earlier (Srikala & Kishore, 2010; Tiwari & Bajpai, 2021) offer starting points for choosing outcomes and settings. Qualitative work is also needed. How do students from different religious, linguistic, caste, and gender backgrounds experience these lessons? Do some feel included and others exposed? A study of teachers' interpretive choices, and of how they handle contested passages, would be valuable too.

Four specific questions seem to me the most pressing. Do activities built on culturally familiar narratives produce larger or more durable gains in life skills than activities built on neutral or imported content? What forms of teacher preparation allow open discussion of contested texts without conflict or self-censorship? How can assessment capture growth in listening, reasoning, and collaboration without turning these into exam performances? And how far do gains in the classroom transfer to behaviour outside it? Until such questions are answered, the claims in this paper should be read as proposals.

XI. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

The discussion above leads to several practical recommendations, each depending on the evidence caveats already stated.

1. Integrate life-skills outcomes into subject teaching, assemblies, arts, sports, and service learning, and do not treat them as a separate add-on.
2. Develop teacher-resource modules in which each narrative or practice is paired with a competency, discussion questions, a practical activity, and a simple assessment rubric.
3. Use sources from many Indian traditions and regional communities, acknowledge variation in interpretation, and ensure representation across gender, language, region, and social background.
4. Prepare teachers to lead respectful disagreement, critical inquiry, inclusive group work, and safe emotional reflection, through sustained professional development and not one-off events.
5. Involve families and community practitioners in projects that document crafts, ecological practices, oral histories, and service traditions, with consent and proper acknowledgement.
6. Use formative assessment to observe listening, reasoning, collaboration, reflection, and responsible action, and do not assess students' personal religious beliefs.
7. Pilot the proposed activities across different school settings and age groups, collect baseline and follow-up evidence with appropriate permissions, and report limitations openly.
8. Encourage cooperation among schools, teacher-education institutions, researchers, and curriculum bodies to develop and evaluate culturally grounded life-skills resources.

XII. CONCLUSION

Indian Knowledge Systems can enrich life-skills education by offering narratives, ethical questions, reflective practices, games, arts, and community knowledge that students can connect to everyday difficulties. The Gita can open discussion of discernment and effort. Upanishadic dialogue can encourage questioning and listening. The Ramayana and Mahabharata can prompt analysis of obligation, justice, leadership, and conflict. Panchatantra and

Jataka stories support reflection on judgement and compassion, Yoga offers optional practices for attention, and local games and knowledge traditions provide occasions for cooperation and environmental care.

None of this works without good teaching. Students need chances to interpret, question, compare, practise, and apply, and they gain little from memorising a moral. When cultural resources are taught with historical sensitivity, respect for plurality, scientific temper, and constitutional values, they can be real partners in contemporary education. The framework offered here is conceptual, and it needs to be evaluated through classroom-based research before anyone claims it changes outcomes. If it is tested honestly and refined with teachers, it may help schools connect cultural understanding with the practical competencies that responsible, reflective, and compassionate participation in society requires.

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