

Book Review

Life Skills & Personality Development

Shinde Maithry, et.al, 2021. (PP. X + 126)

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The book under review is a recent publication from the Cambridge University Press focusing on a much discussed topic Life Skills and Personality Development. The book is penned by practicing and experienced teachers in the field.

Before going into the details, I would like to brief you on the background on how the book took its present form. As part of the Finishing School Program, a value-added course was initiated on Soft Skills for UG students at St. Mary's College. To support the discussions, authentic materials were being produced on the topics chosen by the authors. Having arrived at a bank of materials, they felt that the same could be arranged logically and published, so that their outreach could be greater.

The book has the following units:

Unit-1	Etiquette
Unit-II	Emotional Intelligence
Unit-III	Setting
Unit-IV	Interview Skills
Unit-V	Interpersonal Skills
Unit-VI	Teamwork and Collaboration
Unit-VII	Positive Attitude
Unit-VIII	Leadership Skills
Unit-IX	Image Management
Unit-X	Public Speaking

The structure of the book is uniform in the sense

that every unit is arranged systematically with learning objectives clearly stated at the beginning. For example, the first unit on Etiquette has the following learning objectives:

- Realize the need for good social and professional behavior
- Understand the importance of courtesy
- Make friends and sustain friendships for a long time
- Improve your personal impact on others
- Become aware of changes in life
- Understand the need to adapt to new situations

Learning objectives are followed by '**Consider this...**' component which is in fact a reflective task that promotes learning among the students. All the topics or situations selected under this heading are hypothetical or real life situations which stimulate the learners to imagine, be critical and practical and or introspect. These situations could have been faced by them or their friends in the past. Thus it provides ample scope for the students to either think and answer or depend on their previous experience.

For instance, Unit-3 has the following hypothetical situation.

Imagine that it has been predicted that the next seven days of your life are going to be just as you want them to be. - This means that you have an opportunity to plan every second of the next week and map your days to your idea of perfection. Now create a chart to plan your perfect week.

To answer the above situation the learners need to be imaginative and creative coupled with practicality.

For purposes of illustration, I have selected 'consider this' question from Unit-4.

Your institution has called for nominations for the post of the president of the students' club. Aspiring candidates need to possess skills like good leadership qualities, managerial skills and good communication skills.

This is undoubtedly a real life situation in any higher education institute. The students have to invariably answer the above only by being practical and introspective. Socrates's 'Know thyself' is reiterated here.

Each unit is provided with engaging tasks, including individual, pair and group activities thus providing adequate scope to learners to work independently, in teams and groups, a system that needs to be followed in their future workplaces. These tasks also structured uniformly – they begin with **Individual Activities**, followed by **Pair Work** and conclude with **Team Work**.

An individual activity reads like this: Think about and write down your dreams on at least two of the following categories: 1. Professionally 2. Academically 3. Personal life 4. Travel destinations

The examples are drawn from both past and present to help the learners learn on how to deal in future. 'People who inspire' promote interest among the learners as they are all 'real', diverse, yet, crisp and clear. The illustrations from contemporary and historical narratives with the intervention of dialogue exchange in some of the units allow the students to connect with the skill.

Small chunks of information are offered in easy-to-understand language so that learners can navigate seamlessly through the text. The text embraces multiliteracy in teaching and learning in higher education. There is a review question at the end of every unit to ensure that the learner has an idea of the ground covered.

The book would have been more comprehensive if it had the following:

Outcomes at the end of each unit could help the learner to assess their learning. A few learning objectives are generic. Measurable and actionable learning objectives provide adequate scope to evaluate the learner objectively to a great extent. All the contents of the book deal with intangible skills. Hence, a comprehensive and encompassing rubric would make it complete by all means. Every unit is approximately discussed in 11 or 12 pages, however, uniformity in the number of tasks given is missing. For example, unit-5 has 07 (seven) tasks and unit 8 has 12 tasks. The 'open-ended' questions given at the end of every unit under the heading 'Activity' and 'Let's review' are quite challenging for the teacher to evaluate and provide feedback to the learners. Few ICT related activities would have been added to engage the 'Digital Natives.' A few pertinent questions that arise are:

'Do we really have time to take up all these

tasks and activities in the classroom?’

‘Should we give a few tasks to be completed as practice exercises at home?’ If given, is it practically possible for the teacher to read all the answers? (keeping in mind the administrative responsibilities and the workload)

‘Is it possible to convince the learner, if the teacher feels that the learners’ responses are inappropriate? Does the teacher have any option to think whether the answers are either appropriate or inappropriate? In fact, it is difficult to be judgmental, as there is immense scope for subjectivity while evaluating the responses.

‘Does the book address the needs of new entrants, i.e. teachers?’

However the positives outnumber the shortcomings. The fundamental goal of the book on *Life Skills & Personality Development* is to help young people develop a competence that helps them cope with the difficulties of life. The book provides insightful tasks and meaningful discussions on the much needed 21st century skills like career goals, social goals and personal goals.

From teenagers to graduates and beyond, this book is appropriate for all age groups. The tasks

provided in each unit are thought provoking and practical. By using real-life examples, the authors inspire their readers to approach problems in new ways.

The authors’ rich and varied experience is reflected in designing interactive activities. This book serves as a ready reference for learners to learn, unlearn and relearn and for teachers it serves as a ready reckoner.

There are several books on similar topics and title. However, this book definitely has unique selling proposition because of the simple style, appealing and reader friendly language. It serves as one point solution to all the skills that a graduate should develop to be sociable, employable and to sustain in his or her careers.

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