

THE ROLE OF EDUCATED NEIGHBORHOODS IN ACHIEVING THE NECESSARY LIFE SKILLS FOR ADULT LEARNERS IN SAUDI ARABIA TO CONFRONT THE COVID-19 CRISIS

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ABSTRACT: With today's world of accelerated progress and change, the skills to solve problems, think critically, communicate effectively, and manage lives in a healthy and productive manner are essential for people to flourish in the 21st century. The study's purpose is to explore the role of educated-neighborhood programs for achieving the necessary life skills that adult learners need to help them during the present pandemic. The research also investigates if there is a difference, by gender and number of courses, regarding the educated neighborhood programs' role when acquiring the necessary life skills that could enable adult learners to confront the COVID-19 crisis. The theoretical framework depends on John Dewey's perspective. A self-administered questionnaire was utilized. A total sample of 601 adult learners participated in this study. The results illustrated that the adult learners who enrolled in the educated-neighborhood programs perceived the benefit of the life skills by practicing these skills during the COVID-19 crisis. Additionally, the results revealed differences for both life skills based on the number of courses that learners had taken during the present pandemic. The benefit of the direction was for people who took 5 or more courses. Understanding adult learners' needs is essential to provide the necessary life skills that fit with today's world of accelerated change.

Keywords: 21st century skills, life skills, adultery learns, Saudi Arabia, COVID19

Today's events have been unusual. In the past, there were other epidemics; however, the way people reacted to coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is unique (Matias, Dominski, & Marks, 2020). The COVID-19 viral disease was discovered in December 2019 in Wuhan, central China. By March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified the disease as a global pandemic (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020). On March 2, 2020, the first case of the corona-virus pandemic was reported in Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Health, 2020). Before that date, Saudi Arabia took several audacious and early precautions in order to prevent the spread of the virus. One of the most important precautionary decisions was to halt people who were outside the country from entering Makkah and to visit the Prophet's Mosque. The country also suspended all sporting activities; lounges; and commercial complexes, except for essential jobs and health regulations, to maintain social distancing. The Saudi Arabian government also suspended education at all schools and universities, relying on online platforms for all education levels (Ministry of Education, 2020). Not only has Saudi Arabia been negatively influenced by COVID-19, but countries also all over the world have been affected by this pandemic. To prepare learners very well, they should have the knowledge and skills that enable them to stay healthy, to have positive attitudes about themselves, and to actively participate in societies while effectively dealing with the challenges of everyday life (WHO, 1993). In Saudi Arabia, educated neighborhood programs provide many courses, such as vocational skills, literacy, and life skills, for adult learners. Because life-skill education for adults can be an effective tool to empower them to act responsibly, to take

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initiative, and to control stress and emotions, the research's purpose is to explore the role of educated neighborhood programs for achieving the necessary life skills that adult learners need to help them during the COVID-19 crisis in Saudi Arabia. The research also investigates if there is a difference, by gender and number of courses, regarding the educated neighborhood programs' role when acquiring the necessary life skills that could enable adult learners to confront the COVID-19 crisis.

Educated Neighborhoods

In Saudi Arabia, the neighborhood program learning first started in Jeddah City in 2006 in order to meet the local communities' needs, especially for women who were less fortunate in terms of education or vocational training (Alsuker, 2015). The program's goal is to support people who are upgrading their cultural, health, social, and economic level and to provide them with the skills that qualify them for the labor market, enabling people to participate in their families' and societies' economic and social growth. Neighborhood programs have played a very important role in education since they were established for both men and women. The neighborhood learning program provides many courses, such as foundation studies in literacy, numeracy, and recitation of the Holy Quran, in addition to professional programs, such as cosmetics, food processing, party planning, gift wrapping and flower arrangement. The program also teaches life skills, such as communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving as well as teaching languages, such as English (Ministry of Education, 2018). Courses are taught at public schools within the community; and are free anyone to can attend. Now, the neighborhood learning program has spread to all regions of Saudi Arabia for both males and females. (Alsuker, 2015).

The learning neighborhood programs are informal adult education programs, which are facilitated by some volunteers. More women than men participate in the learning neighborhood programs. The Ministry of Education enlists individuals, particularly teachers and school employees, with the necessary training; those individuals instruct classes for the Learning Neighborhood program. When necessary, the Department of Adult Education teaches people how to work with the adults who attend classes (General Department of Continuing Education, 2018).

The learning neighborhood program's vision is to provide a creative curriculum that reflects the different areas of life, therefore supporting people to be productive citizens and to obtain knowledge that can help them be more effective in their community. The program's objectives are to craft a plan to broaden adult education so that it includes basic literacy and continued study, to increase the literacy rate in the slums, to create more connections between teaching adults and promoting the national social growth, to create a pattern of volunteering that improves society, to encourage people to enhance their abilities, and to promote education as a tool for life and for addressing difficulties (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Life-Skills

Helping people to acquire life skills is hard. Instructors must have the expertise to utilize hands-on approaches (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2012). “Life skills education needs to adopt interactive, responsive, and participatory methods that challenge people to find new ways of relating to one another” (UNESCO, 2012, p. 87). Life skills is a modern concept in the Arab world. The concept of life-skills came in response to life, societal, and educational developments, and this idea keeps pace with the era of inclusive development and the technological knowledge revolution (Al-sabbagh 2004). Life skills refer to the abilities that everyone needs to make the most out of life. Usually, these life skills are linked to the way we manage our lives and live better, as well as helping people to achieve their aspirations (Altuwairqi, 2017). Life skills are defined by the World Health Organization (1993) as the capabilities of adaptive and positive behavior which enable individuals to effectively deal with the demands and challenges of daily life. Examples of these skills are managing emotions, solving problems, thinking critically, making healthy choices, communicating effectively, and managing lives in a healthy and productive manner (World Health Organization, 1993).

These skills may include knowing how to keep a job; understanding why you are behaving in a specific way; or knowing how to deal with people, problems, circumstance changes, or daily stresses (Altuwairqi, 2017). However, the phrases “life skills-based education” and “skills-based health education” are frequently utilized in the same way. The variation is that the former term refers to health-related issues while the latter term addresses a wider range of topics, including goodwill training, nationality, and additional public concerns. The two methods focus on the actual usage of education, talents, and beliefs; both forms of learning utilize active instruction techniques, engaging both the teachers and the learners (World Health Organization, 1993). In fact, any competency that can be useful in our lives could be considered a life skill, whether the trait is utilized at school, at work, or in our personal lives. The study was designed to answer the following research questions: What is the role of the educated neighborhood program in developing life skills (solving problems, thinking critically, communicating effectively, and managing lives in a healthy and productive manner) for adult learners in Saudi Arabia to confront the COVID-19 crisis? Is the role of the educated neighborhood program to help adult learner develop life skills to confront the COVID-19 crisis differ according to gender (male or female) and number of courses?

Significance of the Study

This is significant for the field of adult education because it would provide new knowledge regarding the relationship between COVID-19 and the concept of life skills. This study may provide important information for educational policymakers and educational planners to consider adult learners' needs and interests in the educated neighborhood programs in Saudi Arabia. The educated neighborhood programs need to be in line with the challenges of daily life and must adapt to the changes taking place at the political, social, cultural, and health levels. This study is also important to identify the necessary life skills in a way that contributes to disseminating these skills and increasing their use in adult-education programs.

Theoretical Framework

John Dewey (1916) stressed the importance of enabling individuals to become lifelong learners because education does not stop at a certain stage or age. People who are working to the development of sustainable societies need analytical abilities in order to recognize the responsibilities for purchasing and creating things as well as being guardians and leaders for modifications due to the intricate connectedness among people (Glasbergen & Smits, 2003). Dewey believed that education is based on learning through “hands-on” dialogue, discussion, and critical thinking (Guttek, 2014). Therefore, individuals need to constantly develop their intellectual and practical skills in order to solve problems rationally and scientifically. Accordingly, John Dewey criticized the traditional “old school,” which makes students passive learners, because this approach does not help learners in developing their knowledge or to face the challenges of daily life. Dewey believed that the lecture method is a limited education tool and that its benefits are limited because it does not allow the learner to explore reality, to collect information, to measure things, and to search for solutions (Dewey, 1915).

Dewey’s teaching methods are based on dialogue, problem solving, and self-learning (Dewey, 1998). Dewey (1991) emphasized that the aim of education is to enable people to continue their learning as well as to provide them with the skills that can help them to grow, adapt to their environment, and face challenges and difficulties in life. Dewey thoughts are consistent with the goals for the life skills that adults learn in the educated neighborhood program. The life skills chosen for this study are solving problems, thinking critically, communicating effectively, and managing lives in a healthy manner.

Dewey believed that the main key in the learning process is teaching “problem solving” skills. Hence, through a problem-solving process, learners become ready for real-life situations (Dewey, 1991). Critical-thinking skills is a complex concept, which is related to a number of behaviors that are taken in different situations. Dewey (1933) defined critical thinking skills as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 118). There is a strong link among communication, problem solving, and critical thinking skills. According to Klassen and Dwyer (2015), “problem solving is the heart of critical thinking, but communication is its soul. If you can’t communicate clearly, you can’t think critically” (p.77). Also, critical thinking helps people to manage stress and can even improve their health as well as giving people more incentive to perform.

Research Methodology

The present study utilized the descriptive method of research, and the sample was comprised of adult learners who were taking a life-skills course in the educated neighborhood program. The study was conducted in Taif, a tourist city located in western Saudi Arabia. The total population consisted of 917 students (358 males and 559 females). Online questionnaires were used to gather the data between May 20 and June 30, 2020. The director for the Department of Adult Education in Taif provided a list of

individuals who were studying at the educated neighborhood programs in 2020. Individuals who agreed to participate were asked to complete the questionnaire by email message and social media, such as WhatsApp and Twitter. The measurement items utilized for the study were obtained from reviewing the literature. The questionnaire included 24 items and consisted of two parts. The first part of the demographic information asked about gender and the number of courses. The second part included four life-skill scales: (a) critical thinking, (b) problem solving, (c) communicating effectively, and (d) managing lives in a healthy and productive manner. To clarify, making a rational decision about what to do in a situation is a critical-thinking skill. Coping with issues encountered when trying to solve problems in a positive way, such as analyzing a situation, getting information, thinking of options, revising options, and applying the correct solutions, is problem solving. When people are able to present or to receive various types of information, such as thoughts and feelings, with others as well as express what is happening around them, they have effective communication skills. Skills managing lives in a healthy and productive manner based on daily habits that help people feel energetic, be healthy, stay positive, and be less stressed, reducing the risk of disease. A Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree) was used for this study.

The questionnaire was developed in English. Then, the survey was translated into Arabic by translators who had mastered both languages in order to ensure that each item had equivalent statements in both languages. Creswell (2008) defined content validity as “the extent to which the question on the instrument and the scores from these questions are representative of all the possible questions that a researcher could ask about the content or skills” (p. 172). Thirteen expert panel members, specialists in the field of adult education, were asked to review the items. The expert panel members were asked to provide their opinions about the items’ clarity or ambiguity as well as how these items represented each life skill. The panelists were given the study’s goal and the meaning of each life skill so that they could provide any comments, suggestions, or corrections to improve the questionnaire. The items the panelists found acceptable were kept, and the confusing or ambiguous items were deleted.

After the panelists’ review was completed, a pilot test was conducted using the revised survey; 20 individuals who had similar characteristics as the study’s participants provided comments about clarity and ease of understanding. All 20 individuals completed the questionnaire and gave satisfactory comments about the items’ clarity. The correlation coefficient for each item with the entire questionnaire was 0.39-0.86, and between the items and each scale was (0.44-0.88), indicating acceptable statistical significance. Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated to examine the instrument’s reliability. The overall Cronbach Alpha result was 0.86, indicating high reliability for the survey questions. Information about life skills is presented in Table 1.

Table 1*Life Skills and Items for the Life Skills Survey*

Life Skill and Items	R-test	Alpha
Critical Thinking	0.91	0.71
1. I can assess the life situation and then behave accordingly.		
2. Face this pandemic in an effective way.		
3. distinguish between rumors and facts regarding the response to this pandemic		
4. Discuss issues with my family members in order to make the right decisions for our lives.		
5. Develop reflective thinking skills.		
Problem Solving	0.88	0.70
6. Solve my family's problems in a positive manner.		
7. Identify the problem.		
8. Analyze a situation or problem before forming judgments.		
9. Suggest the best possible solutions for problems by indicating the reason		
10. Get the necessary information to find a solution for the problem.		
11. Apply the best solutions with the given options.		
Communicating Effectively	0.86	0.74
12. Communicate effectively with others.		
13. Listen to other people's point of view carefully.		
14. Communicate positive messages to others during this pandemic.		
15. Persuade and negotiate effectively.		
16. Listen to my family members and hear their concerns about what is happening around them.		
17. Clarify any misconceptions that my family members might have regarding the pandemic		
Managing Lives in a Healthy Manner	0.90	0.81
18. Avoid unhealthy behaviors.		
19. Exercise regularly in order to confront the COVID-19 crisis.		
20. Stay calm under pressure during this pandemic.		
21. Stay positive during the home isolation.		
22. Encourage my family to take precautions during difficult time of COVID-19.		
23. Manage my time effectively.		
24. Realize the importance of adhering to precautions when leaving the house.		
Total	0.89	0.86

Results

Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were utilized to obtain the descriptive information for the study’s demographic variables (gender and the number of courses). The T-test, means, standard deviations, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and post-hoc Scheffé test were employed to describe and to analyze the data. The analysis for the 601 adult learners (206 males and 395 females) who participated in this study is given in Table 2.

Table 2

The Analysis of the Study Sample (Gender and Number of Courses)

		Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	206	34.3
	Female	395	65.7
Number of Courses	1-2	93	15.5
	3-4	196	32.6
	5-or more	312	51.9
	Total	601	100.0

Findings for Research Question One

What is the role of the educated neighborhood program in developing life skills (solving problems, thinking critically, communicating effectively, and managing lives in a healthy and productive manner) for adult learners in Saudi Arabia to confront the COVID-19 crisis? Means and standard deviations were used to answer research question one. The total mean score of 3.85 and a standard deviation of .172 indicated a high level of life skills that the educated neighborhood programs provided the adult learners to help people in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 crisis. The finding illustrated that communicating effectively was the highest-ranked item, with a mean of 3.88. The next-highest rated items were thinking critically, with a mean of 3.87; managing lives in a healthy and productive manner, with a mean of 3.84; and solving problems, with a mean of 3.81, respectively. The adult learners’ perception about the role of the educated neighborhood programs for achieving the necessary life skills to help them during the COVID-19 crisis in Saudi Arabia is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

The Mean and Standard Deviation of the Four Life-Skills Factors

Rank #	Life-Skill Factors	Mean	Std. D.	Level
5	Communicating Effectively	3.88	.210	1
1	Thinking Critically	3.87	.226	2
3	Managing Lives in a Healthy and Productive Manner	3.84	.230	3
4	Solving Problems	3.81	.295	4
	Total Score	3.85	.172	

Findings for Research Question Two

Does the role of the educated neighborhood program to help adult learners develop life skills to confront the COVID-19 crisis differ according to gender (male or female) and the number of training courses? A T-test was employed to examine if there were a significant difference between males and females regarding the educated neighborhood program's role to help adult learners develop life skills to confront the COVID-19 crisis. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in communicating effectively, thinking critically, and solving problems due to gender, all in favor of males. On the other hand, there was no difference in managing lives in a healthy and productive manner (Table 4).

Table 4

Independent T-test Result for Gender

	Sex	N	Mean	Std. D.	T	df	Sig.
Thinking Critically	Male	206	3.94	.105	5.660	599	.000
	Female	395	3.83	.261			
Solving Problems	Male	206	3.91	.161	5.815	599	.000
	Female	395	3.76	.335			
Communicating Effectively	Male	206	3.93	.167	4.311	599	.000
	Female	395	3.85	.225			
Managing Lives in a Healthy Manner	Male	206	3.86	.303	1.306	599	.192
	Female	395	3.83	.180			
Total Score	Male	206	3.90	.115	5.917	599	.000
	Female	395	3.82	.188			

A one-way ANOVA test was utilized to see if there were statistically significant differences based on the number of training courses. The results revealed a statistically significant difference for all factors (thinking critically, solving problems, communicating effectively, and managing lives in a healthy and productive manner). The findings for the one-way (ANOVA) results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5*Summary of the One-Way ANOVA Table for Number of Courses*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Thinking Critically	Between Groups	2.143	2	1.072	22.429	.000
	Within Groups	28.569	598	.048		
	Total	30.712	600			
Solving Problems	Between Groups	5.125	2	2.563	32.518	.000
	Within Groups	47.127	598	.079		
	Total	52.252	600			
Communicating Effectively	Between Groups	.570	2	.285	6.598	.001
	Within Groups	25.848	598	.043		
	Total	26.418	600			
Managing Lives in a Healthy Manner	Between Groups	1.676	2	.838	16.717	.000
	Within Groups	29.984	598	.050		
	Total	31.660	600			
Total Score	Between Groups	1.988	2	.994	37.876	.000
	Within Groups	15.696	598	.026		
	Total	17.685	600			

To show the statistically significant differences between the means, a post-hoc analysis (Scheffé) was used. The results revealed that there was a significant difference at .05 level between 5 or more courses, and both 1-2 and 3-4, favoring 5 or more courses for thinking critically and managing lives in a healthy and productive manner. There were also significant differences at the .05 level between 1-2 courses and 3-4 courses. The differences favored 1-2 courses. The post-hoc analysis also showed significant differences at the .05 level between 5 or more courses, and both 1-2 and 3-4 courses for solving problems. The differences favored 5 or more courses. Finally, there were also significant differences at the .05 level between 5 or more courses and 3-4 courses, favoring 5 or more courses, for communicating effectively. The results of the post hoc analyses are shown in Table 6

Table 6*Post Hoc Comparison Results by the Number of Courses*

		Mean	1-2	3-4	5 or more
Thinking	1-2	3.79			
Critically	3-4	3.82	.02		
	5 or more	3.93	.13*	.11*	
Solving	1-2	3.79			
Problems	3-4	3.69	.10*		
	5 or more	3.90	.11*	.21*	
Communica	1-2	3.87			
ting	3-4	3.83	.03		
Effectively	5 or more	3.90	.03	.07*	
Managing	1-2	3.82			
Lives in a	3-4	3.77	.05		
Healthy	5 or more	3.89	.07*	.12*	
Manner					
Total	1-2	3.82			
	3-4	3.78	.04		
	5 or more	3.90	.08*	.13*	

Discussion and Conclusion

Life-related skills are multiple and comprehensive. The emergence of this concept is the result of life requirements that have resulted from scientific changes and cognitive acceleration. The life skills that were emphasized in this study are critical thinking, problem solving, communicating effectively, and managing lives in a healthy and productive manner. The study included both male and female participants who were taking life-skill courses at the educated-neighborhood program in Taif, Saudi Arabia. The study's purpose was to illustrate the benefits of the life-skill, which adult learners need to help them during the COVID-19 crisis in Saudi Arabia, provided by the educated-neighborhood programs. This study is important because it may generate interesting new knowledge and insight regarding the relationship between COVID-19 and the concept of life skills. Identifying the learners' necessary life skills is essential because that information may contribute to spreading these skills and increasing their use for adult-education programs. This study may provide a framework for educational policymakers to develop education plans that are compatible with the requirements for adults who attend the educated-neighborhood programs in Saudi Arabia.

The results revealed that the adult learners who enrolled in the educated-neighborhood programs perceived the benefit of the life skills by practicing these skills at a high level during the COVID-19 crisis. This result was consistent with the goals of Saudi Arabia's educated-neighborhood programs. Some of these objectives were to provide individuals with the life skills that enable them to become self-directed learners in order to empower them to contribute to society and to develop self-confidence as well as how to act when

facing difficulties (Ministry of Education, 2018). Kumar (2017) indicated that people need knowledge about life skills in order to act with confidence and competence.

Among the four life skills, adult learners who enrolled in an educated-neighborhood program had the highest mean for communicating effectively. Most survey respondents reported that their knowledge from a life-skill course in the educated-neighborhood program enabled them “to clarify any misconceptions that my family members might have regarding the pandemic” and “to listen to my family members and hear their concerns about what is happening around them.” Dewey confirmed that communicating effectively with others is very important because it can help people to gain an active “mind” through the engagement process of “thinking” to resolve a problem as well as liberating people from the overwhelming pressure of events, enabling people to live in a world with a meaningful life (Nathan, 2004). Also, the ability to communicate effectively is very important in the Islamic perspective. In the Holy Quran, a verse stated, “We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people so that he might clearly convey the message to them” (Quran, n.d., Ibrahim, Verse 4, p. 14). This verse indicated that achieving success and reaching others in order to achieve the mission requires effective communication. When communication is not clear and understandable, there may be misunderstandings; the listener may ignore the conversation, or conflicts may arise between individuals.

Thinking critically was the second-highest skill for the adult learners who enrolled in the educated-neighborhood program, followed by managing lives in a healthy and productive manner, and solving problems. According to Carlgren (2013), when giving hope to a generation to be a success in the 21st century, it is necessary to promote the skills for solving problems, thinking critically, and communicating effectively. “The acquisition of these skills would also help at-risk people gain the confidence to compete in the workforce, make healthy choices, overcome hardships, and persevere” (Carlgren, 2013, p. 12). According to Freire (1996), dialogue, critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving are strongly connected. For example, dialogue enhances critical thinking. When there is no dialogue, communication does not occur, and without clear communication, people cannot learn about resolving problems.

The second question found that there is a significant difference in communicating effectively, thinking critically, and the problem-solving skills that adult learners practiced in the educated-neighborhood programs in order to confront the COVID-19 crisis. The direction benefits males. According to the International Labour Organization (2020) almost 2.7 billion people, which represents around 81% of the world’s workers, are affected by this pandemic. Traditionally in Arab communities, women do not participate financially, which makes the man the only breadwinner (Kia, 2019). Therefore, men used critical-thinking strategies and communicated with others more than women in order to find a solution to this problem during the COVID-19 crisis.

However, there is no significant difference for managing lives in a healthy manner, as perceived by the adult learners who practiced the life skills in the educated-neighborhood programs, to confront the COVID-19 crisis. This result is logical because, as a result of

fear surrounding this pandemic outbreak, whether on the personal or family level, both men and women may adhere to the instructions and precautions that the government put in place to confront the epidemic.

Additionally, the results revealed that there were statistically significant differences with the perception of adult learners who practiced life skills in the educated-neighborhood programs in order to confront the COVID-19 crisis; the differences were seen for both life skills based on the number of courses that students took. The benefit of the direction was for people who took 5 or more courses. The results indicated that continuity and succession planning for courses are great ways to help learners master these skills and to change for the better. Conducting a qualitative study to understand adult learners' needs is essential for providing the necessary life skills that fit with today's world of accelerated change.

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