



Ukraine



The Acquisition, Development and Impact of Life Skills on Ukrainian Adolescents

Acknowledgements

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Glossary

CPF	Conceptual and Programmatic Framework
ESPAD	European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs
HBSC	Health and Behaviour in School-aged Children
LSCE	Life Skills and Citizenship Education
LSE	Life Skills Education
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SCORE	Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index
SeeD	Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development
UISR	Ukrainian Institute for Social Research after Oleksandr Yaremenko
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USE	United Nations Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index for Eastern Ukraine

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Adolescents: the term adolescents in UNICEF is used for young people aged 10 to 18 years. However, the vast majority of adolescents that participated in the study were aged between 12 and 19.

Externalizing problems: externalizing problems are defined in this study as aggression, conduct disorder (CD), and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD).

Internalizing problems: internalizing problems are defined in this study as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD).

Life Skills: UNICEF defines Life skills as psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

MENA Life-Skills Framework: a framework of four dimensions which further subdivides into twelve core life skills – 3 life skills in each dimension: skills for learning (creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving), skills for employability (cooperation, negotiation, decision-making), skills for personal empowerment (communication, resilience, self-management), and skills for active citizenship (participation, empathy, and respect for diversity).

Risky behaviours: risky behaviours in this study are defined as substance use, self-harm, and unsafe sexual behaviours.

Areas near the conflict line: the study defines areas near the conflict line as areas within 15 kilometres of the contact line in the government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Oblasts are administrative units within Ukraine.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Life skills are abilities which enable individuals to adapt and deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. The MENA (Middle East and North Africa) Life Skills and Citizenship Education identifies twelve core life skills that individuals need to encompass.

The goal of the study is to explore life skills in the context of Ukraine and to investigate how Life Skills Education impacts upon adolescents. To reach this goal, the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) conducted large-scale quantitative research across Ukraine. Students from eight oblasts participated in the study; specifically, the study took place in Donetsk, Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Lviv, and Kyiv oblasts. A total of 7,846 students (aged 12-19 years old) from 200 educational institutions participated in the study.

To investigate how Life Skills factors are structured in the context of Ukraine, different models were explored. Our analyses demonstrated that there is a general Life Skills factor, and two distinct sub-components as well. The first, Self-Direction Skills, includes problem-solving skills, decision-making skills, critical thinking skills, distress tolerance, self-management, and creativity. The second subcomponent, Collaboration Skills, includes respect for diversity, kindness, social communication, and cooperation.

Further analyses showed that – based on their life skills levels – there are five distinct profiles of adolescents were grouped in five different groups:

- adolescents with outstanding life skills, who have high levels of both self-direction skills and collaborative skills;
- adolescents who display average levels in both self-direction skills and collaborative skills;
- adolescents with stronger self-direction life skills and lower collaborative ones;
- adolescents who have stronger collaborative skills than self-direction ones and;
- adolescents who have low levels in both self-direction and collaborative skills.

Interestingly, high levels of life skills protect adolescents against emotional, educational, and behavioural problems. In other words, adolescents with outstanding life skills scored the lowest levels in measures of, for instance, substance use, anxiety, depression, and aggression. Furthermore, respondents with balanced life skills are better adjusted to the changing environment than their peers with a lower level of life skills.

The study also identifies what contributes to the development of life skills. Findings suggest that the quality of family and school environments tend to influence the acquisition and development of life skills. For instance, adolescents with supportive and involved parents are more likely to develop life skills. In contrast, adolescents with executive dysfunction, with high callous-unemotional traits, or who experience sexual or psychological abuse at home, are impaired in their abilities to acquire and develop life skills.

The present study also examined the impact of the existing Life Skills Education (LSE) programme on adolescents' life skills acquisition. Analyses showed that the programme is successful in improving critical thinking skills in adolescents, and kindness in girls. Furthermore, the LSE programme is very successful in improving the skills of participating students who have high callous-unemotional traits. Specifically, LSE programme improved, among others, their critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making skills, in comparison to those who did not participate in the programme. Nevertheless, participants of the programme who, nevertheless, have high executive dysfunction, or experienced victimization or family abuse did not benefit from participation in the programme.

Overall, the analysis obtained numerous essential findings that may facilitate quality programme development and bring a positive impact on the ongoing education reform in Ukraine.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Life Skills Programmes in Ukraine

Life skills can be defined as psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. As such life skills are particularly crucial for Ukrainian children who are growing up in the midst of an ongoing armed conflict now within its sixth year and remains omnipresent in the daily lives of young people across the country including through its far-reaching socio-economic consequences, increasingly divisive media narratives and, for some, continued direct exposure to violence of the conflict itself.

In 2017, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) prioritisation of life skills development by developing a Life Skills Education (LSE) programme which was first piloted in eastern

Ukraine, digitized and rolled out at scale through the 25 national centres for in-service teacher training. The LSE curriculum focuses aims for changes in behaviours and values through communication, empathy, cooperation, problem-solving, conflict prevention and resolution, negotiation, mediation, reconciliation, appropriate assertiveness, respect for human rights, gender sensitivity and active citizenship.

While these life skills were selected based on the needs and desired outcomes in the Ukrainian context and with the conflict and its consequences in mind, the LSE course is not based on a comprehensive national skills framework as there is currently no agreed-upon overarching life skills framework in an application in Ukraine.

2.2. The MENA Framework

It is now accepted globally that life skills contribute to resilience and various forms of success, including professional and academic ones and that the education system plays a central role in the development of these skills.

The MENA (Middle East and North Africa) Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) Initiative aims towards “a holistic and transformative vision of education that maximizes the human potential of all children and better equips them to face the transition from childhood to adulthood, from education to work, and from unreflective development to responsible and active citizenship”¹. So, the MENA LSCE Initiative aims to have a positive influence on education outcomes, employment and entrepreneurship, and civic engagement.

The LSCE Conceptual and Programmatic Framework (CPF) identifies twelve core life skills (see Figure 1) regrouped under four learning outcomes: (i) skills for learning (creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving); (ii) skills for employability (cooperation, negotiation, decision-making); (iii) skills for personal empowerment (self-management, resilience, communication); and (iv) skills for active citizenship (respect for diversity, empathy, participation).

“Learning to Know” (Cognitive Dimension): This Dimension includes the development of abilities such as creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking. In its core, this learning dimension involves the desire to acquire a better understanding of the world and other people. In other words, for young people to gain novel knowledge, they must acquire these skills.

“Learning to Do” (Instrumental Dimension): This Dimension links with employability and relates to young people attaining the skills needed to implement what they have learned in the workforce. The three skills identified as the most important ones for employment are decision-making, cooperation, and negotiation.

“Learning to Be” (Individual Dimension): Self-management, resilience, and communication all fall under this dimension which relates to self-fulfilment and personal growth.

“Learning to Live Together” (Social Dimension): This dimension “adopts a human rights-based approach consistent with democratic and social justice values and principles²”, and entails the acquisition of respect of diversity, empathy, and participation skills.

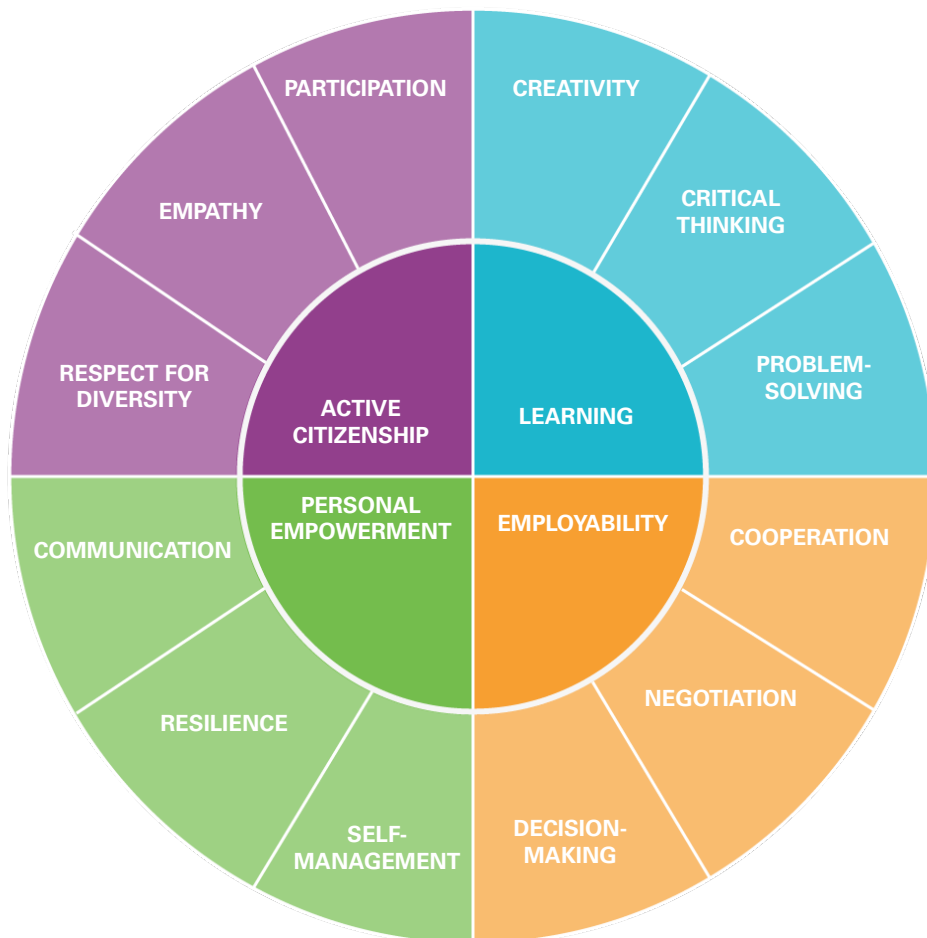
Although distinct, these dimensions overlap and interact with one another, and their interrelations shape one another.

1. UN Children's Fund (2017)

2. UN Children's Fund (2017)

Figure 1.

The twelve core life skills (source: UN Children's Fund, 2017)



2.3. Rationale

Ukraine is a well-surveyed country; numerous studies have been conducted, investigating the consequences of the conflict for children and adolescents. For instance, there is several researches on how children who live in close proximity to the contact line experience the conflict, or on how exposure to traumatic events affects children's and adolescents' behavioural and psychosocial health links. One large-scale study in Eastern Ukraine is a well-surveyed country; numerous studies have been conducted, investigating the consequences of the conflict for children and adolescents. For instance, there is several researches on how children who live in close proximity to the contact line experience the conflict, or on how exposure to traumatic events affects children's and adolescents' behavioural and psychosocial health links. One large-scale study in Eastern Ukraine, conducted

by the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) in collaboration with UNICEF, examined the interaction and impact between conflict and individual, microsystemic, and macrosystemic factors on adolescent development outcomes³. Nonetheless, there have been few attempts towards comprehensive research exploring life skills in the context of Ukraine and how they interact and influence adolescent development outcomes. Doing so is essential due to the increasing empirical evidence that a wide range of skills can support present and future success. To achieve this, the study explored the existing MENA Life Skills Framework in the context of Ukraine, which drives or undermines the development of life skills and how life skills contribute to developmental outcomes.

3. UN Children's Fund (2019)

2.4. Scope of the Study

This report on Life Skills was developed by SeeD and UNICEF and is based on the analysis of data collected in the second of three annual waves. Data were collected through self-reports, with 7,846 adolescents participating. Adolescents were recruited from 200 educational institutions from 8 oblasts in Ukraine: Donetsk, Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Lviv, and Kyiv oblasts. The Ukraine adolescent study aims to provide knowledge on the (i) the appropriateness of the MENA Life Skills Framework in the context of Ukraine, (ii) outcomes of life skills, (iii) what drives the development of life skills, and (iv) to examine the impact of the existing Life Skills Education (LSE) programme on adolescents' life skills acquisition.

Specifically, the study investigates the contribution of life skills to several outcomes, for instance, mental health outcomes (externalizing and internalizing problems), quality of life, educational outcomes, and civic outcomes (e.g., multicultural outlook, and endorsement of human rights). The findings of the study can contribute to the ongoing education reform that also places significant importance on the development

of crucial competencies for lifelong learning. The study also examines what drives and impedes the development of life skills, including individual traits such as executive functioning and callous-unemotional (CU) traits, and environmental factors such as the influence of the family system and the education system. This adolescent research was designed to provide unique, Ukrainian specific, empirically validated data to support the MoES and other Educational stakeholders to increase evidence-based policy and quality programme development to improve the impact of ongoing education reform as outlined in the "New Ukrainian School" document.

In June 2018, UNICEF and the MoES agreed to use the adolescent research tool to complement existing assessments of the Life Skills Education (LSE) programme jointly piloted in eastern Ukraine before being rolled out nationally. Specifically, this approach allows to assess the impact on a broader set of skills and indicators than those directly targeted by the intervention as well as to identify groups of adolescents benefiting the most and the least.

3. METHODOLOGY

The measures complied with UNICEF's and national ethical considerations on conducting research with children. For the design of the questionnaire, to select the indicators most relevant for adolescents, an extensive literature review was conducted along with consultations with experts on adolescent development. Numerous indicators were selected for inclusion in the final questionnaire, ranging from adolescents' experiences in the school setting (e.g. teacher support, peer support, emotional connection to schools) and experiences in their family life (e.g. parental involvement, parental monitoring, or experiences of abuse such as physical or psychological), to externalizing and internalizing behaviours (e.g. conduct disorder, aggression, anxiety, and depression), risky behaviours (e.g. substance use, unsafe sexual behaviours, and self-harm), active citizenship (e.g. multicultural outlook, gender equality mindset) or to quality of life and academic performance. For

the selection of items to form the indicators of the twelve life skills, the same procedure was applied. Where possible, items from well-established and psychometrically validated instruments for social sciences research were used. Otherwise, items were developed by SeeD to correspond to UNICEF's conceptualization of Life Skills. A full list of the adolescent indicators can be found in the appendix.

For the present project, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How appropriate is the MENA Life Skills Framework in the context of Ukraine?
2. What are the outcomes of life skills?
3. What are the specific drivers of life skills acquisition?
4. How effective is the Life Skills Education programme in eastern Ukraine on the acquisition of life skills?

3.1. Instruments: Questionnaires

Five questionnaire items were produced for each of the life skills indicators, which were then aggregated to form a unique skill. For instance, to measure problem-solving, adolescents were asked to indicate how likely it is of them to try and develop strategies to solve an issue or if unsuccessful in trying solving it in a different way.

For the other indicators, an average of 2 to 5 items relating to different aspects of each indicator were included in the survey. For instance, for bullying behaviours, adolescents were asked to indicate how often they (i) push or (ii) hit and kick their peers. Similar to life skills, items are then merged to form a composite factor, named "physical bullying".

3.2. Ethical Considerations

The research team thoroughly reviewed all ethical considerations to ensure the protection of children's rights during the study. UNICEF contracted the Ukrainian Institute for Social Research after Oleksandr Yaremko⁴ (UISR), a leading institute accredited for conduct of national surveys and with substantial experience in school-based surveying to provide expert advice on the questionnaire formulation and its translation. UISR is the institute which gathered the first wave of data for the Eastern Ukraine Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) adolescent survey. UISR is the Ukrainian accredited institute for the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs⁵ (ESPAD) and leads Ukraine's data collection for the Health and Behaviour in School-aged Children⁶ (HBSC),

both cross-national studies taking place in 35 and 48 countries respectively.

UISR carried out an initial independent ethical review of the questionnaire developed by the research team following which the questionnaire was revised before being pilot tested in students in Bila Tserkva. Approval of the survey was obtained from the Commission on Psychology and Pedagogy of the Scientific-Methodical Council of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.⁷ Before administering the paper-based questionnaire, regional field managers from the UISR National network received a full-day training. Students were then informed about the objectives of the study, how the data would be used and informed that participation was on a voluntary basis, that not all

4. <http://www.uisr.org.ua/>

5. <http://www.espad.org>

6. <http://www.hbsc.org>

7. <http://www.mon.gov.ua/>

the questions needed to be answered and that they could withdraw at any time. Each student received a questionnaire and an individual envelope in which they sealed their completed survey. All individual envelopes

of the class were then sealed by the interviewer in a second envelope prior to the return of the teacher in the room.

3.3. Data Collection

The adolescent data was collected through a paper-and-pencil self-report questionnaire in the Ukrainian language during the first semester of the 2018-2019 school-year (October to early December). The sample consisted of 7,846 adolescents aged between 12-19 years old (mean age = 15.46 years). Both genders were represented in the sample. Boys represented 46.3 per cent of the sample (3,634 males), girls represented

53.5% (4,197 females), and a further 0.2% (15 adolescents) did not provide their gender information.

Adolescents were students from 200 education institutions in Ukraine who resided in the Donetsk, Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Lviv, and Kyiv oblasts. For Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, samples were formed as to have groups from (i) 0-5 km, (ii) 5-15 km and (iii) 15+ km from the contact line.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Composition of Life Skills in Ukraine

The comparative analysis of various life skills models confirmed that the MENA Life Skills Framework is the most appropriate model for the Ukrainian context. As a result of the study, the following two distinct components of life skills were defined:

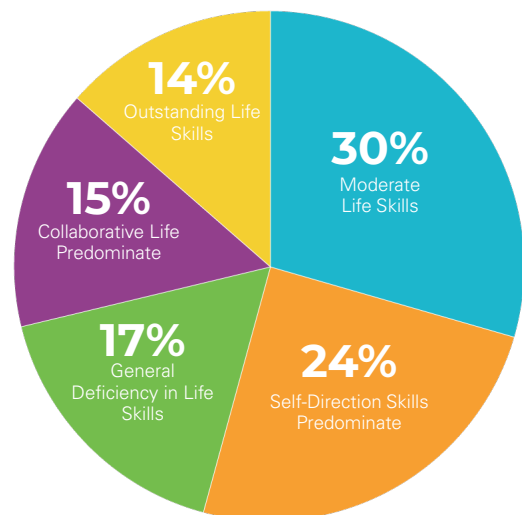
1. The Self-Direction component, which consists of problem-solving, decision making, critical thinking, distress tolerance, self-management, and creativity.
2. The Collaborative component, which consists of respect for diversity, kindness, social communication, and cooperation.

4.2. Profiles of Adolescents

Our findings demonstrated that there are five different profiles of adolescents based on their life skills levels: (i) adolescents with outstanding life skills, who have high levels of both self-direction skills and collaborative skills, (ii) adolescents who display both self-direction skills and collaborative skills but at average levels, (iii) adolescents with stronger self-direction life skills and lower collaborative ones, (iv) adolescents who have stronger collaborative skills than self-direction ones and, and (v) adolescents who have low levels in both self-direction and collaborative skills. This analysis was done to understand if adolescents share similar degrees of life skills between them and to assess how the levels of certain life skills or combination thereof might contribute to different adolescent development outcomes.

Figure 2.

Five profiles of adolescents based on their life skills.



4.3. Life Skills Protect Adolescents Against Negative Outcomes and Promote Healthy Behavioural, Psychosocial, and Civic Adjustment

The adolescent study in Ukraine demonstrated that high levels of life skills protect adolescents against emotional, educational, and behavioural problems. Adolescents with outstanding life skills show the most favourable adjustment in all aspects of their life; for instance, they score higher in measures of human rights endorsement and gender equality mindset. They are also less likely to victimize others, use illegal substances, or suffer from externalizing and internalizing problems.

Adolescents with low life skills are more likely to be more aggressive, have high callous-unemotional traits, and deficient overall quality of life. Additionally, they score low on civic indicators such as gender equality mindset and endorsement of human rights as do adolescents with high self-direction skills but low collaboration skills. This suggests that collaborative skills, such as kindness and respect for diversity, are the necessary components of positive civic outcomes.

In contrast, adolescents who have higher collaborative skills than self-direction are more at risk of suffering from anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. For instance, it seems plausible that when adolescents are kind, but lack skills like critical thinking and self-management, this may cause them

to experience consistent feelings of anxiousness or sadness either for themselves or for others who are going through difficult situations.

Our results demonstrate that adolescents with more constant life skills levels are better adjusted in all spheres of their lives (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Differences in positive outcomes between the five distinct subtypes of adolescents.

	Outstanding Life Skills	Moderate Life Skills	Self-Direction Skills Predominant	Collaborative Skills Predominant	General Deficiency in Life Skills
Quality of life	6,63	5,88	5,53	5,1	4,84
Multicultural Outlook	6,86	6,81	6,14	6,74	5,58
Endorsement of Human Rights	7,53	7,27	6,61	7,01	6,03
Gender Equality Mindset	8,43	8,24	7,44	8,04	6,75
Readiness for Civic Participation	6,5	5,89	5,08	5,51	4,76

Guidelines to read the table on group differences in negative outcomes:

· Cells highlighted in green signify the lowest levels of negative outcomes (e.g. adolescents with outstanding life skills have the lowest chances of abusing illegal substances), whereas cells highlighted in red signify which groups are more likely to display such negative outcomes (e.g. adolescents with low levels in both life skills have the highest likelihood of abusing illegal substances).

· All scores presented in the table are out of 10.

Table 2.

Differences in negative outcomes between the five distinct subtypes of adolescents.

	Outstanding Life Skills	Moderate Life Skills	Self-Direction Skills Predominate	Collaborative Skills Predominate	General Deficiency in Life Skills
Substance Use	0,16	0,21	0,33	0,19	0,48
Anxiety	2,89	3,04	2,92	3,54	2,93
Depression	2,31	2,87	3,03	3,61	3,45
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	1,45	1,72	1,7	2,19	1,93
Unsafe Sexual Behavior	0,33	0,37	0,54	0,29	0,71
Self-Harm	0,29	0,34	0,45	0,7	0,74
Suicidality	0,36	0,38	0,53	0,71	0,93
General Victimization	0,82	0,9	0,97	1,01	1,19
School Drop-Out Tendency	1,88	1,93	2,68	2,3	3,18
Oppositional Defiant Disorder	1,68	2,06	2,34	2,41	2,58
Conduct Disorder	0,45	0,52	0,71	0,62	0,93
General Bullying	0,27	0,34	0,51	0,38	0,66
Callous Unemotional Traits	2,57	3,07	4,14	3,36	5,14
Aggression	2,88	3,3	3,71	3,43	3,89

Guidelines to read the table on group differences in negative outcomes:

· Cells highlighted in green signify the lowest levels of negative outcomes (e.g. adolescents with outstanding life skills have the lowest chances of abusing illegal substances), whereas cells highlighted in red signify which groups are more likely to display such negative outcomes (e.g. adolescents with low levels in both life skills have the highest likelihood of abusing illegal substances).

· All scores presented in the table are out of 10.

5. OUTCOMES OF LIFE SKILLS

The adolescent study in Ukraine found that adolescents with balanced life skills are more adjusted individuals than their peers with lower levels of life skills who are more prone to adverse development outcomes in all aspects of their lives (see Table 2).

Sometimes though, adolescents present some life skills to a higher level than other skills, which eventually leads to specific outcomes. For instance, as our analyses showed, even though all life skills play an important part for high quality of life, an adolescent needs to be equipped with some of life skills (specifically, distress tolerance, self-management and cooperation) to a higher degree than other life skills. So, interested stakeholders, could use this finding and implement relevant interventions where they invest primarily in those life skills. So, when designing appropriate implementation programmes, skills should be prioritized accordingly based on the intended outcomes.

Specifically, our study found that adolescents with lower internalizing problems scored higher – compared to other life skills – in measures of cooperation, distress tolerance, self-management, and decision-making. Because these skills involve, among others, the ability to open up to other people and to cope well during stressful situations, experts who work with depressed and anxious young people should prioritize these four skills.

Secondly, adolescents with low externalizing problems (such as aggression and oppositional defiant disorder) possess better self-management skills, kindness, and respect for diversity. Thus, the work towards building kindness, embracing diversity, and encouraging self-management will lead to less defiant and aggressive behaviours. Furthermore, adolescents who did not have strong behavioural issues (e.g., using illegal substances or engaging in unsafe sexual behaviours) had higher distress tolerance and self-management skills. Consequently, self-management should be supported and promoted, as well as helping adolescents to develop effective coping mechanisms. This way, even when they experience stress, they will not “seek to escape” from their problems by turning to self-destructive behaviours.

Finally, adolescents who endorse human rights, and have a multicultural outlook and gender equality mindset, had higher levels of respect for diversity, kindness, negotiation, and critical thinking skills. That leads to recommendations for stakeholders who wish to nurture any of civic outcomes in communities. One way would be to emphasize building adolescents’ life skills, in particular, negotiation and critical thinking skills, as well as promoting kindness and respect for diversity.

6. TOWARDS AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE – DRIVERS OF LIFE-SKILLS

Unsurprisingly and in line with existing literature, the data show that in Ukraine, both systemic factors and individual traits can significantly impact on the acquisition and development of life skills.

Quality of family life and school life were found to support the acquisition and development of life skills where individual traits such as executive dysfunction and Callous-Unemotional Traits were found to undermine them. These results are significant, because they highlight the limits of the education system and the need for a holistic approach engaging different stakeholders to provide the support necessary for children to take advantage of the opportunities offered within schools.

At the systemic level, the study found that the acquisition and development of life skills were strongly influenced by the school and familial environments. Unsurprisingly, adolescents experiencing higher levels of school connectedness were found to have higher levels of life skills as a whole as did those enjoying a positive environment and involvement of the parents at home. While the impact of school and families on adolescent development are well documented, this study also provides evidence of the parents’ and school’s contribution to the development of life skills. The results show that life skills development is strongly supported by the engagement and practice of positive behaviour control with adolescents of both parents. Specifically, the study found that adolescents with

warm and involved parents who monitor their child’s behaviour are more likely to develop life skills. Both mothers’ and fathers’ involvement were found to be essential but with different influences. Regarding fathers, they were found to support the development of self-management, problem-solving, decision-making, and cooperation skills for all their adolescent children. However, the results show a gendered impact of paternal involvement with certain skills development being supported only for boys and other only for girls (see table 3). Mothers, on the other hand, supported the development of a broader number of life skills without any gender differences.

Overall, adolescents need to have boundaries, yet to also be free to be who they want to be. They need parents who are involved in their lives, but who also respect their boundaries. When parents fail to do so, adolescents’ abilities to develop essential skills diminish.

On the other hand, results show that adolescents who experience sexual or psychological abuse at home are impaired in their abilities to acquire and develop life skills. At the school level, positive experiences also support the development of Life Skills. For example,

competency-based teaching – which involves group assignments and activities that require critical thinking skills and decision-making skills – helps adolescents develop life skills.

At the individual level Callous Unemotional Traits (CUT), which are defined as a systematic disregard of other peoples’ feelings, shallow emotions, and lack of remorse after hurtful actions are associated with lower life skills. Because CUT adolescents do not feel emotions and are not genuinely interested in other people, it is not surprising that they would have, for instance, lower cooperation skills or lack kindness. Executive dysfunction, on the other hand, has to do with individuals’ deficiencies in planning, regulation of emotions or task initiation. In effect, these results mean that specific children are unable to acquire the same levels of life skills than their peers without specific and targeted support.

The ongoing education reform has a strong focus on life skills development, reflecting the Government’s priority and ambitions to invest in Ukraine’s human capital. However, the study highlights the limitations of the schools and calls for a holistic approach engaging several service providers, stakeholders and parents.

Table 3.

Gender differences in the pathways to life skills.

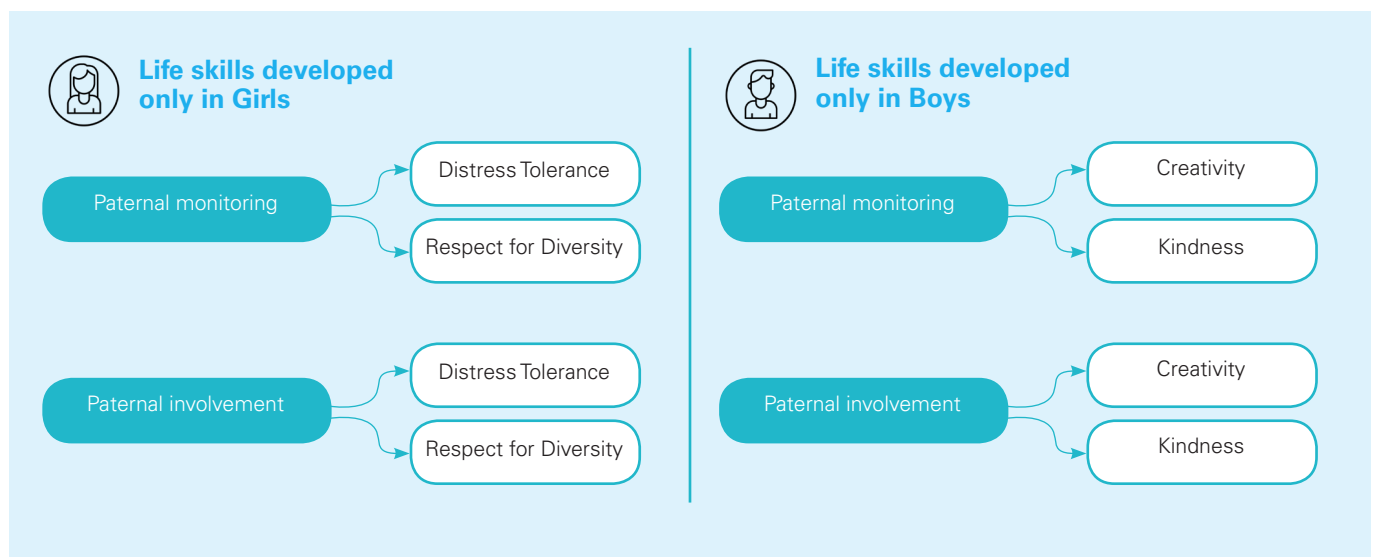
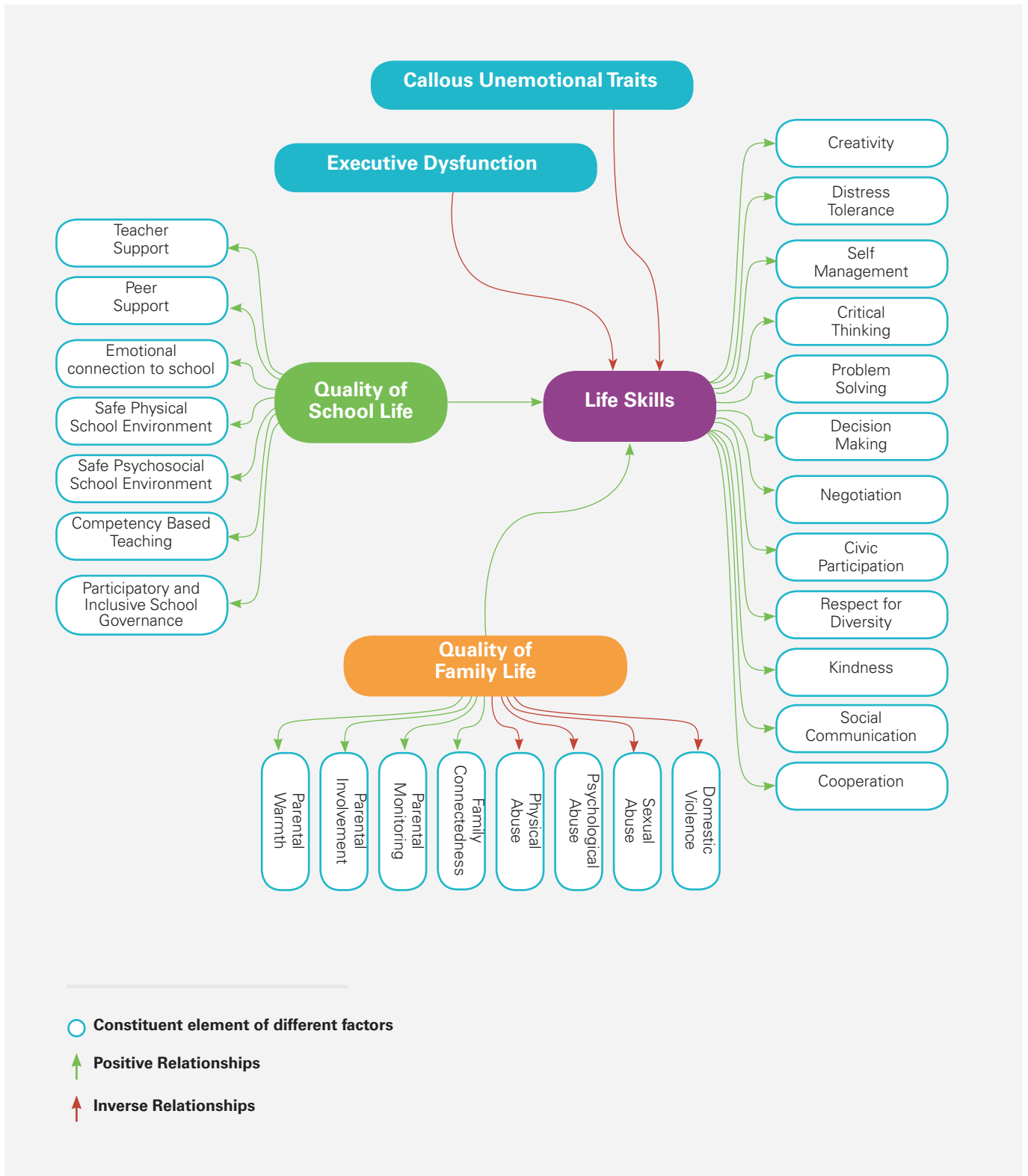


Figure 3.

The empirically-validated model for the drivers of Ukrainian adolescents’ Life Skills.



7. IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION PROGRAMM

Life Skills Education (LSE) programmes help improve critical thinking skills in older adolescents and are very successful in adolescents with callous-unemotional

(CU) traits. LSE helps in building up respect for diversity and self-direction skills.

7.1. Improvements in Critical Thinking Skills After Participation in the LSE Programme

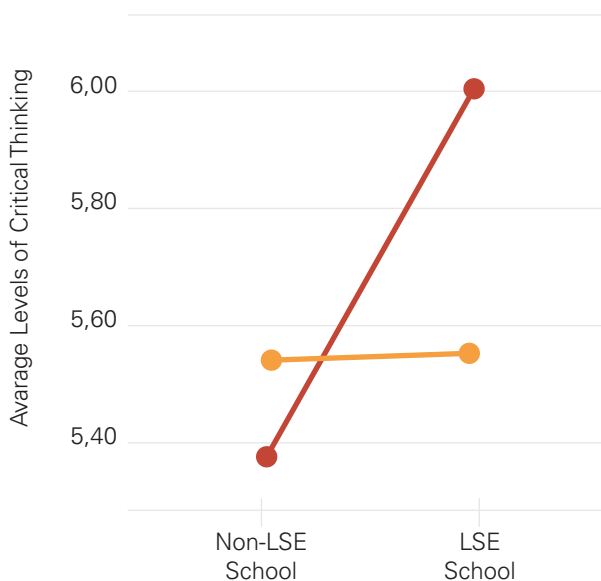
In general, adolescents who participate in LSE programmes have higher critical thinking skills compared to non-LSE adolescents. Furthermore, it seems that the LSE programme works better in older adolescents, because participating students who were above 16 years old benefitted a lot, whereas younger adolescents did not see any improvement. Our findings suggest that LSE is a promising intervention for older adolescents.

7.2. Kindness in Girls is Improved, When Participating in the LSE Programme

As shown in the figure, females in general scored much higher on measures of kindness compared to their male counterparts.

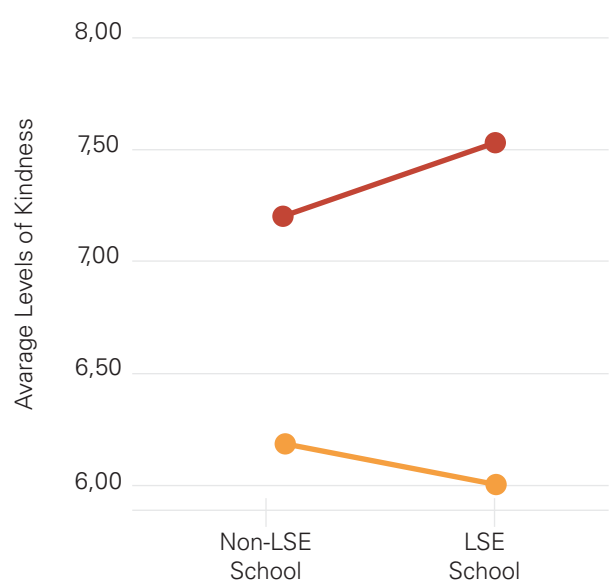
Furthermore, the LSE programme was particularly important for adolescent girls. Girls, who generally had more kindness than boys did, seemed to be highly responsive to the LSE programme on kindness.

Critical thinking



● Young adolescents (13-15) ● Older adolescents (16+)

Kindness



● Males ● Females

7.3. The Importance of the LSE Programme in Adolescents High in CU Traits

The specific LSE curriculum is effective in building up self-direction skills and respect for diversity in adolescents with high CU traits. In other words, participation in the Life Skills Education programme helps to improve such life skills as problem-solving, critical thinking, decision making, negotiation, and respect for diversity, to those adolescents who do not feel guilt or do not express empathy and emotions, and who are unconcerned about their performance. This might be particularly beneficial, because CU traits have been linked to lower levels of motivation and school connectedness, leaving adolescents more prone to school failure, conduct disorder, poor social relationships, and other additional risks⁸.

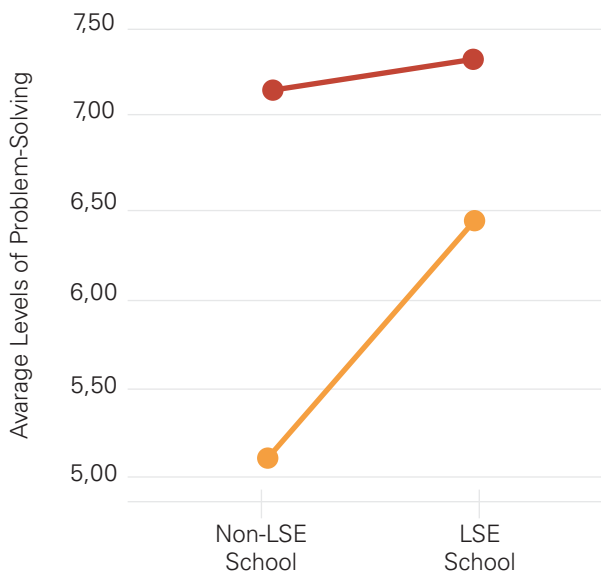
On average, adolescents with CU traits have lower problem-solving skills. However, adolescents with high

CU traits, who participated in the LSE programme, have higher problem-solving skills than adolescents, who also had high CU traits, but did not participate in the programme. Similarly, the participation in the LSE programme also improves adolescents' critical thinking skills. Specifically, callous-unemotional adolescents who did not take part in LSE programmes had a mean score of 4.87 in critical thinking skills, whereas those who did take part had a mean score of 5.88.

Additionally, adolescents with high CU traits who participated in the LSE programme showed better decision-making skills (mean score = 6.12) than those who did not participate (mean score = 4.97) in the programme. It is also very interesting that decision-making skills were even higher than in adolescents with low CU traits.

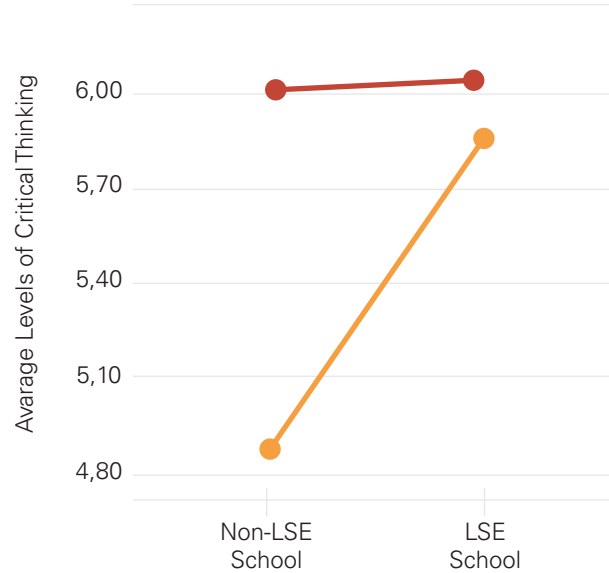
8. Lordos, A., Morin, H., Fanti, K., Lemishka, O., Guest, A., Symeou, M., Kontoulis, M., and Hadjimina, E. (2019) "An evidence-based analysis of the psychosocial adaptability of conflict-exposed adolescents and the role of the education system as a protective environment," Ukraine: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Problem-Solving



●● Low CU traits ●● High CU traits

Critical Thinking

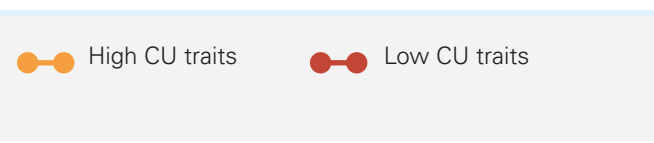
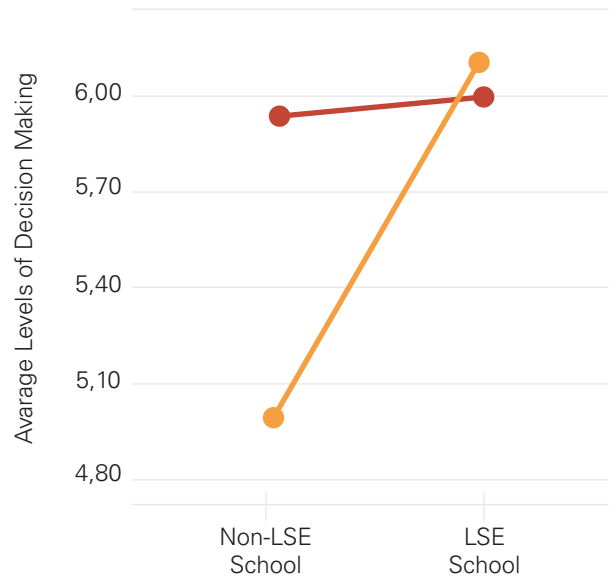


●● High CU traits ●● Low CU traits

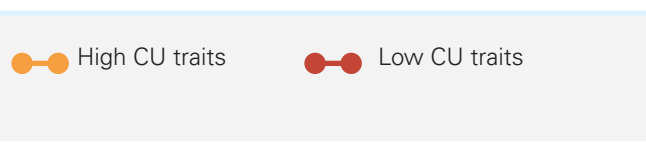
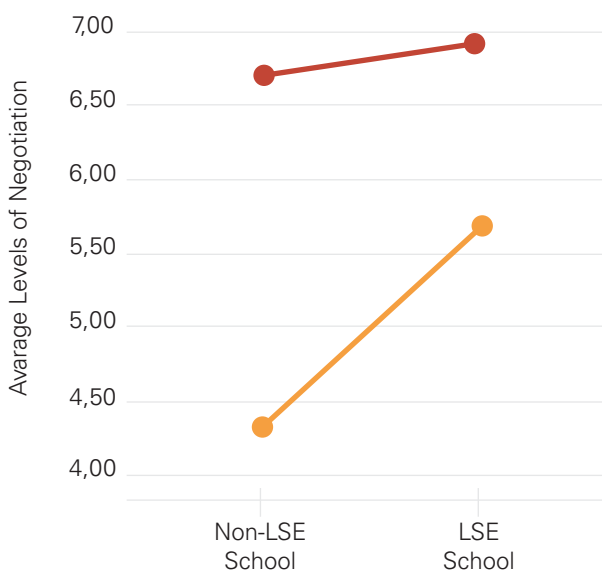
Finally, negotiation skills and respect for diversity among callous-unemotional participants also improved when participating in the LSE programmes. Even though the improvement is notable, negotiation skills and respect for diversity is still notably higher among adolescents with low CU traits regardless of whether they participated or not in the LSE programme.

Despite the promising findings, the LSE programme, though, did not benefit adolescent students who experienced victimization, family abuse, or have high executive dysfunction. Findings, therefore, suggest that the specific LSE curriculum is effective in building up empathy, connectedness and self-direction in adolescents who currently lack such skills (e.g. callous-unemotional adolescents), but less effective with adolescents who already display empathy but need practical self-management skills to deal with experiences of family abuse, victimization, and / or internalizing problems.

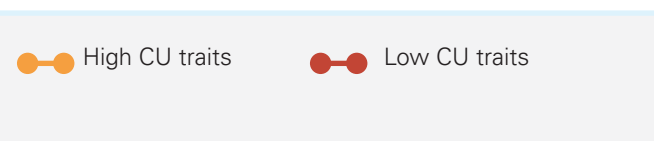
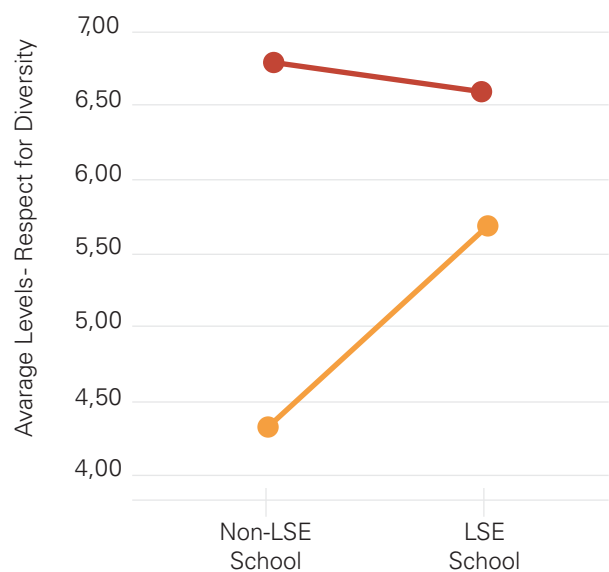
Decision Making



Negotiation



Respect for Diversity



8. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The study investigated life skills in the context of Ukraine, what drives their development, and what is their impact on adolescent developmental outcomes. Then the study sought to examine the effectiveness of the current LSE programme that is implemented at schools in eastern Ukraine. Overall, the main findings of the study are the following:

1. Adolescents with **outstanding life skills experience the healthiest** behavioural, psychosocial, and **civic adjustment**, whereas adolescents who lack life skills or demonstrate higher levels in either self-direction or collaborative skills experience less well-being. For instance, adolescents with higher collaborative skills (a subset of life skills that includes social communication, kindness, cooperation, and respect for diversity) are more prone to internalizing problems like anxiety and depression. This shows that for the positive adolescent's psychological adjustment having balanced and developed life skills is essential.
2. **Some life skills work in favour of positive developmental outcomes.** For example, cooperation, distress tolerance, self-management, and decision making mitigate internalizing symptomatology. So, to alleviate internalizing symptoms, one way is to nurture in adolescents these four skills. Additionally, to work on externalizing problems, the most important skills to be encouraged in adolescents are kindness, respect for diversity, and self-management. In other words, a youngster, who is kind and respects other people no matter their differences, does not want to be hurtful towards others, so does not act out against them.
3. Quality of family life and the quality of school life **contribute to the development of life skills.** Factors such as parental monitoring and parental involvement contribute to the development of life skills, as did positive school experiences such as school connectedness and competency-based teaching.
4. **The contribution of parental factors to the development of life skills is essential; nevertheless, paternal factors impact girls and boys differently.** Some other life skills are gender-specific; for instance, protective factors contribute to the development of distress tolerance and respect for diversity but only in girls. On the other hand, parental monitoring and paternal involvement are important for developing creativity and kindness, but only for adolescent boys.
5. **The LSE programme is particularly important for adolescents with CU traits** in that many life skills were improved in adolescents who participated in a particular implementation programme. Specifically, respect for diversity, negotiation, problem-solving, critical thinking and decision-making skills were noticeably higher in adolescents who were high in CU traits and participated in the LSE programme than adolescents who were high in CU traits but didn't participate in the LSE programme.

Appendix 1.

Glossary of Adolescent Component Indicators

Indicator	Indicator Description
Aggression	Extent to which one is aggressive in daily life, such as frequently getting into fights and confrontations.
Anxiety	Degree to which one feels anxious and insecure to an extent that the person finds it hard to stop worrying and relax.
Bullying	Exposure- repeated over a period- to negative behaviour by one or other persons including in person or online harassment and physical violence.
Callous-Unemotional Traits	Personality traits associated with lack of empathy, remorse, or guilt and shallow or deficient emotions.
Civic Participation	Active participation of a person in the civic sphere, to address matters of public interest or concern.
Competency-based teaching	Policy measures that ensure that teaching is of high quality (e.g., promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills).
Conduct Disorder	The display of disruptive and violent behaviours and, difficulty in following rules.
Cooperation Skills	The ability to work together with other people.
Creativity Skills	The tendency to use an open mind and consider alternative solutions to problems.
Critical Thinking	The ability to think rationally and objectively about different matters, and to weigh different options and ideas.
Decision-Making	Includes analytical thinking, making judgements, and being able to evaluate evidence, claims, and beliefs ⁹ .
Delinquency	The extent to which one commits minor, petty crime or breaks the rules (e.g., underage drinking, skipping school, getting into fights).
Depression	Degree to which one feels depressed or very sad.
Distress Tolerance	The ability to cope and withstand difficult and negative situations without breaking down emotionally.
Emotional connection to school	Degree to which one is emotionally invested in their school.
Executive dysfunction	Inability to control impulses, consider consequences of actions, plan tasks, focus attention and multi-task.
Exposure to conflict	Degree to which one feels exposed to the conflict through being close to regions that are subject to shelling, having family members participating in the conflict, or experiencing family division because of the conflict.
Gender equality mindset	The extent to which one believes and promotes equal access to choices, opportunities and rights, regardless of gender.
Human rights endorsement	The extent to which one supports and defends human rights
Kindness	Being genuinely interested in helping and caring for other people, and doing good deeds.

9. Reimagining Life Skills and Citizenship Education in the Middle East and North Africa: A Four-Dimensional and Systems Approach to 21st Century Skills Life Skills-Conceptual and Programmatic Framework (UNICEF, 2017)

Indicator	Indicator Description
Life Skills	Abilities that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life, including problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, and co-operation skills.
Negotiation Skills	Refers to a person's ability to discuss and claim his intentions/ requirements
Parental Involvement	Parental involvement refers to the amount of participation and connection a parent has when it comes to a child's social and academic life.
Parental Monitoring	Refers to parents being aware and supervising their adolescents' activities (at school, at home, with friends and peers) and communicating their concerns to their adolescent child.
Parental Warmth	Parental warmth is about parents providing their adolescents with regular support, speaking to them in a positive and friendly manner.
Participatory and Inclusive Governance	Policy measures that ensure that everyone's views are valued, heard, and respected in the school community.
Peer support	The extent to which one feels supported by and can rely on peers for support.
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	Experiencing persistent mental and emotional stress that is triggered after exposure to a traumatic or dangerous event.
Problem-Solving	The ability to "think through steps that lead from a given state of affairs to a desired goal" ¹⁰ .
Psychological abuse	Exposure to psychological abuse from parent, sibling or caregiver.
Respect for Diversity	Appreciating and accepting the uniqueness and differences of different people.
Quality of life	The way a person evaluates different aspects of his/her life in terms of mood, relations with others, and goals and the degree to which a person feels satisfied with his/her life.
School dropout tendency	The extent to which one is inclined to drop-out of school or discontinue their studies.
Self-harm and suicidality	Thoughts of and attempts to injure oneself or commit suicide.
Self-Management	The ability of a person to regulate and control their lives.
Sexual abuse	Exposure to sexual abuse from parent, sibling or caregiver.
Social Communication	One's ability to understand their audience and exchange ideas in an efficient and adaptive manner.
Substance use	Frequency of tobacco, alcohol or drug use.
Teacher support	The amount of help, concern and friendship the teacher directs toward the students.
Unsafe sexual behaviour	Inclination to engage in unprotected sex with multiple partners.
Victimization	Directly experiencing bullying in the form of repeated physical, verbal or psychological attack or intimidation that is intended to cause fear, distress, or harm.

10. Barbey, A., & Baralou, L. (2009). Reasoning and Problem Solving: Models. Encyclopedia of Neuroscience, 8, 35-43.

Composite Indicators	
Internalizing problems	Includes Anxiety, Depression, PTSD, Self-harm & suicidality.
Behaviour problems	Includes Substance use, Unsafe sexual behaviour, Conduct Disorder, Aggression, and Normalization of bullying.
Bullying	Includes Physical, Relational, Verbal and Cyber bullying.
Collaborative Skills	Includes Respect for Diversity, Kindness, Social Communication, and Cooperation.
Life Skills	Includes Respect for Diversity, Kindness, Social Communication, Cooperation, Negotiation, Civic Participation, Problem-Solving, Decision Making, Critical Thinking, Distress Tolerance, Self-Management, and Creativity.
Self-Direction Skills	Includes Problem-Solving, Decision Making, Critical Thinking, Distress Tolerance, Self-Management, and Creativity.
Victimization	Includes Physical, Relational, Verbal and Cyber victimization.

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Notes on the maps in this publication: This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.

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