

# Evaluation of Life Skills-Based Open High School Programs in Indonesia

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## Abstract

This study evaluates the implementation and effectiveness of life skills-based Open High School programs in Indonesia, specifically in Bogor Regency, West Java. The research addresses two primary issues in Indonesian education: unequal access and low learning quality. The Open High School (SMA Terbuka) aims to provide education to students unable to attend regular schools by focusing on life skills development, including communication, decision-making, and problem-solving. Using qualitative methods and the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) model, this study assesses the program's impact on students' life skills and academic achievements. Results indicate significant improvements in students' life skills, corroborating previous research that highlights the benefits of life skills education in reducing risky behaviors and enhancing mental health. Factors such as supportive school environments and the necessity for contextual adaptation are crucial for the program's success. Challenges include varying effectiveness based on local contexts and gender differences in program outcomes. Continuous evaluation and tailored adjustments are essential for maximizing the program's benefits and addressing local needs. This research underscores the potential of life skills-based education to improve students' quality of life and prepare them for future challenges, recommending broader implementation and policy support for such programs in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Life skills, Open High School, Education Indonesia, Program evaluation.

## 1. Introduction

Education in Indonesia faces two main problems: unequal access and low learning quality. One of the solutions implemented to address these issues is the Open High School (Sekolah Menengah Terbuka, SMA Terbuka), which is designed to provide access to education to students who are unable to attend regular education. Open SMA focuses on developing life skills, which are considered essential to improving students' quality of life and preparing them for future challenges.

Life skills-based school programs are designed to teach practical skills that can be applied in everyday life. These skills include communication, decision-making, problem-solving and self-management skills. The study by Ade Noor Syamsudin, Ivan Hanafi, (2023) evaluated the implementation of a life skills-based Open High School program in Bogor District, West Java. The study used qualitative methods with the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) model to assess the effectiveness of the program and produce an implementation model that can be applied at the senior high school level (Ade Noor Syamsudin, Ivan Hanafi, 2023).

Previous research shows that life skills-based programs can have a positive impact, especially in preventing risky behaviors and improving mental health. A study by Menrath et al. (2012) found that life skills programs in high schools in Northern Germany were effective in reducing smoking and improving students' life skills, without being influenced by socioeconomic status (Botvin & Griffin, 2004; Moulier et al., 2019)

In addition, research by Kahnooji & Rashidinejad, (2017); Nazarpour et al., (2020) who evaluated life skills training programs in several cities in Iran, found that these programs were significant in improving students' knowledge of life skills, especially among female students. However, these results varied between cities, indicating the importance of local context in program implementation (Kahnooji & Rashidinejad, 2017; Nazarpour et al., 2020).

Evaluations of life skills programs also highlight the importance of a supportive school environment. For example, a study by Turgeon et al., (2021), (2023), identified that good relationships between coaches and athletes in Canadian high schools were instrumental in the success of life skills training programs. This intervention helped coaches to remain consistent in using relational coaching behaviors, despite no significant changes in overall life skills teaching (Turgeon et al., 2021, 2023). However, there are challenges in implementing this program. Evaluations of programs in different countries show that factors such as gender differences and student development must be considered. For example, research found that life skills programs were effective in improving communication and assertiveness skills, but not significant in decision-making skills and self-esteem. This suggests the need for program adjustments to better suit local needs and student development (Koszalka-Silska et al., 2021; Mangrulkar et al., 2001).

This research shows that life skills-based Open High School programs have great potential to improve the quality of education and students' lives. However, the success of the program is highly dependent on implementation that is appropriate to the local context and support from the school environment. Continuous evaluation and adjustment are needed to ensure the program can provide maximum benefits for all students (Datahan, 2020; Proctor et al., 2011).

The research questions that are the focus of this literature review are:

- 1) How is the effectiveness of life skills programs in senior high schools?
- 2) What are the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of life skills programs in secondary schools?
- 3) How does the life skills program impact on students' academic achievement and personal development?

Research on life skills-based Open High School programs has attracted attention for its potential to improve the quality of education and prepare students for life's challenges. This literature review aims to explore the effectiveness of these programs, the supporting and constraining factors, and their impact on students' academic achievement and personal development.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Concept and Importance of Life Skills**

Life skills encompass a wide range of abilities needed to adapt to daily challenges and manage life effectively. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), life skills include communication, decision-making, problem-solving, critical thinking, stress management and other interpersonal skills. Life skills programs in secondary schools are designed to equip students with these skills, so that they can become more independent and productive individuals (Potard et al., 2021; Sheivandi Cholicheh et al., 2021).

### **Effectiveness of Life Skills Programs**

Studies show that life skills programs in secondary schools can have a significant positive impact. Research by Ade Noor Syamsudin, Ivan Hanafi, (2023) evaluated the implementation of a life skills-based Open High School program in Bogor District, West Java. The results showed that the program successfully improved students' life skills, including communication, decision-making, and problem-solving abilities.

Another study by in Northern Germany found that life skills programs were effective in reducing smoking and improving students' life skills without being influenced by socioeconomic status (Leiblein et al., 2022; Menrath et al., 2012).

### **Supporting and inhibiting factors**

Several factors support the successful implementation of life skills programs in schools. Turgeon et al., (2021, 2023) found that a good relationship between trainers and students in Canadian high schools was a key factor in the success of life skills training programs. This intervention helped trainers remain consistent in using relational training behaviors, even though there were no significant changes in overall life skills teaching (Turgeon et al., 2021, 2023).

However, there are also challenges faced in the implementation of this program. Identified that while the life skills program in Peru was effective in improving communication and assertiveness skills, it did not show significant improvements in decision-making skills and self-esteem. This suggests the need for program adjustments to better suit local needs and student development (Choque-Larrauri & Chirinos-Cáceres, 2009; Sáez-López et al., 2020).

### **Impact on Academic Achievement**

Research shows that life skills programs also have a positive impact on students' academic achievement. Gomes & Marques, (2013); Sánchez-Hernando et al., (2021) found that there is a significant relationship between life skills programs and academic achievement. Another study by Menrath et al., (2012) in Northern Germany found that life skills programs were effective in

reducing smoking and improving students' life skills without being influenced by socioeconomic status.

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### Impact on Academic Achievement

Research shows that life skills programs also have a positive impact on students' academic achievement. Benjamin (2011) found that there is a significant relationship between life skills programs and academic achievement. Students who received life skills training showed significant improvement in their academic performance compared to the control group (Benjamin, 2011).

In addition, a study by Williams et al. (2020) that reviewed sports-based life skills programs found that these programs can enhance skills that are transferable to other contexts, such as teamwork and problem solving, which in turn can support students' academic achievement and personal development (Williams et al., 2020).

This research shows that life skills-based Open High School programs have great potential to improve the quality of education and students' lives. The success of this program is highly dependent on implementation that is appropriate to the local context and support from the school environment. Continuous evaluation and adjustment are needed to ensure the program can provide maximum benefits for all students.

### Literature Review-based Research Design

Literature review-based research aims to collect, analyze, and synthesize existing research on a particular topic, in this case life skills-based Open High School programs. This literature review will provide a comprehensive overview of existing knowledge, identify research gaps, and provide recommendations for further research. To ensure that only relevant and high-quality studies were included in the review, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied:

**Inclusion Criteria:** Studies that evaluated life skills programs in high schools, Studies published in peer-reviewed journals, Studies that used clear and valid methodology, Studies published within the last 20 years.

**Exclusion Criteria:** Studies that did not focus on life skills programs, Studies conducted at education levels other than high school, Non-research articles such as editorials, opinion pieces, and book reviews.

Literature will be searched using several major academic databases such as: Google Scholar, PubMed, ERIC, JSTOR, Scopus. The keywords used in the search include: “life skills education”, ‘high school’, ‘open school’, ‘program evaluation’, ‘academic achievement’, and ‘personal development’. The literature selection process consists of several stages: Title and Abstract Screening: All articles found will be screened by title and abstract to determine initial relevance. Full Text Assessment: Articles that pass the screening stage will be read in full to ensure that they meet the inclusion criteria. Data Extraction: Essential data from the selected articles will be extracted, including the study objectives, methods, main findings, and conclusions.

Data analysis in this literature review uses a thematic synthesis approach to identify key themes and patterns in the reviewed studies. The steps of analysis include: Initial Coding: Identifying and coding key points in each study. Theme Grouping: Grouping the codes into broader themes. Thematic Synthesis: Integrating findings from multiple studies into a coherent thematic narrative.

This literature review will adhere to ethical research standards by citing all sources correctly and transparently. The validity of the results will be maintained by using a systematic search strategy and clear selection criteria. Future Research Recommendations Based on the results of the literature review, recommendations for future research will be provided, including under-researched areas and methods that can be used for further study.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### **Results**

The results of the literature review on life skills-based open high school programs are categorized into four main themes: effectiveness of the program, supporting and hindering factors, impact on academic performance, and contextual adaptations.

##### **1. Effectiveness of the Program**

The literature indicates that life skills-based programs in open high schools are generally effective in enhancing students' life skills. Syamsudin, Hanafi, and Elianasari (2023) found that the implementation of a life skills-based open high school program in Bogor Regency, West Java, significantly improved students' communication, decision-making, and problem-solving abilities (Syamsudin et al., 2023). Similarly, Menrath et al. (2012) reported positive outcomes in reducing smoking habits and improving life skills among high school students in northern Germany (Menrath et al., 2012).

## 2. Supporting and Hindering Factors

Several factors contribute to the success or failure of these programs. Turgeon et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of a supportive relationship between coaches and students in the successful implementation of life skills training programs. Their study indicated that consistent relational coaching behaviors were crucial for the positive impact of the program (Turgeon et al., 2021). On the other hand, Choque-Larrauri and Chirinos-Caceres (2009) found that the effectiveness of the program varied depending on the local context and the specific needs of the students, suggesting that program adjustments are necessary to address these variations (Choque-Larrauri & Chirinos-Caceres, 2009).

## 3. Impact on Academic Performance

The impact of life skills programs on academic performance is also significant. Benjamin (2011) demonstrated a positive correlation between life skills training and academic achievement. Students who received life skills training showed higher academic performance compared to those who did not participate in the program (Benjamin, 2011). Additionally, Williams et al. (2020) found that sports-based life skills programs helped students develop transferable skills such as teamwork and problem-solving, which positively influenced their academic outcomes (Williams et al., 2020).

## 4. Contextual Adaptations

The need for contextual adaptation is a recurring theme in the literature. Programs need to be tailored to the specific cultural, social, and economic contexts of the students. For example, Choque-Larrauri and Chirinos-Caceres (2009) emphasized the necessity of adjusting the program to better suit local needs and to ensure its effectiveness across different regions (Choque-Larrauri & Chirinos-Caceres, 2009).

## Discussion

The findings from this literature review indicate that life skills-based programs in open high schools can significantly improve both life skills and academic performance of students. These programs are most effective when they are supported by strong relationships between educators and students and when they are tailored to meet the specific needs of the local context.

## Effectiveness and Benefits

The consistent positive outcomes reported across different studies underscore the importance of integrating life skills education into the high school curriculum. Enhanced life skills such as communication, decision-making, and problem-solving not only prepare students for academic success but also for the challenges of adult life.

## Supporting Factors

The role of supportive relationships between educators and students cannot be overstated. As highlighted by Turgeon et al. (2021), relational coaching behaviors are crucial for the success of these programs. This suggests that training for educators should include components on building strong, supportive relationships with students.

## Challenges and Adaptations

Despite the overall positive findings, the variability in effectiveness across different contexts points to the need for careful adaptation of these programs. As noted by Choque-Larrauri and Chirinos-Caceres (2009), programs must be flexible and responsive to the specific cultural and socio-economic contexts of the students to maximize their impact.

### Impact on Academic Performance

The positive correlation between life skills training and academic performance is particularly noteworthy. This finding suggests that life skills programs do not merely prepare students for life outside of school but also enhance their academic capabilities. This dual benefit makes a compelling case for the broader implementation of such programs in high schools.

Life skills-based open high school programs offer substantial benefits in terms of both personal development and academic achievement. For these programs to be most effective, they need to be supported by strong educator-student relationships and tailored to the local context. Further research should focus on exploring the specific components of these programs that are most effective and on developing strategies for their successful implementation across diverse settings.

## 4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that life skills-based open high school programs have significant potential to enhance students' life skills and academic performance. The main findings from the literature review include:

Life skills programs are effective in improving students' communication, decision-making, and problem-solving abilities.

Studies indicate that these programs can also reduce risky behaviors such as smoking.

Strong relationships between educators and students are crucial for the success of these programs.

Support from the school environment and adapting the program to local contexts enhance its effectiveness.

There is a positive correlation between life skills training and students' academic achievement.

Life skills developed through these programs also contribute to improved academic outcomes.

Programs must be tailored to the specific cultural, social, and economic contexts of the students to ensure maximum effectiveness.

## 5. Implications

Based on these findings, several practical and policy implications can be identified:

**Curriculum Development:** Integrating life skills into the high school curriculum should be prioritized. This will help students develop essential skills for both everyday life and academic success.

**Educator Training:** Educators should be trained in techniques for building supportive relationships with students. This training should include effective methods for teaching life skills.

**Program Adaptation:** Life skills programs need to be flexible and adaptable to local needs. Continuous evaluation and adjustment of the programs based on feedback from students and educators are essential.

**Further Research:** Further research is needed to identify the specific components of life skills programs that are most effective. Additionally, longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term impact of these programs on students' personal and academic development would be valuable.

**Policy Support:** Policymakers should support the widespread implementation of life skills programs in high schools. This includes providing adequate resources and establishing evaluation frameworks to ensure these programs achieve their desired outcomes.

Effective implementation of life skills-based open high school programs can produce a generation of young people better prepared to face life's challenges and achieve higher academic success. Support from various stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, and communities, is crucial for the success of these programs.

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