Teaching Literature for Critical Life Skills

By

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Abstract

Amidst a burgeoning interest in the improvement of life skills, there is concern that literature is better at teaching contents and facts than skills. This concern diminishes the potential to build essential life skills. As a result, efforts have been made to demonstrate how it can be used to teach the ten WHO-identified life skills (namely, decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, communication, interpersonal skills, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions, and coping with stress). This proposed direction gears towards a learner-centered method with a focus on "learning how to know" rather than "learning what to know." This study contributed by explicating how learner-centered methods (specifically, brainstorming, group work, critical and creative thinking, the interactive method, the discussion method, inquiry-based learning, and discovery learning) can improve life skills. O. Henry's "The Last Leaf" was a case study to illustrate how to teach prose for life skills. This study also argues that skill-based teaching approaches, as opposed to content-based ones, can improve students' life skills and lead to a deeper understanding of the short story. This study lays the groundwork for empirical inquiries into the potential of literature for life skill improvement.

Keywords: life skills, short story, learner-centered approach

1. Introduction

Even though the point of education is to prepare students for the future, the current system is broken, and the textbooks do not offer much to help students improve the skills they are supposed to learn. This phenomenon encompasses English language instruction, particularly in second and foreign language environments. For example, Khosravani et al. (2014) revealed that Iranian EFL textbooks offer few opportunities for EFL students to build crucial life skills, particularly in the areas of leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making. Additionally, Al Masri et al. (2016) discovered that there is no distribution plan for life skills (namely, decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, and coping with emotions) in Jordanian English textbooks.

Due to social, economic, and cultural problems around the world, there is a need for textbooks that teach students how to be successful in life. So, ESL and EFL teachers and practitioners try to find a way to solve this problem. Several scholars (e.g., Littlewood, 2000; Rebecca, 2013) agree that literature can help people learn life skills because it includes all spoken and written works aimed at artistic and aesthetic goals that contribute to the growth, interests, needs, pleasure, emotions, and ideas of the individual. Bland (2013, 2018, and 2019) proposed that reading literature can help students learn important life skills. Graham et al. (2020) also agreed that literature is a good way to teach life skills through content, communication, thinking, and culture. Additionally, Abdelhalim (2015) emphasized life skills

in four categories: cognitive, personal, social, and linguistic. All of these studies support the use of literature to improve life skills.

The World Health Organization (WHO) proposed that in order to live a healthier, more productive life in the modern world, every student must develop and learn the following life skills: problem-solving, decision-making, creative thinking, critical thinking, communication, interpersonal skills, self-awareness, empathy, dealing with emotions, and dealing with stress. Because these skills are so important, teachers must make sure their students have them. Teaching language with effective concepts, instructions, and instructional methods is a key problem in the current fields of education and instruction. It is essential to determine the most appropriate and effective teaching for a given multimodal learning environment (Crescenzi-Lanna, 2020). Some effective teaching theories are second language education (Scarino, 2013), decision-making theory (Edwards, 1954), second language acquisition (SLA) (Swain, 2013), which follows Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT), and communicative language teaching (CLT) (Dos Santos, 2020). However, none of these theories involves teaching the life skills under investigation. It is essential to study prior study on the skills. To achieve the WHO's objective, the purpose of this study was to highlight how to integrate key life skills into classroom learning experiences, using a short story as a case study.

This article consists of the following five sections: Section 1 (Introduction) provides the rationale for the study. Section 2 (Literature Review) consists of the prior study, the research gap, a conceptual framework for the study, and a research question. Part 3 (Research Method) describes the research methodology of this study. Part 4 (Results of the Study) explains the research findings. Section 5 (Conclusion of the Study) summarizes the study.

2. Literature review

2.1 Prior study of critical life skills
2.1.1 Problem-solving and decision-making
Analytical problem-solving finds solutions. It is a complicated process that may require decisions. Finding the best answer is a priority. Problem-solving entails finding reasons, asking questions, and coming up with solutions. Data collection clarifies the solution. Problem-solving involves making decisions by picking a solution based on judgment, situation, facts, knowledge, or data. Problem-solving and decision-making skills help handle work problems. They solve several problems together. Many elements influence problem-solving and decision-making. Some of these include judgement (Richards, 2017), cognitive skills (Minda, 2020), standards, norms, and conventions (Kramsch, 2014), innovations (Potvin et al., 2021), data (Schildkamp, 2012), and practice (Tudor, 2003). Understanding a problem is essential to its resolution. This includes understanding the problem's background, causes, and solutions. If the precise nature of the issue is not properly understood, it is unlikely that effective solutions will be discovered. Discovering effective solutions requires critical thinking.

2.1.2 Creative and critical thinking
Creativity enables the decision maker to more thoroughly appraise and comprehend the issue, while critical thinking helps you solve complex problems and understand your thoughts. According to Ulger (2018), problem-based learning and creative and critical thinking are interdependent. Scholars (e.g., Smith, 2014) have argued that creative and critical thinking are fundamental to all education, particularly problem-based learning. DeWaelsche (2015) discovered that cultural and institutional elements, as well as limitations in English language proficiency, may influence critical thinking processes. Creative and critical thinking can aid in

the development of self-directed learning (SLD). Cremin, 2015; Karabulatova et al., 2022), 21st century skills (Dilekci & Karatay, 2023; Alismail & McGuire, 2015), approaches to learning to live with complexity (Tudor, 2003), and capacity for creation, familiarity with technology, and enthusiasm (Dilekci & Karatay, 2023) are some strategies to promote critical and creative thinking. Language's purpose is communication. Creativity and critical thinking help improve language acquisition and communication confidence. Hence, creative and critical thinking are essential for language acquisition and communication.

2.1.3 Communication and interpersonal skills

Communicative language instruction (CLT) is believed to be the most adaptable to various learning situations. Littlewood (2014), for instance, stated that CLT could be used in any situation, even in Asia, where educational traditions and real-world situations are often very different from those in Europe, where CLT originated. Knowledge of how to use communication and communication technologies to learn a language (Haines, 2016), social skills as a way to improve interpersonal communication (Kelly, 2018), networking as a way to teach interpersonal communication skills (Kokkonen & Almonkari, 2015), and interpersonal skills all influence CLT (Pavord & Donnelly, 2015). To accomplish a communicative goal, effective communicators must have good interpersonal skills. Looking for opportunities to create relationships can contribute to the development of interpersonal skills. Successful communication and interpersonal skills need the ability to understand emotions in both team and individual contexts. In both situations, the students must also perceive how other people feel and figure out how to get the most support for their plans and activities.

2.1.4 Self-awareness and empathy

Self-awareness and empathy are two variables that positively affect life skills and language learning. Self-awareness enables us to make better decisions. It increases our self-assurance, and as a result, students communicate with precision and intent. It permits us to see things from numerous angles of view. It liberates us from our biases and assumptions. It aids in building stronger relationships. Literacy (Scarino, 2013), self-directed learning (SDL) (Tu, 2021), and the capability of acquiring strategic information (basic self-directed learning or SDL skills, such as note-taking, elaboration, and study techniques), cognitive task knowledge (language acquisition tasks, such as reading comprehension and writing performance), and self-knowledge (self-mentoring loops bounding SDL strategies and creativity) have been shown to positively influence self-awareness (Nilson, 2013). A few studies (Zhai & Wibowo, 2022; Numanee et al., 2020; Yalcin-Tilfarlioglu & Arikan, 2012) reveal its effects on learning, notwithstanding the paucity of research on the influence of empathy on SLA.

Empathy could be a key part of solving problems because it helps people see and understand all sides of a situation. Fostering learning through empathy improves stress-management abilities. Research (Park et al., 2015; Wahjudi et al., 2019; Romosiou et al., 2019) suggests that when students are able to control their emotions, they are better able to create positive interactions with people. This is referred to as "emotional management," which is the capacity to absorb the sensations of others without becoming overwhelmed. This is a crucial ability for life and learning.

2.1.5 Managing emotions and managing stress

Managing our emotions assists us in making better judgments. Knowing our emotions enables us to recognize our triggers, enabling us to respond in a productive manner. According to research (e.g., Resnik & Dewaele, 2020; Razzaque, 2020), positive emotions improve cognitive and emotional resources. Positive individuals interact actively with their

environment and activities. Rahimi and Bigdeli (2014) examine the broaden-and-build hypothesis of Fredrickson. This hypothesis asserts that positive emotions enhance the focus, intellect, and activity of students. Negative emotions decrease language input, which hinders student learning. Positive emotions enhance student engagement, but negative emotions diminish it. Consequently, teachers of second languages should emphasize pleasant emotions. According to research (Barabadi et al., 2021; Razmi et al., 2020), positive emotions are associated with L2 accomplishment. Barabadi and Khajavy (2020) researched perfectionism in foreign and second languages and discovered that maladaptive perfectionism was strongly associated with both negative and positive emotions, independent achievement goals, and L2 achievement.

2.1.6 Research gaps

Despite teachers' positive attitudes, it is difficult to teach these essential life skills because "language teacher education has grown fragmented, focusing on peripheral topics like applied linguistics, methodology, and language acquisition rather than the core—teaching," as observed by Freeman (1989, p. 27). Tamimy et al. (2023) found that, despite teachers' positive beliefs about teaching methods and instructions, classroom success depends on a number of factors, such as teachers' expertise, perspectives, and challenges with implementation. The teacher's position is crucial, and a teacher who is well-prepared can assist students in achieving educational objectives, such as the development of essential life skills.

2.1.7 Research framework for the study and research question

Changes need to be made to the way the teachers teach so that their students can be successful as innovators of the future. This study aims to propose skill-based, learner-centered literary instructions for life skill improvement in an SLA classroom through literature. While linguistic demands are not learning needs, life skills, which are essential learning needs, and students' individual needs are integrated into the literature discipline and teaching function, as illustrated in the research framework of the study below.
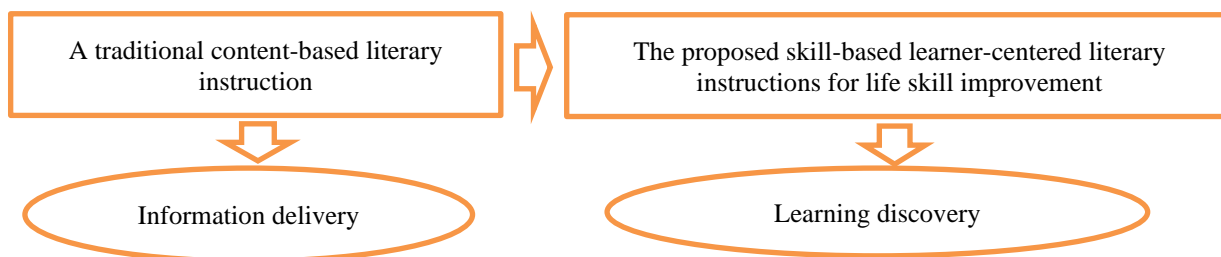

Figure 1 *A Framework for the study*

Figure 1 illustrat**es** the framework for the study. Traditional content-based literary instruction, which is based on information delivery, is shifting to the proposed skill-based, learner-centered literary instruction for life skill improvement, which is based on learning discovery.

In response to the research framework for the study, the research question is determined as follows**:** How can literature be taught to enhance critical life skills?

To answer the research question, the method of the study was designed as shown in the next section.

3. Research Method

This research employed a qualitative, interpretive approach. The researcher and two research assistants cooperatively worked on every step of the data elicitation process. All are teachers of English in EFL contexts. Both hold Ph.D.s, and one is a candidate. All have more than twenty years of teaching and research experience in English language teaching. They began the data elicitation process with the coding system, which involves the construction of the conceptual description of each life skill in this study.

Next, they conducted analyses of "The Last Leaf" by O. Henry. The short story was chosen because it is about the most crucial crises of life and death. The primary emphasis of the literary instruction is on literary disciplines such as "learning what to know" about plot, characters, settings, conflicts, themes, points of view, etc. In addition, the instructional materials proposed in this study also emphasize "learning how to know" life skills.

Then, the case study was interpreted logically according to the objective of the study. The interpretation was fundamentally concerned with understanding, interpreting, and making sense of the case study in relation to the coded descriptions and the proposed skill-based, learner-centered literary instructions for life skill improvement. The interpretation was flexible, inductive, and iterative. In gathering information, all three researchers and their assistants looked for similar coded descriptions, manually coding, grouping, and arranging the codes under appropriate nodes. They also recoded to ensure the appropriateness of the codes, categorized, reasoned, conceptualized, and summarized the same, similar, or related codes.

The goal of the systematic data collection was to make sure that the study was valid and trustworthy. The results are coded and written down so that we can compare how consistent they are. Based on triangulation, the coded and recoded data from all three experts was compared. The conclusion was drawn from their consensus. The results of the study are presented in the next section.

4. The Results of the Study

Using literature as a case study, the purpose of this research was to clarify how to incorporate critical life skills into classroom learning experiences. To answer the research question, "How can literature be taught to improve critical life skills?" the findings can be put into two groups: pedagogy and application.

4.1 Pedagogical perspectives

Clearly, the ten critical life skills place an emphasis on skills. A content-based approach that has been widely adopted in the SLA literature classroom, where the subject matter being taught is so important or undeniable that both the student and the teacher must accept it without question, should shift to a skill-based approach in which the instructor must switch from standard content-based literary instruction to the proposed learner-centered literary instruction and the students must learn or be trained to perform a particular task, as demonstrated in Figure 2.
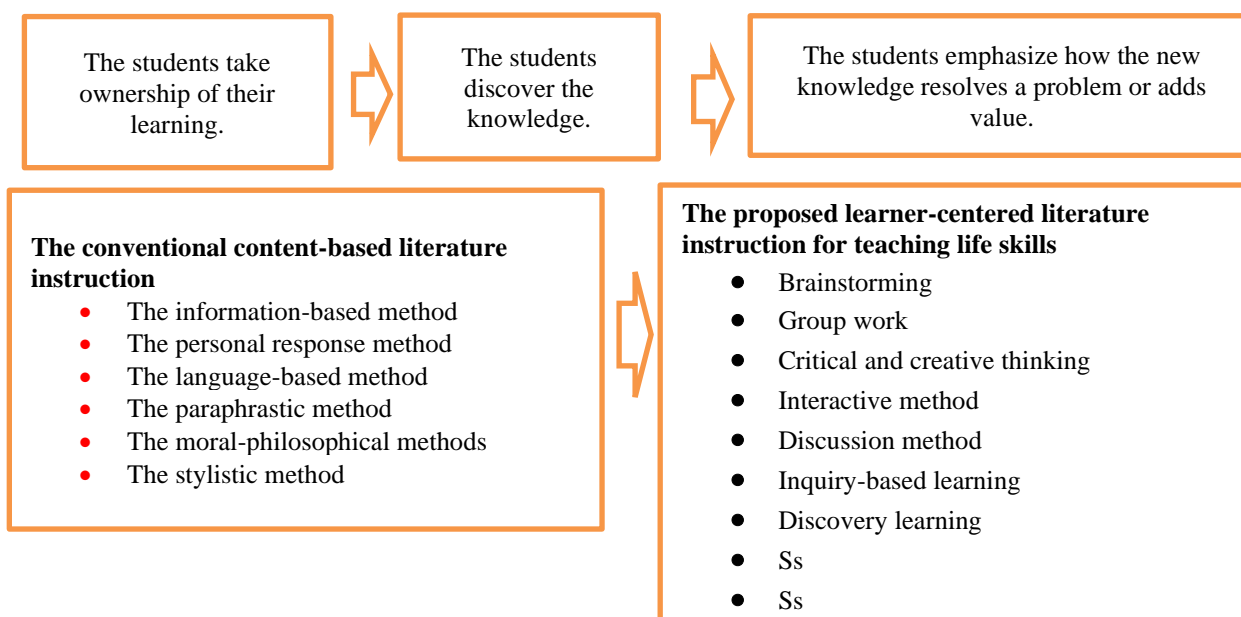
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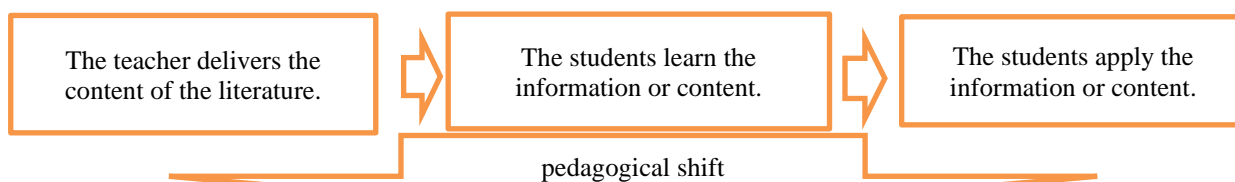
Figure 2 The pedagogical shift from content-based literary instruction to learner- centered literary instruction

Figure 2 demonstrates the pedagogical shift from traditional content-based literature instruction, which primarily focuses on the information delivery of the literature discipline and the contents of literature, to a learner-centered approach that is based on skill-based learning and emphasizes the process of learning to empower students to construct new knowledge through their own learning. The approaches included in content-based learning are the information-based method, the personal-response method, the language-based method, the paraphrastic method, and the moral-philosophical method. Methods such as brainstorming, group collaboration, critical and creative thinking, the interactive method, the discussion method, inquiry-based learning, and discovery learning are included in the suggested learner-centered literature education for teaching life skills.

The goal of a lesson that focuses on content is to help students become better at communicating and/or learning a language. It is also intended to encourage students to respond with personal-based terminology. The teacher uses one or more of the following methods to achieve this goal: first, the information-based method, which aims to explain the contents of literary works to the class; second, the personal-response method, which encourages students to discuss how they felt about the material; third, the language-based method, which includes

language activities in a literature course; and fourth, the paraphrastic method, which restates the information in less technical language for the benefit of the students. In a content-based literature classroom, the teacher serves as the central source of information and learning.

However, in the proposed learner-centered environment, the teacher plays the following roles: (1) a facilitator by planning, designing, and preparing what is essential to learn; (2) a coach by encouraging students to learn and giving advice; (3) a mentor; and (4) a co-learner. The goal of learner-centered education is to give students the tools they need to take charge of their own learning by focusing how new information helps solve a problem or adds value. Instead of just giving a lot of information to the students, the facilitator asks a question and helps come up with a solution. The students are not just passively waiting for the teacher to deliver the answers, the students "discover" the new information and devise solutions.

To improve learner-centered education, the instructor employs one or more of the following strategies: First, brainstorming, the most fundamental kind of deliberate creative thinking, allows students to access, combine, and generate new ideas and solutions. Higher education necessitates that students utilize their creative thinking skills in order to fulfill their professors' requests. In creative thinking, what-if questions, why questions, and what-if alternative inquiries are prevalent. In addition, to foster full understanding of this, the teacher should encourage these questions: Can I combine perspectives and/or solutions? What is a topic that nobody else has discussed? What is being neglected or disregarded? What about...? After identifying an issue, doors and options begin to open.

Second, despite the fact that many students dislike it, group work is an excellent method for improving students' cognitive abilities. When they collaborate on a project or issue, multiple perspectives are brought to bear on the problem at hand. Naturally, these diverse brains will develop a variety of methods for interpreting data and resolving problems. A skilled observer will see that their critical and creative modes of thought are continuously alternating. For example, when working in groups, they evaluate data and generate their own answers, while also critiquing the analyses and ideas of others and responding to their own criticisms. Students may dislike group work because it tests their capacity to think critically and requires them to defend themselves while criticizing others. This is due to the fact that the majority of their educational experiences consist of individual work. This contributes to their growth as scholars, learners, and thinkers.

Third, the approach of critical and creative thinking is one of the most fundamental parts of decision-making and problem-solving. Students can figure out if statements, claims, and information they read or hear are true and correct because they can think critically, which allows us to break an issue, situation, or problem down into its parts. Critical thinking looks at data and tries to figure out what problems are really about. Creative thinking, on the other hand, comes up with ways to solve these problems. Students with a lot of creativity come up with unique answers to problems that do not use answers that have already been found. They come up with answer 3 when everyone else is still arguing between answers 1 and 2. In order for our thoughts and ideas to transcend the present restrictions of a problem and enable us to see beyond the boundaries that prevent the discovery of new solutions, it is necessary to employ strategies to cleanse the mind. Consider a task that required the students to compare the writings of two authors on the topic of education, choose the superior one, and explain why. By doing so, the students will also consider the fact that their teacher, in this instance, favors one author over the other. Critical thinking can help them figure out what these authors have in common and what makes them different. Creative thinking is also needed if you want to disagree with your teacher, and come up with new ways to look at these authors.

Fourth, both teachers and students can benefit from interactive methods of instruction. So that students do not object, it is the obligation of the teacher to explain the fundamental concepts or relevance of using an interactive or participatory strategy in class. This method employs writing exercises, pair projects, debates, problem-based learning, and situation analysis, among other instructional strategies.

Fifth, the discussion approach enables students to participate in a two-way communication style in which they are eager to hear what their classmates have to say. A teacher's job is to teach students how to have structured group discussions and to explain what the issue is all about. Using each student's knowledge, experience, and imagination is the primary objective of this method. As the conversation concludes, the instructor clarifies any unfamiliar concepts and corrects any errors.

Sixth, inquiry-based learning aims to excite and engage students' interest as opposed to simply presenting information. This learning approach may be utilized by the teacher to engage students in this type of learning. Allow them to generate inquiries they are keen to examine. Create for them a problem statement that requires them to respond to their question using a crafted response and extra research. In addition, allow them class time to conduct research on the topic. After that, request that the students discuss what they have learned. Finally, invite them to reflect on the successful and unsuccessful components of the process. Reflection is essential. In addition, it goes beyond merely soliciting their previous opinions on the topic. It requires considering the procedure as a whole. Metacognition, or thinking about thinking, is applicable in this case. Encourage students to consider how they learned in addition to what they learned.

Last but not least, discovery learning is meant to help students see how much they can learn from talking to other people. To promote discovery-based learning, the instructor may choose one of the following strategies: (a) assign an interview and have students write about what they learned, what surprised them, and the benefits of direct learning; (b) assign a project on a research topic, encourage them to use technology or the Internet to research, then gather them to share what they discovered; (c) give students topic-related data to study, ask questions, analyze data, and draw conclusions; or (d) assign self-directed learning so that students can promote failure and growth, motley learning, and motivational learning.

By using these methods, learners will be able to: (1) be more motivated to learn; (2) improve their critical thinking, writing, and communication skills; (3) remember different pieces of information; (4) learn to adapt and listen to the opinions of other learners and how to work well with others; (5) learn to be responsible for their own learning; and (6) learn to keep learning throughout their lives.

These learner-centered activities provide students with practice in recognizing connections and delving deeper into a text while reading and talking with peers. In addition, they gain additional benefits, such as a greater comprehension of the text, an increased likelihood of remembering knowledge, a greater engagement with the text, critical thinking about the text while making connections, the establishment of connections with other comprehension techniques, and the acquisition of essential life skills. The next section illustrates one way to use a short story to teach life skills through the aforementioned teaching methods.

Students can practice making connections and digging deeper into a text while reading and talking with their peers in these learner-centered activities. They also get other benefits,

like a better understanding of the text, a better chance of remembering what they have learned, a deeper connection to the text, the ability to think critically about the text while making connections, the ability to make connections with other ways of understanding, and the development of important life skills. The next part will look at one way to use a short story to teach life skills using one of the methods that were already talked about.

4.2 Practicality

To apply the aforementioned pedagogical principles, the relationship between the ten life skills can be conceptualized as shown in Figure 3.
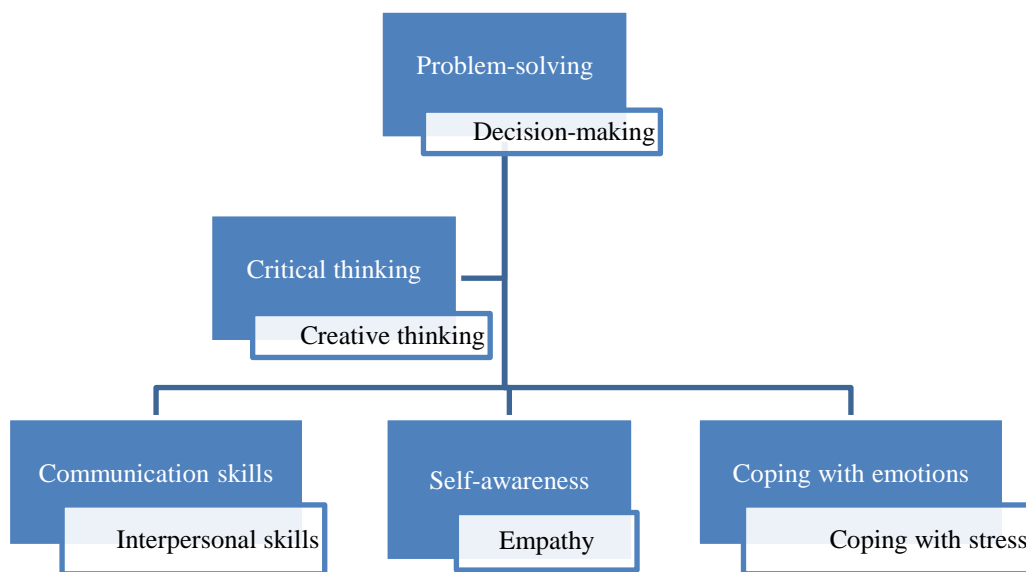

Figure 3 *The relationship between the ten life skills*

Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between the ten life skills. Life is full of problems. This study, therefore, sets problem-solving as a priority. This skill is the priority in this study. It is a crucial skill for success in study, work, and life, so this skill is emphasized. All skills are divided as follows: Major skills include problem-solving, critical thinking, communication skills, self-awareness, and coping with emotions. Minor skills as support for the major skills consist of decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal skills, empathy, and coping with stress. The sequences of major skills (and minor skills) are grouped and arranged as follows: problem-solving (and decision-making), critical thinking (and creative thinking), communication skills (and interpersonal skills), self-awareness (and empathy), and coping with emotions (and stress). These major and minor skills are interdependent and can be complementary.

The information below shows how the life skills are used to teach a short story, using "The Last Leaf" as an example. It also shows how the skills are used to help the students fully understand the skills.

Problem-solving and decision-making

Students can learn how to solve problems and make decisions by looking at how the plots of short stories, novels, plays, and other works of prose progress. They can see how the problem starts, how the characters try to solve it, and how it ends. In these problem-and-solution scenarios, students learn how characters apply knowledge to solve problems, anticipate outcomes, think things through, make good decisions, explore new techniques for problem-solving, make mistakes and try again, recognize breakthroughs, and use trial and error to find a solution. "The Last Leaf," the chosen case study, is about Johnsy, an impoverished,

pneumonia-stricken young artist, suffering from poverty and sickness. She believes she will perish when the ivy outside her window loses all of its leaves. Behrman, her artist neighbor, charmed her by painting a leaf on the wall. Johnsy recovers, but Behrman dies from pneumonia while painting the leaf. If the teacher uses a content-based method to teach this short story, he or she largely solicits facts and information and assigns student responses in the manner outlined as follows: What is the theme of "The Last Leaf"? What is its setting? What are the conflicts in the story? What is Behrman's masterpiece? How does his masterpiece contribute to Johnsy's survival? How does the author describe pneumonia and its activities? How does he portray hope, friendship, and sacrifice?

The education needed to improve life skills must go beyond content-based teaching, which focuses on facts and information. To make it more learner-centered, the teacher should assign group projects to improve life skills because, in group work, cooperation, teamwork, and leadership, students are allowed more opportunity to listen to, share with, and support the efforts of others in the group; motivate and empower others to act; and relate positively to people (playing nicely). In addition, this method makes and maintains friendly relationships, takes the initiative to help and direct others, and listens to and follows the group's needs. The following is a typical assignment instructing students to work in groups.

Direction: Examine characters' connections in the story. Discuss the following questions:
- What are the similarities and contrasts between the story's characters?
- What did Sue do to restore Johnsy's will to live? What tactics did she utilize?
- Is she capable of resolving issues? Why did Sue's plan prevail in the end? Did Sue think about how her decisions would affect Jonhsy and the outcome?
- Did Sue make wise decisions? Was there anything she could have done differently?
- Sue worked independently or in partnership with Behrman to address the problem posed by Jonhsy's unwillingness to live. Was this the best course of action?
- Must Behrman demonstrate courage?
- Was his choice of action unexpected? How?
- Was his mode of thought novel?
- How did his way of thinking influence the outcome of the story?

To improve problem-solving skills, it is necessary to identify the issues. To allow problem-solving, the instruction should require students to recognize the challenges or conflicts in the plot development and the corresponding logical thinking abilities illustrated below.

Direction: Identify the conflicts.
A.   Discuss the following questions.
- What are the story's conflicts?
- What internal tensions does Johnsy experience?
- What are her disagreements with Sue?
- What, if any, conflicts does she have with her society?
- What, if any, conflicts does she have with nature?
B.   Provide support.
- Work in groups to brainstorm facts in the story to support your ideas.
- Work in groups to brainstorm examples to illustrate your ideas.
C.   Organize the information logically and generate examples to illustrate your thoughts.
- Put the conflicts in a logical or chronological order as a group to show how the plot changes.

By noticing the story's tensions, the questions above will help students find the story's problems. The next phase is to cultivate the students' problem-solving abilities. To do this, the instruction may require students to identify the characters' responses, as well as the implications and ramifications of those solutions. In addition, the instruction may ask them to compare and contrast the repercussions and implications. These are useful methods for assisting students in discovering their own solutions, which serve as the basis for decision-making in the subsequent stage.

Individual students can be given the following tasks to help them learn more about problems and how to solve them: (1) describe the numerous strategies by which the characters efficiently handled problems, (2) analyze each method and possible alternatives; and (3) discuss prospective remedies for the character's predicament.

Direction: Look for available solutions.
A.   Collaborate, using reasoning to determine the characters' most vital objectives.
•   What are Sue's most essential objectives for Johnsy?
•   Which of Sue's priorities for Johnsy is most important?
B. Determine the ramifications and consequences.
•   What is the relevance of the priorities?
•   C. Determine facts.
•   What facts from the narrative support your position?
•   D. Compare and contrast possible solutions.
•   What potential remedies does Sue have for Johnsy's issues? Evaluate and contrast the solutions' merits and drawbacks.

After the students have discovered the solutions open to the characters in the story, it is time for them to make decisions. To help them understand how to make a decision, they must discover the validity of each solution by analyzing its strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, the education may require students to consider alternative solutions and justify their own in comparison to those of the characters. The teacher should ask the following questions to help the student make a solid decision:

Direction: Make decisions.
A.   Make decisions based on the available solutions.
•   Collect facts and pertinent data to support each character's solution as a group.
•   Which is the strongest? Give evidence and examples to bolster the proposed solution and undermine competing proposals.
B.   Support and defend legitimate solutions.
•   How valid is each answer?
C.   Justify your solution.
•   If you were Sue, what would your approach to helping Johnsy be? If your solution differs from Sue's, why do you believe that your solution is more valid?
•   Would you, if you were Behrman, give your life for Johnsy's? Moreover, why? Do you believe it is worthwhile to do so? If not, why not? What would you do rather than give up your life for hers?

When you are trying to solve a problem, you need to use both critical and creative thinking to find the best solution. In terms of problem-solving, critical and creative thinking are complementary. The next section explains how college students will be exposed to critical and creative thinking and how it will enrich their learning experiences in a literature course.

4.2.2 Critical and Creative Thinking

Students' creative and critical thinking will be boosted when they look at a problem-solution scenario and make choices. Students with these cognitive skills are good at solving problems. They come up with creative ideas, make connections, think critically and creatively, and analyze characters.

There are either active or passive thinkers in "The Last Leaf." Through engagement activities, dialogue, and inquiry about his tactics, the students will observe Behrman's confidence as he effectively works things out.

> **Direction:** Discuss the following questions:
> * How does Behrman utilize his painting skills to overcome personal obstacles?
> * How has he planned for the outcomes?
> * How does he think things through and make decisions that save Johnsy's life?
> * Why is she unable to halt her suicidal thoughts?

The students will also see how hard her friend Sue works to solve problems through activities, conversations, and questions about how she does it.

> **Direction:** Discuss the following questions:
> * Why is she unable to halt her suicidal thoughts?
> * What steps has she taken to alleviate her depression? Did she try out new techniques to resolve her problems?
> * Is she willing to assess her belief and its implications critically?

In contrast, the students view Johnsy as a passive thinker who fails to solve her difficulties through engagement activities, dialogue, and inquiries regarding her failure.

> **Direction:** Discuss the following questions:
> * What steps has she taken to alleviate her depression? Did she try out new techniques to resolve her problems?
> * Is she willing to assess her belief and its implications critically?
> * What steps has she taken to alleviate her depression? Did she try out new techniques to resolve her problems?
> * Is she willing to assess her belief and its implications critically?
> * Does she disregard Sue's opinions? Why?

To help students develop their creative thinking based on the previously mentioned critical thinking about the characters, instructors may use the following questions:

> **Direction:** Discuss the following questions:
> * Do you consider yourself an active or passive thinker? Why?
> * What are your strengths and weaknesses?
> * How will you strengthen yourself by enhancing your self-monitoring skills?
> * What nuances am I overlooking? Are any essential concerns missing?

Also, the instructions could ask for comments from other group members about how the student felt about the reflection. In order to help the students think creatively and rationally about the story or any other situation, the teacher may ask them to answer the following questions:

Direction: Discuss the following questions:
- What nuances am I overlooking? Are any essential concerns missing?
- How do I know? Consider how the material was compiled and where it originated.
- Who is the storyteller? What are the speaker's perspectives, and what influences them? What else? What if...? Which further notions exist? Are there any other options?
- What course of action would you take if you were Johnsy, Sue, or Behrman?
- What do you believe would have occurred if Behrman had lived?
- What do you believe would have occurred if Johnsy had perished?
- Have you experienced, witnessed, read about, or heard about a comparable crisis?
- Did the story's conclusion surprise you? If you were the author, how would you conclude the story?
- What crucial lessons did Behrman's passing leave for Johnsy and Sue?
- How have the lessons you've learned changed your perspective?

In order to debate these issues, students learn to think creatively and critically by figuring out how to evaluate information and make decisions that make sense. It also helps students learn skills like problem-solving and making decisions, which will help them make ethical, logical decisions on their own in the future. In addition, they improve communication and interpersonal skills, as described in the next section.

4.2.3 Communication and interpersonal skills

Effective communicators comprehend and transmit facts and ideas with confidence and originality. They collaborate with others effectively and voluntarily. Literature provides strategies for good communication. In works of literature, students encounter characters who exhibit communication tactics and their results. The characters in "The Last Leaf" exhibit both the techniques and their results. The instructor may assign the following questions for group discussion:

Direction: Discuss the following questions:
- Are Johnsy, Sue, and Behrman competent collaborators and listeners?
- Do they clearly communicate their thoughts, feelings, and opinions to others?
- Do they listen attentively and appropriately respond?
- Are those who ask questions and listen to the responses telling the truth?
- Do they use constructive methods to prevent misunderstandings?
- Do they use negative approaches, resulting in miscommunication and misunderstanding?
- Are they attempting to foster trust and wholesome relationships?
- Are they attempting to offer clarity and comprehension?
- Are they trying to improve their understanding of nonverbal communication while getting things they need?
- Are they attempting to boost self-esteem and decrease behavioral problems?
- Do they show how important the message is by talking to each other politely and with respect?
- What motivations does each character possess?
- How do each character's desires force them to struggle?
- What do you think about the character's choices to reach their goals?
- How do the personality traits of the character affect his or her decisions?
- What is the character's significance? Why?
- What are the protagonist's significant relationships and objects? Why?

- What are your impressions of the character relationships?
- What can other characters teach us about the main characters?
- What motivated the character's actions?
- Is the character's conduct appropriate or inappropriate? Why?
- What did the character benefit from this behavior?
- How do I compare or contrast the character?
- How do the character's aspirations and obstacles express the author's message?
- How does the setting add context to the narrative?
- How does the setting affect the character and add to the tone of the story?
- How would you describe the story's conflicts? What is the conflict's progression?
- What actions or circumstances contributed to the conflict's resolution?
- How does the resolution contribute to the story's natural, thought-provoking, or unexpected conclusion?
- What enduring insights or fundamental questions are raised by this narrative?
- What are the story's key themes and lessons? What are their essences?

In addition to what the students learn from the characters in the story, the teacher may use different teaching methods to help students improve their communication and social skills so they can have more meaningful conversations. The following are examples of methods. The initial technique is active listening. This strategy entails gathering information and interacting with the speaker while listening to others. During conversations, active listeners avoid engaging in distracting behaviors. The second element is cooperation. This strategy requires much more interpersonal skills, such as communication, adaptability, and accountability. The third is the exchange of feedback. Effective communicators can both accept and deliver constructive criticism. The comments should address issues, provide solutions, or contribute to the enhancement of the current themes. Providing and receiving feedback is an essential skill for learning because it helps students and partners make substantial improvements in the development of life skills. The final method is active learning. In contrast to passively "acquiring" literature knowledge, this method challenges students to actively participate in the learning process. This could mean that students are discussing a topic in small groups, individually reflecting at the end of each class session on what they have learned and outstanding questions, collaborating with a partner to solve an application problem prior to presenting it to the entire class, or participating in class, group, or team discussion boards.

These interpersonal skills are soft skills that can be used in different situations. They make learning environments more pleasant and help keep them that way. Many components must be present for effective communication and interpersonal skills. Self-awareness and empathy are crucial aspects. To communicate effectively in both team and individual situations, students must be aware of their own personalities, sentiments, motivations, and desires, as well as how these characteristics influence the thinking, decisions, and outcomes of other students. In order to select an acceptable response for each communicative goal, as demonstrated in the next section, students must also have knowledge of the personalities, sentiments, motives, and desires of other students.

4.2.4 Self-awareness and empathy

Self-awareness affects all aspects of a student's growth. The students' capacity to understand themselves influences how they communicate, learn, and interact with others, as well as how their emotions affect themselves and others. Students with self-awareness are able to identify the emotional causes that affect them. This awareness enables individuals to

effectively control their emotions, identify the emotions of others, and comprehend that others may perceive them differently than they perceive themselves.

The characters in "The Last Leaf" show how emotions can affect both people and themselves. To appreciate this, the instruction may provide the following questions for students to discuss:

Direction: Discuss the following questions:

- Does Johnsy analyze how her emotions influence her choices and their consequences?
- Does she analyze how her emotions influence her choices and their consequences?
- Does she become aware of her predicament?
- Does she develop her strengths?
- Did she gain insight from her flaws?
- Does she view failure as an educational opportunity and a stepping stone to success?
- Does she boost confidence and self-esteem?
- Is she aware of and able to manage her emotions during her life crisis?
- Does she build good relationships with Behrman by being aware of how what she does affects him?
- How does Johnsy identify and communicate her feelings prior to and following her recovery?
- How does she understand that others consider her a failure?
- How does she identify her strengths and limitations in order to improve?
- How does Sue employ various learning strategies and ways to assist her?
- How does she know that Johnsy's emotions and thoughts impact her health?
- How does Behrman comprehend her desire and emotions?
- How did Johnsy change during the course of the story?
- Did she consider the impact of her actions or conduct on Sue?
- What alternatives did she have?
- What was the lesson acquired by Johnsy?
- Do you believe that her self-awareness has increased?
- How could she analyze and alter her behavior?
- What prior knowledge did she utilize?
- What did she gain from this?
- How did she deal with depressive states?
- What was the most significant or noteworthy incident in the story? Why?
- What self-discoveries did she make?
- How will students utilize this knowledge in the future?
- What is Behrman's objective?
- What difficulties hindered him from accomplishing his objectives?
- How did he overcome adversity to achieve success?
- Was there anything he could have done differently to accomplish his objective? Why?
- How could he have simplified his masterpiece?
- What further strategies may he employ?
- How do you believe Sue and Behrman will settle the problem facing Johnsy?
- Why do you suppose Johnsy is hesitant to do something new?
- What can she learn from her mistake?
- Did she ask for help when she needed it? Would it have made a difference?

In order to create full understanding, the training needs to ask students to work in groups to act on their thoughts and feelings in a helpful way, to learn from their mistakes and how to fix them, and to be aware of their own strengths, flaws, and problems. This expanded instruction will generate fascinating discussions about how students acquire various self-awareness abilities.

The teacher can assign group discussion on the following questions to promote empathy:

Direction: Discuss the following questions:
- What attributes did Sue possess that made her a good friend of Johnsy?
- Why did Behrman and Sue need to work together on her case?
- Do you feel Behrman could complete the task by himself?
- What was Sue's relationship to Behrman?
- How are Behrman and Sue able to set aside their affections for Johnsy to work together?
- Why is cooperation so difficult at times?
- In what ways did Johnsy rely on Sue and Behrman?

To promote complete comprehension of self-awareness and empathy, the lesson may additionally include self-questioning exercises.

Direction: Discuss the following questions:
- How could positive interactions with others help us overcome hard circumstances?
- What characteristics define a healthy and positive relationship?
- What are the benefits of a healthy relationship?
- How might our behaviors affect our friendships?
- What impact does empathy have on a friendship?

While life is full of issues and obstacles, individuals are often stressed. To lessen stress in life, students must acquire a variety of skills to manage emotions and stress in preparation for adulthood, including the aforementioned talents (namely, decision-making, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness). In the following section, however, other crucial considerations are discussed.

4.2.5 Coping with emotions and coping with stress

Many stories illustrate the ability of characters to successfully regulate their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in a range of settings, such as stress management, urge control, and self-motivation while pursuing personal, academic, and professional goals. Self-management is one of the skills that contribute to success.

Self-management teaches students to realize how different situations influence their behavior, emotions, and judgments. This awareness assists them in responding positively to stressful situations and regulating their emotions. Individuals who practice self-management demonstrate higher confidence and self-esteem, enhanced ability to set and attain goals, enhanced study skills and academic performance, confidence and pride in successes, and an understanding

of reaching goals and overcoming barriers are not always easy. Characters (namely Behrman and Sue) in "The Last Leaf" are capable of self-management. To help students

comprehend this through the characters' emotional and mental resilience, the instructor may offer the following group discussion.

Direction: Discuss the following questions:
- Are Behrman and Sue self-motivated, organized, and persistent?
- Can they regulate their emotions, thoughts, and actions in a variety of contexts?
- Do they realize why they feel the way they do?
- Do they employ effective impulse control and emotional regulation strategies?
- Do they encourage perseverance in personal endeavors?
- Do they utilize stress management techniques such as mindfulness?
- Are they self-motivated to overcome hurdles with perseverance?
- Do they recognize the need for time and motivation to fulfill objectives and challenges?
- Do they recognize that failure and mistakes are learning and development opportunities?
- Do they establish personal goals and strive to accomplish them?
- Do they assess their existing circumstances and formulate new goals?
- Do they develop organizational skills and follow procedures?

The teacher might have the students talk in groups about Johnsy's inability to deal with emotions and stress to make sure they know these skills.

Direction: Discuss the following questions:
- Why do you think Johnsy struggled to manage their emotions?
- What would have happened if she had managed her emotions and behavior?
- How could she manage her emotions and conduct?
- Why was her perseverance during her sickness so crucial?
- What stress management strategies may she have implemented?
- Was it okay for her to experience depression?
- What would have been a more effective strategy?
- What do you feel caused her depression?
- How can she effectively regulate her emotions?
- What lessons can be learned from her mistakes?
- How could she have exacerbated her illness?
- How may she have rendered the doctor's efforts to treat her futile?
- How did she render Sue's attempt to assist her futile? What further strategies could she use to alleviate the crisis?
- In what way do you suppose Sue could resolve Johnsy's issue?
- Why do you feel Johnsy fears positive thoughts and is eager to die?
- What could she do differently in the future?
- What could Sue do better in the future instead of telling Behrman, who afterwards gave his life for Johnsy?
- Would you tell Behrman about Johnsy if you were Sue?
- What could Behrman do differently in the future to save Johnsy's life and his own?
- How did Johnsy use failure to propel her to success?

As a way to help students remember how to deal with emotions and stress, the lesson could include a comparison of characters with a fixed mindset and those with a growing

mindset.Sue and Behrman demonstrate a growth mindset, but Johnsy transitions from a fixed to a growth mindset to assist students in developing a growth mindset that will assist them in overcoming academic and life challenges and reaching future academic and life goals. Students may be told to have a meaningful conversation with their partner by evaluating how they think and asking if their partner sees them the same way they do.

Direction: Discuss the following questions:
- Are you determined to get past problems and figure out how to do better in the future?
- Do you view challenges as opportunities for growth?
- Are you aware that intelligence is changeable and may develop?

To fully understand this, consider schooling and learning an opportunity for growth.

Direction: Discuss the following questions:
- Do you emphasize a task's procedure over its result?
- Do you attempt innovative concepts or procedures?
- Do you have command over your emotions, distractions, and temptations?
- Do you seek aid and adhere to advice?
- Are you willing to take risks in front of other people?
- Are you motivated by others around you who are successful?
- Do you give up in times of life or academic crisis? Do you feel hopeless?
- Do you choose basic tasks exclusively?
- Do you believe that intellect is innate and unchangeable?
- Do you view education as a platform for criticism and evaluation?
- Do you believe that they will never have the "right" answer?
- Do you stick to what they are accustomed to?
- Do you struggle with procrastination and maintaining emotional control?
- Will you ask for help or accept criticism?
- Do you try to appear intelligent in order to conceal your weaknesses?
- Do you feel threatened by successful people?
- What techniques do you use to manage your emotions and behavior?

Also, the training should assign group discussion on the following questions to ensure that the students fully understand self-management.

Direction: Discuss the following questions:
- Do you feel threatened by successful people?
- What techniques do you use to manage your emotions and behavior?
- Why do you find self-management difficult?
- In what ways could self-management improve your life?
- How can you support others with mood and behavior management?

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5. Conclusion

This research was motivated by the worry that typical content-based teaching of literature in the ESL context undermines its ability to improve critical life skills. Thus, the purpose of this study was to demonstrate how literature can be taught to equip students with the skills they need, utilizing the unique learner-centered approach offered, which emphasizes "learning how to know" rather than "learning what to know." This paper contributed to this by:

(1) providing pedagogical principles of learner-centered methods (namely, brainstorming, group work, critical and creative thinking, interactive methods, discussion methods, inquiry-based learning, and discovery learning) that can enhance ten critical life skills (namely, decision-making and problem-solving, creative thinking and critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills, self-awareness and empathy, and coping with empathetic emotions); and (2) demonstrating how learner-centered methods can facilitate the development of the life skills. There is no doubt that short stories can teach essential life skills, but the instruction should emphasize skill-based approaches that encourage students to construct their own learning as opposed to content-based methods that largely focus on information delivery by the teacher. My goal is that the proposed skill-based teaching of short stories and other narratives such as novels and plays can now be used to improve students' life skills, despite the belief that literature can teach contents but not skills. I also hope that this study will serve as the basis for future empirical research into the potential of literature to improve life skills.

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