



Upanishadic Wisdom as a Foundation for Life Skills Education: A Framework for Self-Awareness, Emotional Regulation and Decision-Making

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Abstract

Education in the twenty-first century is increasingly expected to move beyond academic achievement and contribute to the holistic development of learners. Students require competencies that enable them to understand themselves, regulate emotions, make responsible decisions, cope with challenges and respond appropriately to changing situations. Life Skills Education provides an important framework for developing such competencies. The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies ten core life skills, including self-awareness, decisionmaking, critical thinking, creative thinking, problem-solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, empathy, coping with emotions and coping with stress. Alongside contemporary frameworks, the Indian Knowledge System offers philosophical traditions that may provide culturally meaningful perspectives on human development. The Upanishads, in particular, emphasise self-knowledge, inquiry, discipline, discernment and inner awareness. The present paper explores the relevance of selected Upanishadic teachings to Life Skills Education, with particular emphasis on self-awareness, emotional regulation and decisionmaking. A qualitative conceptual and interpretive approach was adopted. Selected passages and concepts from the Katha Upanishad, Chandogya Upanishad and Taittiriya Upanishad were examined and thematically mapped with selected life skills. The analysis indicates conceptual correspondences between Upanishadic self-inquiry and self-awareness, control and discipline of the mind and senses and emotional regulation,



and the distinction between *shreyas* and *preyas* and responsible decision-making. The paper proposes an Upanishadic Life Skills Framework in which self-inquiry forms the foundation for self-awareness, self-regulation supports emotional balance, and discernment contributes to responsible decision-making. The study argues that Upanishadic wisdom should not be treated as an equivalent or replacement for contemporary psychological frameworks but can complement Life Skills Education by providing an Indian philosophical perspective on reflective, balanced and responsible living.

Keywords: Upanishads, Life Skills Education, Self-Awareness, Emotional Regulation, Decision-Making, Indian Knowledge System, Holistic Education

1. Introduction

Education has traditionally been associated with the acquisition of knowledge and the development of intellectual abilities. However, the demands of contemporary life require learners to possess competencies that extend beyond academic knowledge. Young people encounter academic pressure, interpersonal challenges, emotional difficulties, social expectations, uncertainty regarding the future and complex choices in everyday life. Consequently, education needs to prepare learners not only to acquire knowledge but also to use that knowledge effectively in real-life situations.

Life Skills Education has emerged as an important approach in this context. The World Health Organization identifies ten core life skills: self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, coping with emotions and coping with stress. These skills are broadly associated with cognitive, social and emotional dimensions of human functioning. Among these competencies, self-awareness, emotional regulation and decision-making have particular importance during adolescence. A learner who understands personal emotions, strengths, limitations and values is better positioned to regulate responses and make thoughtful choices. Life Skills Education therefore seeks to develop the learner as a whole person rather than focusing exclusively on academic performance.



The search for holistic approaches to education has also renewed interest in the Indian Knowledge System. The National Education Policy 2020 has given importance to holistic development, values, competencies and Indian knowledge traditions. Within this context, classical Indian texts may be examined for educational principles that can meaningfully complement contemporary educational frameworks.

The Upanishads occupy an important position within the Indian philosophical tradition. They explore questions concerning the self, knowledge, consciousness, reality and human existence. Their method frequently involves dialogue, questioning, reflection and inquiry. The learner is encouraged to seek understanding rather than simply receive information.

One of the central concerns of Upanishadic thought is self-knowledge. This provides an interesting conceptual connection with the contemporary life skill of self-awareness. Similarly, discussions concerning the mind, senses, discipline and discernment can be interpreted in relation to emotional regulation and decision-making.

The present study therefore examines selected Upanishadic teachings through the lens of contemporary Life Skills Education. It does not claim that the Upanishads formulated the modern WHO framework. Instead, it explores conceptual correspondences between selected Upanishadic principles and selected contemporary life skills.

2. Rationale of the Study

The contemporary education system places considerable emphasis on academic achievement. Although academic knowledge is essential, it does not by itself guarantee that learners will be able to manage emotions, respond to stressful situations or make responsible decisions.

This creates a need for educational approaches that integrate knowledge with selfunderstanding and practical competencies.

Life Skills Education addresses this need by developing psychosocial competencies. Recent empirical research in India has also examined the impact of life-skills education on socioemotional development and school-related outcomes among adolescents.

At the same time, there is increasing academic interest in examining Indian Knowledge System perspectives in relation to contemporary education. Recent scholarship has specifically



discussed Upanishadic reflection, self-knowledge, discernment and holistic development in relation to life skills and social-emotional learning.

The present study is therefore significant because it attempts to bring together:

Contemporary Life Skills Education and Upanishadic philosophical wisdom without treating the two traditions as historically identical. The study may contribute to the development of culturally responsive approaches to Life Skills Education and may provide a conceptual basis for future empirical research.

3. Review of Related Literature

Life Skills Education has gained considerable importance in contemporary education because academic knowledge alone is not sufficient to prepare learners for the challenges of everyday life. The World Health Organization (WHO) identified ten core life skills, including self-awareness, decision-making, critical thinking, creative thinking, problem-solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, empathy, coping with emotions and coping with stress. These skills are intended to promote adaptive and positive behaviour and support individuals in dealing effectively with everyday challenges (World Health Organization [WHO], 1997, 1999).

Bharath and Srikala's study of the NIMHANS school mental-health programme found that adolescents who participated in a life-skills programme demonstrated better self-esteem, perceived coping and adjustment, as well as improved prosocial behaviour compared with students who did not participate in the programme.

Research on life-skills education has further highlighted its relevance to the social and emotional development of adolescents. Studies have reported that structured life-skills programmes can support students' self-awareness, emotional competencies, interpersonal abilities and decision-making. Such findings indicate that life-skills education can contribute to the holistic development of learners beyond academic achievement.

Within the Indian context, increasing attention has been given to the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and its possible contribution to contemporary education. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasises holistic development, values, competencies and the integration of Indian



knowledge traditions into education (Government of India, 2020). This has created opportunities to examine classical Indian philosophical texts from an educational perspective. The Upanishads provide an important source within the Indian philosophical tradition for examining human development and self-knowledge. Their teachings emphasise inquiry into the nature of the Self, reflection, knowledge, discipline and the relationship between the mind, senses and intellect. The *Chandogya Upanishad*, through the teaching of *Tat Tvam Asi*, provides a significant basis for exploring the concept of self-knowledge. Similarly, the *Katha Upanishad* discusses the relationship between the Self, intellect, mind and senses through its well-known chariot analogy (Olivelle, 1998).

Pal and Hazra (2015), for example, examined Upanishadic education in relation to contemporary Indian education and highlighted its philosophical, psychological and educational dimensions.

Asagar (2025), through a literature-based analysis, examined the relationship between IKS and modern pedagogy under NEP 2020 and highlighted principles such as the *Guru-Shishya Parampara*, *Panchakosha Vikas* and dialogic learning.

The *Katha Upanishad* also distinguishes between *shreyas* (the beneficial or worthwhile) and *preyas* (the pleasurable or immediately attractive). This distinction provides a useful philosophical basis for examining responsible choice and decision-making. The emphasis on control and proper direction of the mind and senses can also be interpreted in relation to emotional self-regulation.

The *Taittiriya Upanishad*, particularly through the concept of the *Panchakosha*, presents a multidimensional understanding of human development. This perspective is relevant to holistic education because it recognises that human development involves more than intellectual growth.

Recent scholarship on Indian Knowledge Systems has begun to explore connections between Upanishadic reflection, self-regulation, life skills and social-emotional learning. However, there remains scope for systematic educational interpretation of specific Upanishadic concepts in relation to contemporary life-skills frameworks.

4. Research Gap

The reviewed literature indicates that Life Skills Education and Upanishadic thought have each been examined extensively from their respective perspectives.

However, comparatively limited attention has been given to developing a focused conceptual framework connecting selected Upanishadic teachings with specific contemporary life skills, particularly self-awareness, emotional regulation and decision-making.

The present study attempts to address this gap by examining selected Upanishadic teachings and interpreting their educational relevance through the contemporary Life Skills Education perspective

5. Conceptual Understanding of Life Skills

Life skills refer to abilities that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. The WHO framework identifies ten core life skills encompassing thinking, social and emotional dimensions.

The analysis focused on three major life-skill areas:

1. Self-awareness
2. Coping with emotions/emotional regulation
3. Decision-making

The WHO framework represents a modern educational and psychosocial framework to establish a meaningful dialogue between **Indian philosophical wisdom and contemporary Life Skills Education** the approach provides a foundation for understanding how selected Upanishadic ideas concerning self-knowledge, self-regulation, discernment and responsible living may enrich the development of culturally relevant and holistic approaches to Life Skills Education.



Fig 1 : Three Selected Life Skills



5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Approach

The study adopted a qualitative conceptual and interpretive approach. The purpose was to examine selected philosophical teachings and interpret their educational relevance rather than measure the effect of an intervention statistically.

Through qualitative approach the study focuses on the meaning, interpretation and educational significance of philosophical concepts rather than on the measurement of numerical variables or the testing of an educational intervention.

The conceptual nature of the study is based on the examination and organisation of ideas derived from primary philosophical texts and relevant scholarly literature. The study does not involve the administration of a questionnaire, collection of responses from students or teachers, experimental intervention, or statistical analysis.

5.2 Method of Analysis

A thematic interpretive method was adopted by following the four stages of analysis

The analysis followed four stages:

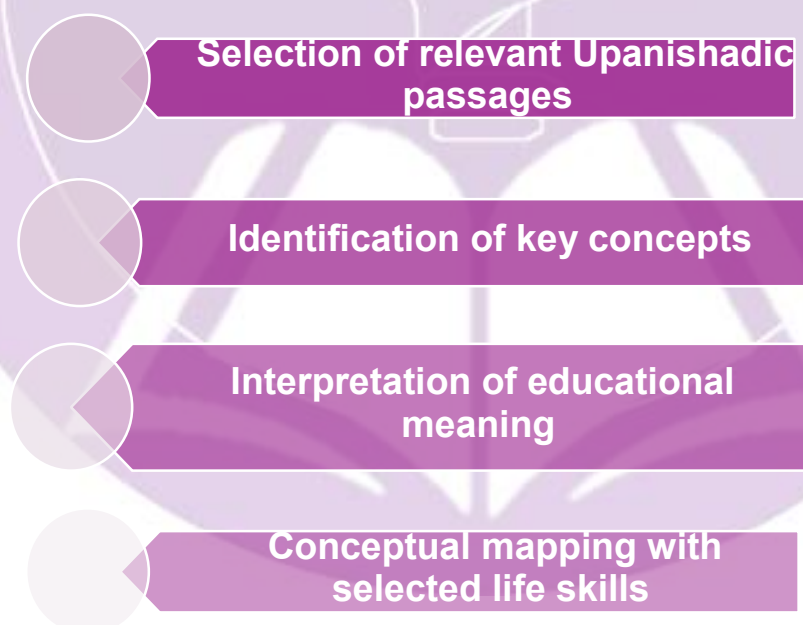


Fig 2: Four Stages of Thematic Analysis



5.3 Analysis and Interpretation

The present study examined selected Upanishadic passages to explore their relevance to contemporary Life Skills Education. The analysis focused specifically on three selected lifeskill dimensions: self-awareness, emotional regulation and decision-making. Rather than treating the Upanishadic teachings as direct equivalents of contemporary psychological concepts, the study sought to identify conceptual correspondences and interpret their possible educational significance.

The study therefore follows a process of textual examination, thematic identification, conceptual interpretation and educational mapping. Selected passages from the Katha Upanishad, Chandogya Upanishad and Taittiriya Upanishad are examined to identify recurring ideas related to the selected life-skill dimensions. These ideas are then organised into broader themes and compared conceptually with the relevant dimensions of Life Skills Education.

5.3.1 Upanishadic Wisdom and Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is one of the central life skills identified by WHO. It enables an individual to understand personal feelings, values, strengths and limitations.

The Upanishadic tradition places considerable emphasis on the question of the Self. Rather than understanding knowledge merely as information about external objects, Upanishadic inquiry also directs attention towards the knower.

The Chandogya Upanishad, particularly the dialogue between Uddalaka and Shvetaketu, contains the well-known statement *Tat Tvam Asi* in section 6.8.7. The statement occurs within a broader teaching concerning the subtle essence and the Self. For educational purposes, this teaching can be approached as an invitation towards deeper self-reflection.

Thus, Upanishadic self-inquiry can be conceptually related to contemporary self-awareness.

5.3.2 Upanishadic Wisdom and Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is the ability to recognise and regulate emotions is an important component of Life Skills Education. The Upanishads do not use the contemporary



psychological term "emotional regulation." However, several teachings address the relationship between the mind, senses, intellect and disciplined action.

The most significant example for the present study comes from the Katha Upanishad.

5.3.2.1 The Chariot Analogy

Katha Upanishad 1.3.3 describes the Self as the master of the chariot, the body as the chariot, the intellect as the driver and the mind as the reins.

The following verse identifies the senses with horses.

The analogy can be represented as:

Katha Upanishadic image	Conceptual interpretation
Chariot	Body
Rider	Self
Charioteer	Intellect
Reins	Mind
Horses	Senses

Table 1: Representation of The Chariot Analogy

The subsequent verses emphasise the importance of discrimination and control of the mind and senses.

From a contemporary educational perspective, the analogy can be interpreted as illustrating the importance of self-regulation.

For example, when a student experiences anger, disappointment or frustration, an immediate emotional reaction may influence behaviour. The learner who develops awareness and control can pause, reflect and select a more appropriate response.

5.3.3 Upanishadic Wisdom and Decision-Making

Decision-making is another important life skill.

Adolescents frequently make decisions concerning academic choices, friendships, social media, career aspirations, peer pressure and personal behaviour. These decisions may involve a conflict between immediate pleasure and long-term benefit.



The Katha Upanishad provides a particularly relevant conceptual distinction through the ideas of *shreyas* and *preyas*.

Katha Upanishad 1.2.1–1.2.2 distinguishes between the good or beneficial (*shreyas*) and the pleasurable (*preyas*). The teaching states that the thoughtful person examines the two and chooses the beneficial rather than merely selecting what is pleasurable. For contemporary Life Skills Education, this provides an excellent basis for discussing responsible choices.

For example: A student has an examination the next day. Two choices are available:

Preyas: Spend several hours watching entertainment because it is immediately enjoyable.

Shreyas: Prepare for the examination because it contributes to a longer-term goal.

The purpose of the teaching is not to suggest that pleasure is always wrong. Rather, it encourages the learner to examine alternatives and consider their consequences.

5.3.4 Upanishadic Inquiry and Critical Reflection

Although critical thinking is a modern educational construct, the Upanishadic tradition contains a strong culture of questioning and inquiry. Knowledge is frequently presented through dialogue between teacher and learner. The learner asks questions, seeks clarification and engages with deeper philosophical issues. Such inquiry can complement contemporary approaches to critical thinking. The educational value lies not in claiming that ancient inquiry and modern critical thinking are identical, but in recognising that reflective questioning is valuable to both

5.3.5 Upanishadic Wisdom and Holistic Development

The Upanishadic approach does not view human development exclusively in terms of intellectual achievement.

The Taittiriya Upanishad presents the *Panchakosha* model, which describes the human being through interconnected dimensions traditionally understood as:

1. *Annamaya* — physical dimension
2. *Pranamaya* — vital/energy dimension
3. *Manomaya* — mental dimension
4. *Vijnanamaya* — intellectual/discriminative dimension



5. *Anandamaya* — deeper dimension associated with bliss

For contemporary educational interpretation, this model may be understood as encouraging attention to multiple dimensions of learner development. It supports a broader educational question: Is education only about what a learner knows, or also about how the learner thinks, feels, behaves and develops as a person?

Life Skills Education similarly emphasises the development of cognitive, emotional and social competencies. Therefore, the Upanishadic perspective can contribute to the idea of holistic learner development.

6. Thematic Analysis Representation

The major findings of the conceptual analysis are presented below.

Theme	Upanishadic concept	Textual source	Life-skill connection	Educational interpretation
Self-awareness	Self-knowledge and self-inquiry	Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7	Selfawareness	Encourages reflection on identity, values and inner experience
Emotional regulation	Mind and senses under	Katha Upanishad 1.3.3–1.3.9	Coping with emotions	Encourages awareness and regulation of impulses
Decisionmaking	<i>Shreyas</i> and <i>Preyas</i>	Katha Upanishad 1.2.1–1.2.2	Decisionmaking	Encourages examination of choices and consequences
Reflective thinking	Teacher–learner inquiry	Upanishadic dialogues	Critical thinking	Encourages questioning and reflection
Holistic development	Panchakosha	Taittiriya Upanishad	Holistic skills life	Encourages attention to multiple dimensions of development

Table 2 : Findings of the Conceptual Analysis



7. Interpretation of the Major Findings

The thematic analysis reveals three major conceptual correspondences.

Finding 1: Self-Knowledge as a Foundation for Self-Awareness

The analysis of Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7 suggests that the Upanishadic emphasis on understanding the Self can be interpreted educationally as an invitation to self-reflection. Its relevance to Life Skills Education lies in encouraging learners to examine their identity, values, thoughts and behaviour. Therefore:

Upanishadic self-inquiry → Reflective understanding → Self-awareness

Finding 2: Self-Control as a Basis for Emotional Regulation

The chariot analogy in Katha Upanishad 1.3.3–1.3.9 provides a structured metaphor for understanding the relationship between the body, senses, mind and intellect. The teaching can be interpreted in contemporary educational terms as emphasising awareness, self-control and purposeful responses.

Therefore:

Awareness → Regulation → Balanced response

This provides conceptual relevance to the life skill of coping with emotions.

Finding 3: Discernment as a Basis for Responsible Decision-Making

The *shreyas-preyas* teaching in Katha Upanishad 1.2.1–1.2.2 emphasises examining alternatives and distinguishing between what is beneficial and what is merely pleasurable. From an educational perspective, this can encourage learners to consider consequences and make decisions based on reflection rather than immediate attraction.

Therefore:

Alternatives → Evaluation → Discernment → Responsible choice

This provides a strong conceptual connection with the contemporary life skill of decisionmaking.

7.1 Proposed Upanishadic Life Skills Framework

On the basis of the thematic analysis, the study proposes the following framework:

Upanishadic wisdom

Self Inquiry - Who Am I ?

Self Awareness - Understanding thoughts, emotions, values and behaviour



Self-Regulation- Managing impulses, emotions and responses

Discernment-Examining alternatives and consequences

Responsible Decision-Making - Choosing a thoughtful and beneficial course of action

Holistic Development

Fig: 3 Proposed Upanishadic Life Skills Framework

The proposed framework suggests that life skills can be understood as interconnected competencies rather than isolated abilities. Self-awareness provides the basis for recognising one's internal experiences; emotional regulation supports appropriate responses; and discernment enables the learner to make responsible decisions.

8. Discussion

The present conceptual study demonstrates that selected Upanishadic teachings can be meaningfully interpreted from a Life Skills Education perspective.

The first major area of correspondence is self-awareness. Upanishadic inquiry directs attention towards the nature of the Self. The educational interpretation of this principle encourages students to examine their thoughts, values, emotions and behaviour.

The second area is emotional regulation. The Katha Upanishad's chariot analogy provides a powerful conceptual representation of the relationship among the body, senses, mind and intellect. The metaphor can be interpreted educationally as demonstrating the importance of regulating impulses through awareness and disciplined mental functioning.



The third area is decision-making. The distinction between Shreyas and Preyas emphasises the importance of examining alternatives and distinguishing what is beneficial from what is merely pleasurable.

These three areas can be viewed as interconnected rather than isolated.

A student who develops self-awareness is more capable of recognising emotional responses. A student who can regulate emotional responses is better positioned to consider alternatives calmly. This supports thoughtful decision-making.

The study also recognises an important limitation. The WHO life-skills framework and Upanishadic philosophy originate in very different historical and intellectual contexts. Consequently, the concepts should not be treated as exact equivalents.

9. Educational Implications

The findings of the present conceptual study have important implications for contemporary education. Selected Upanishadic teachings can be meaningfully incorporated into Life Skills Education to promote self-awareness, emotional regulation and responsible decision-making among learners.

Teachers can use reflective activities, classroom discussions, real-life situations, storytelling and value-based dilemmas to help students understand themselves, recognise and regulate their emotions, and evaluate the consequences of their choices.

Concepts such as self-inquiry, self-discipline, discernment, *shreyas* and *preyas* can be presented through age-appropriate and experiential activities rather than as purely philosophical content. Such an approach can encourage learners to reflect on their thoughts, emotions, values and behaviour and gradually develop the ability to respond to challenging situations with greater awareness and balance.

Selected Upanishadic concepts may be introduced within teacher education through courses or modules related to Indian Knowledge Systems, value education, holistic education, reflective practice and life skills.



Teacher trainees can be encouraged to engage in self-reflection, dialogue, case studies and classroom-based activities that demonstrate the application of self-awareness, emotional regulation and responsible decision-making

Upanishadic teachings should be presented as part of India's philosophical and intellectual heritage in an inclusive and educational manner, rather than as religious instruction. This approach may help future teachers develop a deeper understanding of holistic learner development while connecting traditional Indian wisdom with the needs of contemporary education.

Thus, the integration of selected Upanishadic perspectives with Life Skills Education may contribute to the holistic development of learners by connecting knowledge, values, emotional balance and responsible action.

10. Further Research Implications

The conceptual framework developed in the present study may provide a foundation for future empirical research.

Future researchers may:

1. develop a structured Upanishadic Life Skills module;
2. conduct the intervention among secondary or senior-secondary students;
3. develop an assessment scale for self-awareness, emotional regulation and decisionmaking;
4. examine changes before and after the intervention;
5. compare Upanishadic-based Life Skills Education with conventional Life Skills Education;
6. investigate teachers' perceptions regarding Indian Knowledge System-based Life Skills Education.

Such empirical studies could provide evidence regarding whether the conceptual principles identified in the present paper can translate into measurable educational outcomes.

11. Limitations of the Study

The study has the following limitations:



1. It is conceptual and interpretive rather than empirical.
2. Only selected Upanishads have been considered.
3. The analysis focuses primarily on self-awareness, emotional regulation and decisionmaking.
4. Interpretations of Sanskrit philosophical concepts may differ among scholars and philosophical traditions.
5. The study does not establish the effectiveness of Upanishadic Life Skills Education through experimental data.
6. The conceptual mapping between Upanishadic principles and contemporary life skills should therefore be treated as interpretive rather than equivalent.

Conclusion

Life Skills Education has become an important component of contemporary holistic education because learners need competencies that enable them to manage emotions, understand themselves, solve problems and make responsible decisions.

The Upanishadic tradition offers a rich philosophical perspective that can complement contemporary approaches to Life Skills Education. The present study explored selected Upanishadic teachings through the three life-skill dimensions of self-awareness, emotional regulation and decision-making.

The analysis indicates meaningful conceptual relationships between self-inquiry and selfawareness, discipline of the mind and senses and emotional regulation, and the distinction between *shreyas* and *preyas* and responsible decision-making.

The study does not suggest that the Upanishads constitute an ancient version of the WHO lifeskills framework. Instead, it proposes that Upanishadic wisdom can enter into a meaningful dialogue with contemporary Life Skills Education.

Such an approach can contribute to an educational model in which knowledge is connected with self-understanding, emotional balance, ethical reflection and responsible action.

In this sense, the educational relevance of Upanishadic wisdom lies not merely in preserving ancient philosophical knowledge but in exploring how its principles of inquiry, reflection,



discipline and discernment can contribute to the development of learners capable of living thoughtfully and responsibly in the contemporary world.

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