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Self-Awareness as a Life Skill among College Students: Its Educational Significance

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Abstract

Education plays a vital role in the overall development of college students. Along with academic knowledge, students need skills that help them manage personal, social, emotional and professional responsibilities. In the present changing environment, college students often experience academic pressure, career uncertainty, relationship difficulties and emotional challenges. Thus, life skills have become an important part of higher education. Among the ten core life skills identified by the World Health Organization, self-awareness is particularly important because it helps individuals understand themselves and respond appropriately to different situations. Self-awareness involves understanding one's thoughts, emotions, strengths, weaknesses, values, interests, abilities and behaviour. It includes emotional awareness, self-concept, self-esteem, social awareness, behavioural awareness and self-value. Developing these areas can help students manage emotions, make thoughtful decisions, build healthy relationships, remain motivated in learning, plan their careers and act responsibly. Educational institutions can support the development of self-awareness through life skills education, counselling, reflective activities, group discussions, co-curricular activities, mentoring, self-assessment, mindfulness, goal-setting and experiential learning. However, academic pressure, limited institutional support, lack of trained personnel, limited time and students' reluctance to discuss personal concerns may create challenges. Strengthening self-awareness in higher education can therefore contribute to students' holistic development and better preparation for their future personal, social and professional responsibilities.

Keywords: Self-Awareness; Life Skills; College Students; Higher Education

1.0 Introduction

Education has an important place in the development of students. It is not limited to gaining knowledge or improving academic performance. It also helps students grow physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and morally. In a broader sense, education prepares individuals to live meaningful and responsible lives and to participate positively in society (Delors, 1996). Higher

education provides students with opportunities to develop critical thinking, communication, creativity and the confidence to deal with different situations they may encounter in life. Students today are growing up in a world that is changing rapidly because of technological developments, global competition, changing employment opportunities, academic demands and shifting social conditions. Along with their studies, many students have to deal with stress, anxiety, concerns about their future careers and difficulties in managing relationships and emotions (Arnett, 2015). These experiences show that academic knowledge by itself may not be enough to prepare students for the realities of everyday life. Students also need practical abilities that can help them deal with problems, make sensible decisions and manage their personal and social responsibilities (Goleman, 1995). For this reason, life skills have received increasing attention in the field of education. Life skills provide individuals with the abilities they need to respond to everyday situations and deal with the challenges they encounter in their personal and social lives. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines life skills as abilities that help individuals deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (WHO, 1997). Among the different life skills, self-awareness has a particularly important place. It involves understanding oneself, including one's strengths and weaknesses, emotions, values, beliefs, interests and patterns of behaviour (Xu et al., 2025).

2.0 Concept of Life Skills

Life skills are the abilities that help individuals deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. These skills are not limited to academic knowledge. They help a person think clearly, manage emotions, communicate with others, make suitable decisions, solve problems and develop positive relationships. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 1997), life skills are abilities that support adaptive and positive behaviour and help individuals deal effectively with everyday challenges. The concept of life skills became important in education and health programmes because academic knowledge alone is not sufficient for successful living. Students also need practical, social, emotional and thinking skills to deal with different situations in their personal and educational lives. Life skills education therefore aims to develop the abilities needed for healthy, responsible and productive living (WHO, 1997).

The World Health Organization (WHO) identified ten core life skills that help individuals deal with the demands and challenges of everyday life (WHO, 1997). These skills are closely related to the way people understand themselves, interact with others, make decisions and respond to different situations. The ten core life skills are described below:

- i. **Self-awareness:** This refers to understanding one's own feelings, strengths, weaknesses, values, interests and abilities. It helps individuals recognize who they are and understand how their thoughts and feelings influence their behaviour.
- ii. **Empathy:** Empathy is the ability to understand and respect the feelings, experiences, and perspectives of other people. It helps individuals respond to others with sensitivity and understanding.

- iii. **Critical thinking:** This involves examining information, ideas, and situations carefully before reaching a conclusion. It enables individuals to consider different aspects of an issue and make reasoned judgments.
- iv. **Creative thinking** – Creative thinking is the ability to develop new ideas and look at situations from different perspectives. It helps individuals find alternative approaches when dealing with problems or challenges.
- v. **Decision-making:** Decision-making involves considering different choices and selecting an option that is appropriate for a particular situation. Good decision-making helps individuals deal with everyday responsibilities more thoughtfully.
- vi. **Problem-solving:** Problem-solving is the ability to identify a difficulty, understand its causes and work towards finding a suitable solution. It helps individuals deal with challenges in a practical and constructive manner.
- vii. **Effective communication:** This skill involves expressing thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly while also listening carefully to others. Effective communication supports mutual understanding and reduces misunderstandings.
- viii. **Interpersonal relationships:** This refers to the ability to establish and maintain healthy as well as supportive relationships with others. It includes developing trust, respect, cooperation and positive interaction.
- ix. **Coping with emotions:** This involves recognizing, understanding and managing one's emotions in an appropriate manner. It helps individuals respond to emotional situations without allowing their feelings to negatively affect their actions or relationships.
- x. **Coping with stress:** Coping with stress involves recognizing the situations that create stress and using appropriate ways to manage them. This skill helps individuals handle difficult situations while maintaining their emotional and psychological balance.

3.0 Concept of Self-Awareness

Self-awareness refers to the ability to understand one's own thoughts, feelings, strengths, weaknesses, values, interests, and behaviour. The World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) considers self-awareness an important life skill that enables individuals to recognize their feelings, strengths, weaknesses, values and abilities. A self-aware person is generally better able to recognize both personal strengths and limitations (Chang, 2017). Self-awareness also involves understanding and managing emotions, recognizing personal needs and values, accepting mistakes and responding appropriately to different situations. It enables individuals to reflect on their actions and understand how their behaviour and decisions may affect others. In this way, self-awareness is closely connected with personal growth and development. When students have a better understanding of themselves, they can recognize the areas in which they need to improve while making effective use of their existing strengths. This awareness may contribute to greater self-confidence, emotional control, responsible behaviour, positive relationships, and more thoughtful decision-making (Goleman, 1995). For college students, self-awareness becomes particularly important because the college years are a time of considerable personal growth and preparation for future academic, professional and social roles. During this period, students

gradually develop a clearer sense of their identity, interests, values, abilities and future aspirations. Understanding these aspects of themselves can help students recognize their strengths and weaknesses, manage their emotions and make decisions that are appropriate for their circumstances. It may also help them set realistic goals, make suitable academic and career choices, and deal with challenges more effectively (Soria et al., 2025). Therefore, self-awareness can serve as an important foundation for the academic, personal, social, and professional development of college students. Developing this skill can help students understand themselves more clearly and respond to the challenges of everyday life in a more thoughtful and effective manner.

4.0 Major Components of Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is a broad concept that includes several related aspects of understanding oneself and one's behaviour. The major components of self-awareness are discussed below.

Emotional Awareness: Emotional awareness is the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions and feelings. It enables students to identify what they are experiencing such as happiness, sadness, anger, anxiety, frustration or stress and to understand what may have caused these feelings. Being aware of emotions can also help students respond to them in a more controlled and appropriate manner, particularly when they face difficult or stressful situations (Goleman, 1995).

Self-Concept: Self-concept refers to the way individuals perceive and understand themselves. It includes their beliefs about their personality, abilities, appearance, interests, roles, and other personal characteristics. A clear and realistic self-concept helps college students develop a better understanding of who they are and what they want to achieve. It also contributes to the development of a stable and positive sense of identity (Rogers, 1951).

Self-Esteem: Self-esteem refers to the sense of value and respect an individual has for oneself. It reflects how a person evaluates their own abilities, qualities and overall worth. Students with healthy self-esteem are generally more confident in their abilities and may be better prepared to face academic and personal challenges in a positive manner (Rosenberg, 1965).

Social Awareness: Social awareness involves understanding the feelings, thoughts, needs and perspectives of other people. It helps students interpret social situations and respond to others with greater sensitivity and understanding. Social awareness is closely associated with empathy, effective communication, cooperation and the development of healthy interpersonal relationships (Goleman, 1995).

Behavioural Awareness: Behavioural awareness refers to understanding one's own actions, habits, reactions, and patterns of behaviour in different situations. It enables students to reflect on how their behaviour affects themselves as well as those around them. By becoming more aware of their behaviour, students can recognize actions that may be inappropriate or unhelpful and make necessary changes in the way they respond to different situations.

Self-Value: Self-value refers to an individual's sense of personal worth, dignity, importance and uniqueness. It involves recognizing and appreciating one's own qualities, abilities and potential (Cochrane, 2021). A healthy sense of self-value can encourage students to respect themselves,

develop positive relationships with others and work towards their personal and academic goals. It can also help them maintain a sense of confidence and purpose when facing difficulties or setbacks.

5.0 Educational Significance of Self-Awareness

Self-awareness has an important place in the educational and personal development of college students. The educational significance of self-awareness can be understood through the following areas.

Self-Awareness and Academic Achievement: Being aware of their own strengths and weaknesses can help students understand where they are doing well and where they need further improvement. This awareness allows them to identify subjects or areas that require additional attention and choose suitable ways to improve their performance. It can also help students set realistic academic goals, keep track of their progress and adjust their learning strategies when necessary (He et al., 2024; Dignath et al., 2021).

Self-Awareness and Learning Motivation: When students have a clear understanding of their interests, abilities and goals, they may have a better idea of what they want to achieve through education. This clarity can give greater meaning to their learning and encourage them to remain focused on their goals. Self-awareness can also help students identify personal or situational factors that affect their motivation and find ways to deal with them (Bindawala & Mahato, 2023; Chang, 2017).

Self-Awareness and Classroom Participation: A better understanding of their own abilities can encourage students to take a more active role in classroom activities. Students who feel comfortable with their abilities may be more willing to ask questions, express their views, participate in discussions and work with others during group activities (Dignath et al., 2021).

Self-Awareness and Emotional Well-Being: College life can bring different emotional experiences, including stress, anxiety, frustration and uncertainty. Self-awareness helps students recognize what they are feeling and consider the possible reasons behind those feelings. Understanding their emotional responses can help them deal with difficult situations more appropriately and maintain greater emotional balance (Goleman, 1995).

Self-Awareness and Decision-Making: Self-awareness can also influence the way students make decisions. When students understand their values, interests, abilities and goals, they can take these factors into account when making choices related to their studies, personal lives and future careers (Xu et al., 2025). This understanding can also encourage them to think about the possible consequences of their choices and take greater responsibility for their decisions.

Self-Awareness and Career Development: Understanding oneself is an important part of planning for a future career. By reflecting on their interests, skills, abilities, values and limitations, students can develop a clearer idea of the types of work or career paths that may suit them. Self-awareness can also help them identify areas where additional knowledge or skills are needed and encourage them to work towards developing these abilities before entering professional life.

Self-Awareness and Interpersonal Relationships: The way students understand their own emotions and behaviour can influence their relationships with others. When they recognize how

their words, actions and emotional responses affect people around them, they may be better able to communicate, cooperate and respond with empathy. This can contribute to more positive relationships with teachers, classmates, friends, and other members of society (Soubramanian, 2024).

Self-Awareness and Responsible Behaviour: Self-awareness encourages students to reflect on their actions and consider their possible consequences. Rather than reacting immediately to a situation, they can learn to think about their choices and take responsibility for the outcomes. In this way, self-awareness can contribute to the development of discipline, responsibility, ethical behaviour and respect for others.

6.0 Role of Educational Institutions in Developing Self-Awareness

Educational institutions have an important role to play in helping college students develop self-awareness. The following measures can be adopted to encourage the development of self-awareness among college students.

Incorporating Life Skills Education into the Curriculum: Life skills education can be integrated into the college curriculum to provide students with opportunities to develop self-awareness along with their academic knowledge. Topics such as understanding oneself, managing emotions, communication, decision-making and problem-solving can be introduced through classroom discussions, activities, and practical exercises. Regular exposure to these areas can help students understand themselves better and learn how to respond to different situations in everyday life (WHO, 1997).

Providing Counselling and Guidance Services: Counselling and guidance services can provide students with a safe and supportive space to discuss their personal, academic and career-related concerns. Counsellors can help students reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, interests, goals and difficulties. Such support can also help students understand their needs more clearly and make informed decisions about their education and future careers (Soares et al., 2022).

Organising Workshops and Awareness Programmes: Colleges can conduct workshops, seminars, and awareness programmes focusing on self-awareness and personal development. Activities related to personality development, emotional awareness, stress management and career planning can encourage students to reflect on their abilities, interests, emotions and future goals. These programmes can provide students with practical opportunities to understand themselves beyond the regular classroom setting (Cochrane, 2021).

Encouraging Reflective Learning Activities: Students can be encouraged to reflect regularly on their learning and personal experiences. Maintaining learning journals, writing self-reflections, setting personal goals and reviewing their progress are some activities that can promote this process. Such practices give students an opportunity to think about their thoughts, feelings, actions, strengths and areas where they need further development.

Promoting Group Discussions and Collaborative Activities: Group discussions and collaborative learning activities allow students to express their ideas while listening to different perspectives. Interaction with classmates can help students become more aware of their

communication style, attitudes, and behaviour. Working with others can also encourage empathy, cooperation, patience and respect for different viewpoints (Soria et al., 2025).

Providing Opportunities for Leadership and Co-curricular Activities: Activities such as debates, cultural programmes, sports, student clubs, community activities and student leadership can help students explore their interests and recognize their strengths. Taking responsibility in such activities can also contribute to confidence, decision-making, teamwork, and a sense of responsibility (Nugroho et al., 2026).

Creating a Supportive and Inclusive Learning Environment: A supportive college environment can make it easier for students to express their thoughts, feelings, concerns and ideas without fear of discrimination or unnecessary judgment. Teachers and institutional authorities can contribute by promoting respect, equality, cooperation and open communication. Positive relationships between teachers and students can create a sense of safety and belonging, allowing students to explore their abilities and develop their potential more freely (Griffiths et al., 2021).

7.0 Strategies for Developing Self-Awareness among College Students

Self-awareness does not develop automatically; it grows through regular reflection, experience, interaction with others and opportunities for personal development. The following strategies can be used to promote self-awareness among college students.

Self-Reflection and Reflective Journaling: Students can be encouraged to spend some time reflecting on their experiences, thoughts, feelings, actions, and achievements. Keeping a reflective journal provides an opportunity to record important experiences and think about what they have learned from them. This practice can help students recognize patterns in their behaviour, understand their emotional responses and identify both their strengths and areas that require improvement (Ho & Lau, 2025).

Self-Assessment Activities: Self-assessment gives students an opportunity to look closely at their own abilities, interests, strengths, weaknesses, values, and learning needs. Questionnaires, checklists, inventories, and other personal development activities can be used to encourage this process. The information gained through such activities can help students recognize areas in which they are confident as well as those where further development may be needed.

Feedback from Teachers and Peers: Feedback from teachers and peers can provide students with perspectives that they may not always notice themselves. Constructive and specific feedback can help students understand how their behaviour, communication and academic performance are viewed by others. Positive feedback can reinforce existing strengths, while appropriate suggestions can help students recognize areas that need improvement and make useful changes in their learning and behaviour.

Group Discussion and Role-Playing: Group discussions provide students with opportunities to express their ideas and listen to the experiences and opinions of others. Exposure to different viewpoints can encourage students to reconsider their own thoughts and attitudes (Zhao et al., 2025). Role-playing activities can take this learning further by allowing students to experience

different situations and reflect on their feelings, reactions and ways of communicating. Such activities can strengthen self-understanding while also developing interpersonal skills.

Counselling and Mentoring: Counselling and mentoring can provide students with individual guidance when they are dealing with personal, academic or career-related concerns. Teachers, mentors and counsellors can encourage students to reflect on their abilities, interests, goals and difficulties and help them consider possible ways forward. Regular guidance can give students greater clarity about themselves and support them in making thoughtful decisions (Rosenberg, 1965).

Mindfulness and Emotional-Awareness Activities: Mindfulness encourages students to pay attention to their present thoughts, feelings, and experiences rather than reacting to them immediately. Simple practices such as mindful breathing, meditation, and emotional-awareness exercises can help students notice and understand their emotions. With regular practice, students may become better able to respond to emotional situations calmly and appropriately, supporting greater emotional awareness and self-control (Goleman, 1995).

Goal-Setting Exercises: Students can be encouraged to establish realistic goals related to their academic performance, personal development, and future careers. To do this effectively, they need to consider their present abilities, recognize areas that require improvement, and monitor their progress over time. The process of setting and reviewing goals can help students understand to organize their priorities and take greater responsibility for their own development (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Experiential and Activity-Based Learning: Learning through direct experience can provide students with valuable opportunities to discover more about themselves. Projects, presentations, fieldwork, community-based activities, internships and problem-solving tasks allow students to apply their knowledge in real or practical situations. Through these experiences, students can discover interests and abilities that may not become apparent through classroom learning alone. They can also recognize areas where they need to gain further knowledge or develop new skills.

8.0 Challenges in Developing Self-Awareness

Students may have limited opportunities to reflect on themselves, understand their emotions, recognize their abilities, and think about their personal and future goals. Some of the major challenges are discussed below.

Limited Attention to Life Skills in Formal Education: Higher education often places considerable emphasis on academic subjects, examinations, grades and completion of the prescribed curriculum. In such an environment, life skills such as self-awareness, emotional management, communication and decision-making may receive less attention. As a result, students may have fewer structured opportunities to develop these skills alongside their academic knowledge (WHO, 1997).

Excessive Focus on Academic Achievement: The pressure to obtain good marks and perform well in examinations can occupy much of a student's time and attention. When academic achievement becomes the primary concern, students may have fewer opportunities to reflect on

their personal development. They may pay less attention to understanding their emotions, interests, strengths and weaknesses, even though these areas are important for their overall growth (Zhao et al., 2025).

Lack of Trained Teachers and Counsellors: Teachers and counsellors can play an important role in helping students develop self-awareness. However, not all educational institutions have sufficient numbers of professionals with appropriate training in counselling, life skills education or personal development. Students may not receive regular guidance to explore their concerns, abilities, emotions and future goals.

Limited Time for Life Skills Activities: College curricula can be demanding and both teachers and students often have to manage a considerable number of academic responsibilities. Consequently, there may be limited time for activities such as workshops, counselling sessions, reflective exercises, group discussions and other life skills programmes (Lui et al., 2024).

Students' Hesitation to Discuss Personal Issues: Not every student feels comfortable sharing personal concerns with teachers, counsellors or other people. Some may hesitate to talk about their emotions, weaknesses, family circumstances, academic difficulties or career-related concerns because they fear being judged or misunderstood. Concerns about privacy and confidentiality may also discourage students from seeking support. Such hesitation can reduce opportunities for reflection and personal guidance (UNESCO, 2025).

Inadequate Institutional Support: Developing self-awareness requires more than occasional activities; it benefits from a supportive institutional environment and continued opportunities for students to reflect and seek guidance. A shortage of counselling facilities, trained staff, appropriate programmes or other necessary resources can make this difficult. Without adequate institutional support, self-awareness activities may remain occasional rather than becoming a regular part of student development (Ho & Lau, 2025).

Lack of Awareness about the Importance of Self-Awareness: Some students may not fully recognize how self-awareness can influence their academic performance, relationships, emotional well-being, decision-making and future professional life. Awareness programmes and student-oriented activities can therefore help learners understand the practical value of self-awareness and encourage them to work consciously on developing this life skill (Nugroho et al., 2026).

9.0 Recommendations

Based on the educational importance of self-awareness and the challenges that may affect its development, several measures can be considered to support college students in developing this life skill.

Integration of Life Skills Education into Higher Education: Life skills education can be made a meaningful part of higher education. Areas such as self-awareness, communication, decision-making, problem-solving, emotional management and interpersonal skills can be included in relevant courses and classroom or co-curricular activities. Providing regular opportunities to learn and practise these skills can help students apply them in their everyday lives (WHO, 2020).

Regular Self-Awareness Programmes: Colleges can organize regular programmes focusing on self-awareness and personal development. Workshops, seminars, awareness programmes and interactive sessions can give students opportunities to reflect on their emotions, strengths, weaknesses, interests, values and future goals.

Training for Teachers: Teachers can be provided with appropriate training in life skills education, communication, counselling and student development. Such preparation can help teachers understand the different needs of students and provide appropriate guidance when required (Xie et al., 2024).

Strengthening Counselling and Mentoring Facilities: Colleges can strengthen their counselling and mentoring services so that students have easy access to appropriate support. Trained counsellors and mentors can assist students with academic, personal, emotional and career-related concerns. Counselling services that are accessible, confidential and supportive may make students more comfortable discussing their difficulties and seeking guidance when needed (UNESCO, 2025).

Encouraging Reflective and Experiential Activities: Students can be given more opportunities to learn through reflection and direct experience. Activities such as reflective journaling, self-assessment, group discussions, role-playing, projects, fieldwork and community-based activities can help students discover their abilities, interests, emotions and patterns of behaviour. Such experiences can provide practical situations in which students can learn more about themselves (Ho & Lau, 2025).

Connecting Self-Awareness with Academic, Personal, and Career Development: Self-awareness can be linked with students' academic planning, personal growth and career development. Students can be encouraged to consider their strengths, interests, values, abilities and areas requiring improvement when setting academic and career goals (Soria et al., 2025).

10.0 Conclusion

Self-awareness is an important life skill that enables college students to develop a better understanding of their thoughts, feelings, strengths, weaknesses, interests, values, abilities and behaviour. When students understand themselves more clearly, they can recognize both their capabilities and the areas in which they need to improve. This awareness can support better decision-making, emotional management, confidence, relationships and responses to everyday challenges. The importance of self-awareness extends across different areas of student life. It can contribute to learning motivation, goal-setting, decision-making, communication, emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships and career planning. A student who has a clearer understanding of personal abilities and limitations may be better prepared to respond to academic demands, personal difficulties, social situations and future professional responsibilities. Higher education institutions therefore have an important role in creating opportunities for students to develop self-awareness. Life skills education, counselling and mentoring, reflective activities, group discussions, experiential learning and a supportive learning environment can all contribute to this process. These opportunities can help students look beyond academic achievement and pay greater attention to their personal and social development.

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