

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) in India

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ABSTRACT

“When educating the minds of the youth, we must not forget to educate their hearts”

- Dalai Lama

Education is a process-oriented system which continuously reinvents to align its path towards the goal of mediating evolution. The pedagogy of education is a progression of igniting a combination of cognitive, behavioural and emotional development among children. Based on well-established theories, the relationship between social-emotional functioning and cognitive outcomes implies that the development of better interpersonal, intrapersonal and emotional skills among children can improve academic outcomes. Contextualising in this background, PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) is a curriculum based on the ABCD (Affective-Behavioural-Cognitive-Dynamic) model, designed to be used with children between Kindergarten and Grade 5. With an aim to improve social-emotional functioning along with neurocognitive functioning, PATHS caters to access and enhance five core domains, which include, self-control, emotional understanding, positive self-esteem, relationships and interpersonal problem-solving skills. The model was primarily developed and employed in the western context. However, evidence-based studies conducted in developing countries like Croatia, Turkey and Pakistan have proven the effectiveness of various cultural adaptations of this curriculum. In this context, the current paper aims to examine the efficacy of PATHS as a facilitator of social-emotional learning among children and proposes its adoption in the Indian context. The concept of ‘Alternative Education’ for holistic development of children has been prevalent in India since time immemorial. However, the inclusion of the alternative vision and possibilities as a system of mainstream education is yet to find light. In such a context, the PATHS model can be a bridging factor which requires to be incorporated in the already established formal education system. Thus, research directed towards the implementation of programmes such as PATHS in the Indian schooling system can aid in empowering education and enhancing the learning experiences of children.

Keywords: PATHS, Education, Social-emotional learning

The academic world in the 21st century is not limited to merely achieving adequate performance on tests but aims at preparing students for dealing with the real world which requires them to look beyond cognitive competence. There has been a major

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shift in focus from obtaining good grades to all round development involving social and emotional skills which in turn is said to positively influence academic outcomes as well as mental health outcomes (Merrell & Gueldner, 2010; Butzer et al., 2016). There is growing research on the importance of developing emotional and social competence in children. In this context, a related concept which has been increasingly gaining importance since the publication of Daniel Goleman's (1995) 'Emotional Intelligence' is 'social emotional learning (SEL)' (Merrell & Gueldner, 2010). SEL is defined as "implementing practices and policies that help children and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that can enhance personal development, establish satisfying interpersonal relationships, and lead to effective and ethical work and productivity. These include the competencies to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show care and concern for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (Weissberg et al., 2015).

The relationship between emotions and cognition can be explained through neurological correlates. Emotional states affect the attention span, sensory abilities as well as the comprehension and understanding abilities of an individual. This correlation can be tied to the fact that areas of the brain responsible for emotional functioning are interwoven with those involved in cognitive learning (Goleman, 2004). Amongst various factors like biculturalism, race and socio-economic conditions that influence the academic achievement of students, social-emotional competence acts as a protective factor and also enhances the learning experience (Chain et al., 2017). Currently, there are a number of evidence-based SEL programs implemented across the world, all leading to various positive outcomes such as reduction in risk of delinquency and child abuse, constructive conflict resolution and positive inter-group relations, improved behaviours, mental state, health and performance (Butzer et al., 2016; Aber et al., 1996; Maurer & Brackett, 2004). Thus, SEL programs are not limited only to those students with special or more intense mental health needs, but proves to be an effective way to provide mental health services to all students in the classroom setting (Merrell & Gueldner, 2010).

SEL programmes are implemented with the objective of equipping students with core competencies in five key areas including self-management (the ability to manage and regulate emotions, including stress), self-awareness (the ability to recognise emotions and be aware of their impact on behaviour), social awareness (appreciating the perspectives of others), relationship skills (establishing and maintaining positive relationships) and responsible decision making (the ability to make positive choices about personal behaviour and social interactions) (CASEL, 2014). The efficacy of SEL programs is directly dependent on the supportive and nurturing environments provided by the school (Greenberg, Kusché & Riggs, 2004). This steers the discussion to an understanding of the schooling system prevalent in India.

The Indian schooling system

The pedagogy of education in India traces its history back to the age of Gurukul system where the quest for knowledge steered students towards a proficient 'Guru' to satisfy their pursuit (Dubey, 1981). This form of education aimed at holistic development of personality through a combination of the knowledge of specific subjects and learning a way of life. From the 'gurukul' system in ancient times to contemporary times, the fundamental nature of the Indian schooling system has undergone drastic changes. Though the present system of education is said to be the outcome of years of colonization (Kumar, 1991), over the years, learning has evolved in such magnitude that the country has embraced newer technologies in education at a rapid

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stride. Another significant characteristic of the Indian education system is its multilingual. Therefore India being home to almost 800 languages (Seetharaman, 2017), has also resulted in the Indian education system being multilingual where each state, apart from having English medium schools, also has educational institutions with regional languages as the medium of instruction.

But, owing to the diversity of the Indian population, the nature of the overall education system is such that it creates huge gaps in the quality and access to education due to various factors such as difficult geographical terrain, gender and socioeconomic status playing a major role (Cheney, Ruzzi & Muralidharan, 2005). Another significant concern of the Indian education system is the high student-teacher ratio (Srivastava, 2015). The Indian education system is also characterised by high levels of academic stress and pressure to excel which leads to anxiety and other mental health issues among students (Deb, Strodl & Sun, 2015). Yet, the core nature of the Indian schooling system still remains to be text-book and exam-oriented (Deb, Strodl & Sun, 2015) with little focus on other aspects of development.

Being in a competitive world, all round development of children should be at the heart of education as it is valuable in terms of preparing the students to better cope with the various aspects of the outside world. In this context, the present paper aims to explore the efficacy and feasibility of implementing the PATHS model in the Indian education system. The effort is to understand the need for a curriculum like PATHS to be integrated in a role complementary to the existing system of formal education. The paper also discusses the implications and possible challenges that could have to be addressed in the course of consideration of the model.

METHODOLOGY

The study is a systematic review of research relating to the use of the PATHS curriculum, primarily but not limited to pre-schoolers. Studies pertaining to the implementation of the PATHS curriculum in various countries and cultural contexts have been reviewed.

Research questions and search terms

The review questions include (a) what is the efficacy of the PATHS curriculum? and (b) Can the PATHS curriculum be effectively adopted in the Indian settings? The search terms used for finding the literature were PATHS curriculum, PATHS curriculum adaptations, PATHS curriculum in countries, preschool PATHS, social-emotional learning.

Search Strategy

The current study analyses papers obtained through online databases such as Google Scholar, Research Gate, Springer, Sage and EBSCOhost. The selection of studies focused on the implementation of the PATHS programs in various countries, the methods used and the results obtained. Studies mentioned highlight the conceptual and theoretical framework, efficacy, limitations and adaptations of the PATHS curriculum. It was found that more research has been conducted on PATHS in pre-school as compared to PATHS curriculum for grades 1 through 5. Thus, the review of literature presented in the current study is more focused on integration and implementation of PATHS for the preschool years of education.

RESULTS

This section highlights the findings of the various trials that have been conducted in different countries using the PATHS program.

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Table 1 Findings pertaining to the implementation of PATHS in various countries

Author & Year	Country	Methods	Results
Bilir Sehyan et al. (2017)	Turkey	Quasi-experimental (pre-test and post-test model) study on 285 children, 21 teachers in the intervention group (48-72 months) and 280 children, 20 teachers (48-72 months) in the comparison group.	Improvement was observed in the intervention group with respect to children's social-emotional skills, communication, interpersonal relationship skills and emotion regulation. Higher levels of prosocial behaviour, compliance, problem-solving and positive feelings were observed in the same group.
Humphrey et al. (2016)	England	Randomised control trial on 4516 children (7-9 years) was conducted over a period of two years.	The study reported mixed results with respect to the efficacy of PATHS suggesting that the intervention may not be as effective when implemented outside the country of origin.
Mihic et al. (2016)	Croatia	Post-intervention results involving behaviour ratings given by teachers of 164 preschool children were analysed after implementing the translated version the original PATHS curriculum.	The curriculum was found to improve prosocial behaviour, emotion regulation, emotional symptoms, problems related with peers, relational aggression, conduct problems, and hyperactive-impulsive behaviour.
Hughes & Cline (2015)	United Kingdom	Pretest-Posttest study on 3 groups (67 preschool children) was conducted. Group 1 was the control group, an adapted version of PATHS was implemented on group 2 and the full version on group 3. Data was collected using assessments and behaviour rating scales.	Implementation of the full version of the PATHS curriculum led to the reduction in problem behaviour, better emotional knowledge, attentional skills, and prosocial behaviour. Groups 1 and 2 showed no significant improvements.
Inam, Tariq & Zanam (2014)	Pakistan	Two-phased study including cultural adaptation of PATHS using heuristic model and initial try-out in phase 1 and pilot testing of outcome measures in phase 2.	The study revealed that the content and core components of the PATHS curriculum are universal in nature. Kusche Emotion Inventory, Social Competence Scale-Teacher (SCS-T) and Child Behaviour Checklist, CBCL (11/2-5)-CTRF were found to be appropriate outcome measures to study the influence of the

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Author & Year	Country	Methods	Results
			PATHS curriculum.
Arda & Ocak (2012)	Turkey	Pretest-posttest control group design on a sample of 99 children aged 6 (52-intervention group; 48-control group). Inventories, scales, behaviours ratings and observation served as tools for data collection.	Results reveals no significant improvement in the knowledge of emotions. Improvements were found in level of children's compliance, cooperation, problem solving, feeling expression, the level of teachers' discipline strategies, emotional support, problem solving, and preventing misbehaviour.
Kam, Wong & Fung (2011)	Hong Kong	An abbreviated and translated PATHS intervention was implemented for a duration of four months on 316 first grade students. Questionnaires and behaviour rating scales were used for the collection of data.	PATHS intervention was found to have shown significant improvement in emotion understanding, emotion regulation and prosocial behaviour among Chinese students
Ross et al. (2011)	Ireland	The Irish version of the PATHS curriculum 'Together 4 All' (T4A) was implemented across 12 primary school for a duration of 3 years in a randomised experimental trial. Data was collected using rating scales, observation and interviews.	Positive results relating to recognition and expression of feelings by students, prosocial behaviour, mutual respect and understanding.
Kelly et al. (2004)	United Kingdom	Action research on one class of 25 children (9-10 years), including 7 target children with emotional and behavioural difficulties Exploratory qualitative analysis was also done.	The PATHS model was found to be effective in improving vocabulary related to emotions and also led to an increased recognition of emotional cues, understanding of one's own as well as others' emotions, which led to an increase in their control and management of emotions. The 7 target children showed positive improvements in different areas of difficulty.

As evidenced by the review of literature, the PATHS program has been implemented in developing as well as in developed countries. The efficacy of the program, the cultural

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modifications required as well as the challenges have been highlighted through various experimental studies conducted in countries across the globe. The studies discussed in the current paper have highlighted the various behavioural, emotional and developmental outcomes of implementing the PATHS curriculum. Some discrepancy is seen in the efficacy of the curriculum with respect to its adaptations in different countries or cultures. While some research shows that the components in the program are universal (Inam, Tariq & Zanam, 2014), other research suggests that it may not be implemented in different cultural contexts (Humphrey et al., 2016). This discrepancy might imply that the effectiveness of the curriculum depends on how well it is adapted to fit the culture and language of the particular region which might prove to be a challenging task.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

PATHS as a Curriculum of Socio - Emotional Learning (SEL)

“SEL programming builds children’s skills to recognize and manage their emotions, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish positive goals, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations” (Greenberg et al., 2003). This is materialised through developmentally appropriate classroom instruction and application of learning to everyday situations. Based on the ABCD (Affective-Behavioural-Cognitive-Dynamic) model of development, Eco-behavioural systems model, Psychoanalytic theory and concepts relating to neurobiology and brain organization such as vertical control and horizontal communication, the PATHS curriculum, takes on a holistic approach focusing on cognition, affect and behaviour (Greenberg, Kushé & Riggs, 2004).

PATHS can be implemented as a complementary course in special or mainstream schooling (Kushé & Greenberg, 1994) with an aim to improve the social-emotional functioning, specific neurocognitive functioning and academic functioning of preschool children and children from grade 1 through 5. The entire PATHS module covers four conceptual units spread across six volumes (Greenberg, Kushé & Riggs, 2004; Kelly et al., 2004). One volume covers Readiness and Self Control, three volumes cover Feelings and Relationships, one covers Problem Solving and another covers Supplementary lessons.

The training period for teachers is usually 2 days (Inam, Tariq & Zaman, 2014). Teachers and children alike have reported having positive experiences with the PATHS curriculum in terms of subjective experiences as well as outcomes. Teachers have found the structured curriculum to be useful and easily applicable whereas students have reported to have found PATHS homework and activities more enjoyable than regular homework (Kelly et al., 2014). Most studies examining the effectiveness of the PATHS curriculum have concluded with positive outcomes except one wherein results indicated no statistically significant positive effects (Berry et al., 2015). With immense focus on social problem solving, PATHS has been found to be beneficial in reducing aggressive behaviour and conduct problems among elementary school children over a two-year period (Crean & Johnson, 2013). Apart from the common findings regarding emotional and social skills, it has also been found to positively affect sustained attention and inhibitory control among pre-schoolers (Domitrovich, Cortes & Greenberg, 2007). Research also indicates a scope to develop abbreviated versions of the PATHS curriculum depending on the target behaviour and population (Gibson, Werner, & Sweeney, 2015).

Implementation of PATHS in the Indian Schooling System

According to UNICEF, the gross enrolment in pre-primary schools was 54% for males and 57% for females between 2010-2014 whereas the net attendance ratio for primary schools

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was 85% for males and 82% for females with an enrolment ratio of 95%. As of 2019, 19% of the population falls between the age group of 10-19 years (UNICEF Database) and 30.76% of the total population falls between the ages 0-14 years (United Nations Statistics Division). Indian students are heavily prone to experiencing academic stress, parental pressure and anxiety (Deb, Strode & Sun, 2015). The heavy prevalence of mental health and academic issues in India necessitates early intervention and tackling of the issue at the grass root level which can be undertaken by the implementation of social-emotional learning programs at schools. Considering the availability of research pertaining to the adaptation of PATHS in developing countries and its proven efficacy makes it a viable option to be applied in the Indian education system.

The six volumes of the PATHS model encompassing modules on Readiness and Self Control, Feelings and Relationships, Problem Solving and other Supplementary lessons can be integrated with the pre-school curriculum in the form of activities. This can be materialised in broadly five stages. The first stage of execution requires orienting and training teachers in the PATHS model followed by designing an integrated curriculum. The next stage would involve meticulously executing the modules at a central level thereby maintaining uniformity followed by reviewing and monitoring the progress and ensuring appropriate execution of the program. The most crucial and probably most challenging step would be that of implementing behavioural interventions to change the mindset of academia about the notion of education.

Implications and Possible Challenges

The plausible effectiveness of the PATHS model, upon implementation in the Indian education system may be discussed at three broad levels: Intrapersonal (Individual), Interpersonal and Societal domains of functioning. At an individual level, integrating PATHS in the mainstream education system of India can help in fostering better learning outcomes both at a cognitive as well as emotional parallel. In addition to enhanced academic achievement, students can be intellectually and emotionally better equipped to tackle real world problems in the increasingly complex world. This would reflect in positive outcomes at an interpersonal level, in terms of enhanced student-teacher cooperation, healthy peer relations and prosocial behaviour thereby making school a fun-learning experience rather than stressful and burdensome which has further implications on the overall mental health of students, teachers as well as parents.

Further, children are said to be the building blocks of society. The positive outcomes of the PATHS curriculum on the individual may reinforce the entire system, thus benefiting the societal construct too. The nation can thus thrive with the support of an emotionally and intellectually adept youth, eventually improving the overall quality of education which can have further implications on increasing employability. Most importantly, PATHS model would be a medium of preparing educated youth with the core attribute of sensitivity in actions and reception which would be the finest evidence to the making of a tolerant society. However, an intervention such as the PATHS curriculum necessitates not just efforts by the academia (Kam, Greenberg, & Walls, 2003) but also requires a conducive school environment with support from policy makers and active participation of parents (Zins et al., 2004). In this regard, the tenable impediments in the execution of PATHS in the Indian context would mainly be focussed at resources and training.

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Financial Resources

Apart from the human resources required to have successful outcomes, financial resources need to be a major consideration in the implementation of such a program. In the U.S (The gold standard social-emotional learning curriculum), an entire PATHS module could cost between \$489-\$879 (approx. ₹35,000- ₹62,000) depending on the target grade whereas one study in the U.K (Berry et al., 2015) reported the average cost of PATHS to be £12,666 per school (approx. ₹12 Lacs) or £139 (approx. ₹ 87,000) per child. Drawing parallels in Indian context, the implementation of PATHS would require financial aid to be sponsored by various organisations/ agencies.

Efficient Translation for Adaptation

In order to be adapted in the entire Indian education system, the PATHS curriculum will have to be translated into various Indian languages and modify culturally irrelevant items if it is to be implemented at regional levels. In doing so, the main concern would be to maintain the validity of the content of the model in order to achieve the desired results which further necessitates extensive and efficient research.

Resources for Training

The program also requires special training for teachers which could be an obstacle due to the time and resources required for training and also resistance by teachers to adapt and incorporate a new system. In the Indian context, where the importance of social-emotional competence in an academic setting may not be well realised, not all educational institutes would be open to willingly embrace educational reforms.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

India, with its high population also records higher pupil-teacher ratios (Srivastava, 2015). In a highly dense classroom, teachers would face difficulty in providing equal attention to all students and less receptive students might be overlooked. Executing and managing the PATHS curriculum in a populated class will also pose as a challenge to the teacher.

Changing the Mindset

The conditioning of the people to a particular system of education may pose to be a major hurdle to the proposition of any change. For an effective implementation, there would be a need for quintessential efforts to be concentrated on working on the mindset of the educators, parents and all the people associated with the development of the children. Uncertainty in the efficacy of the model may cause rigidity in openness to experience which would further affect the execution of the PATHS model in India.

Suggestions for Further Research

It is suggested that a trial run of the PATHS curriculum be implemented at a small scale to investigate its efficacy in the Indian context keeping in mind the probable challenges while considering potential measures to overcome them. An undertaking of this kind can provide researchers, educators and policy makers with a better understanding of the concept which can lead to serious considerations regarding its long-term implementation in the Indian education system.

CONCLUSION

Education is a process-oriented system which continuously reinvents to align its path towards the goal of mediating evolution. The ignition of young minds is a combination of cognitive, behavioural and emotional development with a focus on social-emotional

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functioning. This Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) implied by the augmentation of interpersonal, intrapersonal and emotional skills has been found to positively influence academic outcomes among children. In this context, a model which has proven its efficacy at achieving a holistic advancement in various aspects of a child's life is PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies). A majority of literature reveals that the PATHS curriculum has significant positive behavioural outcomes for children such as reduction in aggressive behaviour, improved mechanisms of emotional expression, improved interpersonal relations and communication, active prosocial behaviour, increased compliance among many others. However, effectively adapting the curriculum in different cultures and countries can be a challenging task requiring a great amount of effort. Based on the successful adaptation of the PATHS model in various countries, this paper proposes the integration of this model complementary to the existing formal education system in India. While discussing the possible challenges in its execution, the nature of positive outcomes seems to outweigh the demands which shows a bright light in visualising the future.

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Conflict of Interest

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