



***EXPLORING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION EXPERIENCES THROUGH LIFE  
SKILLS EDUCATION PROGRAM DURING ADOLESCENCE IN MALDIVES***

**AISHATH NASHEEDA**

**FEM 2020 16**



**EXPLORING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION EXPERIENCES THROUGH LIFE  
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By

**AISHATH NASHEEDA**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**March 2020**

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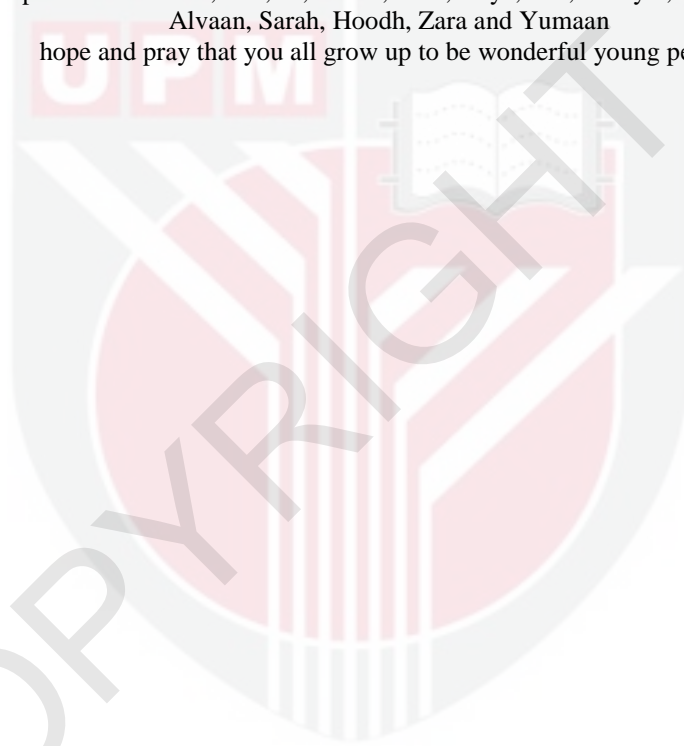


## DEDICATION

Shau and Al, two bravest and strongest young adults.  
This is your story, your journey.

Luyu for always being so supportive and patient,  
For being so mature and responsible, and simply the best 8 year old.  
Keep growing, my Love

My nephews and nieces; Zak, Ju, Nonni, Rafa, Kaya, Fau, Daniyal, Mannu, June,  
Alvaan, Sarah, Hoodh, Zara and Yumaan  
hope and pray that you all grow up to be wonderful young people.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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By

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**March 2020**

**Chairman : Associate Professor Haslinda bint Abdullah, PhD**  
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The main purpose of this study is to describe young adults' experiences of life skills education program during their adolescence. The study takes on a retrospective approach so that the respondents can reflect on their experiences of life skills education programs. Hence, the study investigates the social construction of the participants' experiences through a social psychology lens.

In order to explore the experiences of the participants, a narrative research methodology is adopted in understanding the participants' experiences in the program. Two participants' experiences were collected through semi-structured interviews. A multimethod restorying framework facilitated in transforming the interview transcripts into stories. The social constructivism in social psychology provides a theoretical basis for understanding how realities and views of the world are individual specific and created through social interactions within the individual social environment. Exploring how the participants have constructed their experience of LSE program through their feelings, thoughts and behaviour helped in understanding how the participants' interactions during the LSE program translated into meaningful skills in future.

Most of the described events evolved around their adolescence, their struggle, achievements and the life skills education program experiences in school. Both Shau and Al's stories reflected how their adolescence, life skills education experiences and their interactions with their families, schools and friends shaped their lives. The type of experiences that both participants had with the life skills education program were subjective in number of ways such as age of exposure, number of life skills programs, delivery method and also the social environment.

Findings of the research suggests that life skill approach is an important approach to transmitting knowledge, attitudes and skills to real life problem situations. However, it is the interactive experiences in the society and its people that shapes the individual's thinking, attitude and provides a sense of purpose in life.

This insight deepens the understanding of the life skills education program and helps in identifying the gaps in delivery of the program. It also signals that there are priorities and concerns regarding the future of LSE program in the Maldives. The study also has implications for stake holder and policy makers in designing, implementing and delivery of age appropriate structured LSE program from early on their adolescence.

As this is a process study the findings of the study helps in generating hypothesis for future research in life skills education. It is also important to conduct similar studies to collect stories not only from young adults, but also from high risk adolescents who are already exposed to drugs and smoking to better understand the issues related to them and also the level of transfer of skills in them. Mixed method studies can be conducted to evaluate the program effectiveness and to understand which skills are required most at different stages of individuals' life.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**MENEROKA PEMBENTUKAN PENGALAMAN SOSIAL MELALUI  
PROGRAM PENDIDIKAN KEMAHIRAN HIDUP SEMASA ALAM REMAJA  
DI MALDIVES**

Oleh

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**Pengerusi : Profesor Madya Haslinda binti Abdullah, PhD**  
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Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk memperihalkan pengalaman belia terhadap program pendidikan kemahiran hidup (KH) ketika mereka di zaman remaja. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan retrospektif agar responden dapat mengimbuu kembali pengalaman mereka dalam program pendidikan KH. Oleh itu, kajian ini mengenalpasti pengalaman pembentukan sosial peserta dari sudut pandang psikologi sosial.

Bagi meneroka pengalaman para peserta, kaedah metodologi kajian naratif diguna pakai untuk memahami pengalaman peserta dalam program ini. Pengalaman dua peserta dikumpulkan melalui temu bual separa berstruktur. Kerangka penceritaan semula pelbagai kaedah yang membantu dalam mengubah transkrip wawancara kepada cerita. Pembentukan-sosial dalam psikologi sosial memberikan asas teori untuk memahami bagaimana realiti dan pandangan dunia adalah spesifik kepada individu dan diperolehi melalui interaksi sosial dalam persekitaran sosial individu. Penerokaan tentang bagaimana para peserta membina pengalaman mereka mengenai program KH melalui perasaan, fikiran dan tingkah laku mereka membantu memahami bagaimana interaksi sewaktu mereka menjalani program tersebut diterjemahkan kepada kemahiran yang bermakna untuk masa depan mereka.

Kebanyakan peristiwa yang dijelaskan berlaku sekitar usia remaja mereka, perjuangan mereka, pencapaian dan pengalaman sewaktu mengikuti program pendidikan kemahiran hidup di sekolah. Kisah Shaun dan Al mencerminkan bagaimana remaja melalui pengalaman pendidikan KH dan interaksi mereka dengan keluarga, sekolah dan rakan membentuk kehidupan mereka. Jenis pengalaman yang dimiliki oleh kedua-dua peserta dengan program pendidikan KH adalah subjektif dalam beberapa sudut seperti usia, pendedahan, jumlah program kemahiran hidup, kaedah penyampaian dan juga keadaan persekitaran sosial.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa pendekatan KH adalah pendekatan penting untuk memindahkan ilmu, sikap dan kemahiran yang ada kepada penyelesaian permasalahan kehidupan sebenar. Walau bagaimanapun, pengalaman berinteraksi di dalam komuniti dan masyarakat yang berada di dalamnya adalah elemen penting yang membentuk pemikiran, sikap individu dan memberikan maksud serta tujuan dalam kehidupan.

Dapatan yang mendalam ini memberi pemahaman tentang program pendidikan KH dan membantu dalam mengenal pasti jurang dalam pelaksanaan program. Ini juga memberi isyarat bahawa terdapat keutamaan dan keperluan berkaitan masa depan program kemahiran hidup di Maldives. Kajian ini juga mempunyai implikasi bagi pemegang taruh dan pembuat dasar dalam merancang, menerapkan dan menyampaikan program KH secara berstruktur dan sesuai dengan usia sejak mereka di awal remaja.

Oleh kerana kajian ini ~~meliha~~ meneliti proses interaksi yang berlaku, dapatan kajian membantu dalam menghasilkan hipotesis untuk penyelidikan masa depan dalam pendidikan KH. Ia juga penting untuk melakukan kajian serupa untuk mengumpulkan cerita dalam kalangan kumpulan umur yang berbeza bukan sahaja dari orang dewasa muda, tetapi juga dari remaja berisiko tinggi yang sudah terdedah kepada dadah dan rokok untuk lebih memahami masalah yang berkaitan dan juga tahap pemindahan kemahiran yang berlaku. Kajian kaedah campuran boleh dilakukan untuk menilai keberkesanan program dan memahami kemahiran mana yang paling diperlukan pada tahap kehidupan individu yang berbeza.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

All praises and thanks to Allah (SWT) for granting me the strength and will to complete this task. Alhamdulillah for all the blessings and for everything in my life.

All the teachers who taught me in every phase of my life have enriched my educational experience. I wouldn't have come this far without their encouragement and guidance. My sincere gratitude to all my teachers and lecturers. I have learnt so much from each one of you.

My doctoral journey have been a meaningful learning experience all because of my supervisory committee. Associate Professor Dr. Haslinda Abdullah, Professor Abdul Lateef Abdullah and Associate Professor Dr. Nobaya Ahmad guided and significantly shaped the quality of my thesis. Undoubtedly, they are notable scholars in their areas and I felt extremely fortunate for sharing their knowledge, suggestions and taking time to review my work for which I will always be grateful. In addition, Dr. Haslinda being my primary supervisor took care of many of the administrative challenges I faced. She was extremely prompt in sorting out my issues, a leader in true form. Further, it was a privilege to have Professor Lateef, as the steering force for my research and production of journal articles. Your guidance in this journey had exemplified what a true academic should be like. Similarly, Dr. Nobaya for all your ideas to improve my study and most importantly for challenging my ideas so that I can learn and grow. It was truly a worthy experience.

Many other notable individuals have been one way or the other part of this journey. My parents, for always believing in me. Dad you have always supported my education unconditionally. Mum you are undoubtedly the most selfless person I have ever known. What you have taught me as a kid, as a teenager and as an adult does not measure up to any of the learning experiences but it is all because of what you have taught me, I am who I am today all because of you. A thank you would be an understatement for you.

To all my family members, for being there for me in every way you can. My mother-in-law for your support and encouragement. My sisters and brothers, my cousins, and most importantly to my nephews and nieces for simply being the best, for all the fun times. It was worth the time. I needed it to keep my sanity.

To my favorite aunt Kudoo, and family; Asimbe and Ihu for being so generous with your time, and unconditional support. You have always been the best. Thank you kudoo for your support, help and accommodating me. Thank you Ihu for helping me out in my work, especially for spending time with Luyu when I am so busy. She really enjoys your company. I don't have words to express how much I appreciate you all.

To the participants, Shau and Al, thank you for sharing your experiences and your story. I hope you learned and enjoyed sharing your journey to adulthood, as much as I did. Those were stories worth telling.

To Zee and Ianbe, Thank you for taking time and proof reading my work. You have been an important part of this journey.

To Imad Shan, my computer genius, how could I ever thank you. You have been my savior, at times when my laptop fails me. But you never, hesitate to come to my rescue. I know for sure, that heroes do not wear costumes and you are my hero. Thank you for all you have done, and for saving my work and helping me maintain a good laptop.

To Shaby, you have been a wonderful cousin, always willing to help even when you are so busy. I'm glad we had the chance to bond during this journey. I cannot express how grateful I am for the morning rides and the chitchats we had in the car. Those were conversations and memories I will always cherish.

To all my friends, who stood by me. Most importantly to Lirey, for your enthusiasm and for being eager to help in every way you possible can. I appreciate all that you have done for me. Thank you. To Nihan, for your unconditional support and for always going out of the way to help me in any way you can. To Nishwa for your continuous support and encouragement. To They and Sheex for always being happy for me, and supporting what I do. I cannot express my gratitude to you both. Sheez, for inspiring me, with your strength and positive attitude. Seeing you, fight the toughest battle any human being can ever fight, kept me going and to complete this thesis.

A huge thank you to Shifa for helping me find Shau. Thank you to Rafiu Jameel for finding Al for me. I so grateful to you both, for contributing to my research, AL and Shau are simply the best, participants. They are so generous with their time and their story. So thank you for all that you have done for me.

To all my UPM friends, Amira, Izza, Rosy, Putri for always being there for me. I am so glad I met you all. A huge thank you to Fathmath Haleem and Shanoo for their support and always having discussions on my favorite topic – research.

To my lovely daughter, Luyu, for always trying to be your best. You have been my biggest cheerleader and inspiration. Thank you for trying your best, being so obedient and understanding. For all the love and caring, for being so proud of me. I hope you learn to enjoy education as much as I do. I hope that you find your strength to pursue your dreams and not give up.

Finally, to my husband Mai, life has always been fun and enjoyable with you, so has this journey. Together we started our academic journey and to walk to the finish line together is a remarkable adventure. This journey has not only brought us closer, but it has also made us stronger. I cannot wait to close this chapter of our life and start the next one with you.



I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 13 March 2020 to conduct the final examination of Aishath Nasheeda on her thesis entitled "Exploring Social Construction Experiences through Life Skills Education Program during Adolescence in Maldives" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LSE	Life Skills Education
LSBE	Life Skills Based Education
WHO	World Health Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNSECO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the motivation of the study. The chapter focus on introducing the concepts of the study such as social construction, life skills education, adolescents' development and also highlights life skills education program in the Maldives. Further sections of the chapter present the research problem and the significance of the study, purpose, research questions, the scope and delimitations of the study.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Young people make sense of their behaviours within their social interactions and environment. Adolescents seek to rediscover their feelings, desires, ways of reasoning, and reactions to the internal and external situations. During adolescence the individual come to think of themselves and their social world. Research indicates that social life and social cognition in adolescence is an interesting period of growth for number of reasons (Brizio et al., 2015). Firstly, it is the phase that an individual finds him/herself facing the external world. It is the time that the individual develops diverse views, thoughts and emotions with the outer world, including; peers, friends, teachers and society at large (Crone & Dahl, 2012). Secondly, during this period adolescents not only progress through physical transitions but also progress through self-knowledge (Christie & Viner, 2005). Several studies, indicate the first onset of psychological problems are being reported during adolescence and early adulthood (Carlo et al., 1999; Griffith-Lendering et al., 2011). Furthermore, adolescence is described as a period of emotional imbalance, conflict with parents, identity crisis and alienation (Crone & Dahl, 2012).

There is a need to understand how adolescence think and behave in their social world in order to understand adolescence related issues. According to (Brickell, 2016) social constructionists argues that adolescence is a time of growth and adolescents behaviour is meaningful within their social interactions and context. As adolescents think about their social world and their thoughts become the basis of their behaviour. The goal of this research is to offer subjective meanings to young people's lived experiences formed through social interactions with others in the environment (Creswell, 2013). However, there is limited literature describing how adolescence make sense of their social world to understand adolescent behaviour (Brizio et al., 2015).

### 1.2 Life Skill Education (LSE)

In the context of adolescent development, mitigating risk factors through intervention and prevention strategies are known to protect young people from risky behaviours. Life skills education is aimed at promoting positive and comprehensive behavior in individuals (UNICEF, 2003). In order to ensure a holistic learning of life skills concepts,

the approaches adopted in the life skills education programs are completely interactive, with brain storming, role plays, group discussions, games, and other innovative teaching techniques (Peace Corps, 2001; WHO, 1997). In, life skills education programs individuals learn and practice psychosocial skills that can be accessible in tough situations such as peer pressure and abuse. The World Health Organization suggests life skills education programs need to target all children as a means to respond positively to health needs, rather than an intervention program for already at risk children and those with health related problems (WHO, 1997).

### 1.2.1 Life Skills Education Programs around the World

Due to its prominence, “life skills” became an essential component of international decelerations such as Dakar Framework for Action Education for All (EFA), UNGASS and the Convention for Rights of Children (Okech & Role, 2011; Onrust et al., 2016; UNESCO, 2000; WHO, 1997). According to UNICEF (2015) global evaluation of life skills education programs, 156 countries were conducting UNICEF supported life skill education activities, of which 145 countries had incorporated life skills into their primary and secondary school curricula. Furthermore, 70 countries have made life skills education a compulsory subject. The range of focus of different areas under which life skills education programs are conducted around the world echoes the country’s main concern. Table 1.1 illustrates the emphasized areas of life skills education programs as interventions.

**Table 1.1 : Focus Areas of LSE Intervention from 2007 Stocktaking**

Region	Main focus areas on life skills based education program
Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States	HIV and AIDS, the environment, health, hygiene, conflict, drugs, emergencies, rights, citizenship and others
East Asia and the Pacific Islands	Health, HIV and AIDS and drug use
Middle East and North Africa	HIV and AIDS, peace education gender
South Asia	Environment, peace-building, gender, reproductive health and rights, HIV and Aids and drug use
Americas and the Caribbean	HIV and AIDS, violence, gender
Western and Central Africa	HIV and AIDS, peace education gender

(Source : as stated in UNICEF, 2012)

With reference to the report of UNICEF’s global evaluation of life skills programs, it was observed that the life skills programs were used in multiple areas to promote positive development in adolescents (Jones & Lavallee, 2009; UNICEF, 2012). Countries like the United States of America, Germany, Mexico, South Africa and Greece have designed special life skills education programs such as Positive Adolescents Life Skills (PALS) (Tuttle et al., 2006a), A Team Against AIDS (Givaudan et al., 2007), Fit and Strong for Life, Lions Quest and IPSY to promote positive behavior towards smoking, drugs and

alcohol, HIV, AIDS, perception about sexual activities; contraception, and condom use (Marrow et al., 2010; Menrath et al., 2012). Study findings regarding effective intervention programs revealed that life skills education has been inculcated in sports programs like “GOAL” and “SUPER” to develop adolescents sense of personal control and self-confidence (Goudas et al., 2006; Goudas & Giannoudis, 2008; O’Hearn & Gatz, 1999).

While life skills programs are being conducted around the world, it is unclear from the studies which skills are needed by the adolescents (Jones & Lavallee, 2009). There is limited evidence to support the outcome of behavioral and attitude change as most life skills research (Botvin & Kantor, 2000; Huang et al., 2012; Mandel et al., 2006) emphasizes on program effectiveness both during and following their time with the program instead of learners’ experiences (Jones & Lavallee, 2009). Therefore, determining what knowledge, which skills have been acquired as a result of life skills education program is essential in healthy transition to adulthood.

### **1.2.2 Life Skills Education Programs in South Asia Region**

In South Asia, life skills education programs have been ongoing for number of years, mainly for street children, at risk adolescents and rural teenage girls and women (UNICEF, 2008). With the growing evidence that life skills education is a factor in both social and economic success for adolescents and youth (Wood et al., 2015; World Bank, 2014a). The popularity of life skills programs is rapidly growing and as a result life skills education is considered very important for secondary school students in south Asian countries (Sirohi & Singh, 2012; UNICEF, 2005).

In Bangladesh and Nepal the life skills education programs are integrated into existing curricula (UNICEF, 2010). However, in Pakistan and Bhutan life skills education programs are delivered through extracurricular activities. For example, around 11800 schools in Pakistan, have addressed adolescent related issues such as early pregnancy, puberty, use of contraceptives and HIV under life skills based education programs (Svanemyr et al., 2015). In India, life skills are delivered through a blended program under the Adolescent Education Program (AEP) (Sirohi & Singh, 2012). In Sri Lanka, life skills are taught in more than 6000 secondary schools (UNICEF, 2005) and was estimated to reach more than 120,000 students by the end of 2010. Likewise, in Nepal 16,851 adolescents and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 were given life skills training (Employment Fund, 2014).

Even though, life skills education programs are popular and regarded as effective in South Asia, limited documentation regarding coverage of life skills, as in number of schools that conducted life skills education (UNICEF, 2012) and number of students who received life skills education under any life skills education program or project (UNICEF, 2015). This information however, provides no indication regarding which life skills are considered necessary or effective for adolescents for them to cope successfully with the complex realities of life (Singh & Menon, 2015).



### 1.3 Adolescent Development

Adolescence is a transitional period from a child to an adult. The period of adolescence is between 10 and 19 years (UNICEF, 2011). During this period individuals progress through several transitions such as physical, cognitive, emotional and social (Christie & Viner, 2005). Adolescence is also a period of increase independence and growing social influence from peers, school and communities and thus adolescents engage in risk taking behaviours including, drugs and substance abuse. Studies reveal that early development of risky behaviour put adolescents at a greater risk of mental, physical and psychological problems (Kim, Oesterle, Catalano, & Hawkins, 2015).

Certain emotional, cognitive, behavioral and resilience skills plays a vital part in the development of adolescent's personal and social success (Langford & Badeau, 2015; McWhirter et al., 2007; WHO, 1993). For example, adolescents with emotional and behavioural skills contribute to satisfying relationships with family members and peer, enabling young people to deal with stressful situations and adversities in positive ways (Brownlee et al., 2013). Similarly, being equipped with psychosocial competencies helps in maintaining positive mental well-being. Children and adolescents with psychosocial skills are more likely to have positive self-esteem and self-efficacy (Savoji & Ganji, 2013; WHO, 1993). Research indicates that children and adolescents with psychosocial problems are prone to become victims of bullying, develop compulsive internet use, adopt poor eating habits, use tobacco and drugs when compared to adolescents with psychosocial competencies (Busch & De Leeuw, 2013). Embedded in the positive youth development philosophy, "life skills" has been considered as an important set of skills to deal with every day challenges and become productive in the community (Desai, 2010; Galagali, 2011; Goudas & Giannoudis, 2008). Life skills Education and training programs are utilized as an essential component in the development of young people through childhood, adolescence and the transition to adulthood (WHO, 2003).

Over the years, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have become the most prominent advocates of life skills education programs around the world. According to UNICEF life skills are psychosocial and interpersonal competencies that help people communicate, cope difficult situations that can facilitate them with healthy transition into adulthood (UNICEF, 2003). Additionally, in the recent years, life skills education programs have become part of intervention and prevention programs to promote positive behaviours such as refusal skills, smoking, alcohol, drug abuse (Griffin & Botvin, 2014; Weichold et al., 2016), HIV, AIDS, reproductive health (Minnis et al., 2014; Svanemyr et al., 2015), delinquency, aggression and bullying (Farrington et al., 2016).

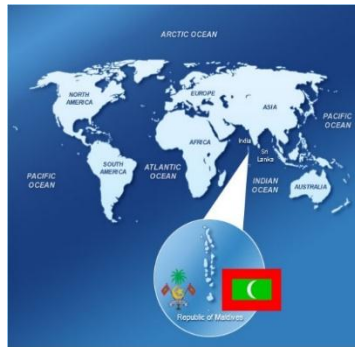
Several studies addressed the benefits of life skills education programs to adolescents. In these studies, significant improvement was found in different life skills dimensions; for example; self-esteem (Maryam et al., 2011; Vatankhah et al., 2014; Yadav & Iqbal, 2009), initiative, respect and leadership (Holt et al., 2008), interpersonal communication, relationship skills, physical fitness and health (Jegannathan et al., 2014) decision making, self-awareness, critical thinking, problem solving, and dealing with stress



(Parvathy & Pillai, 2015; Yadav & Iqbal, 2009). These studies describes life skills as adaptive behavior that brings positive change for an individual. Desai (2010); Khera and Khosla (2012), argue that adolescents who have greater competencies in life skills areas are believed to deal effectively with challenges in their life. Further studies on the value of life skills programs resulted in positive effects on risky and risk taking behaviors such as smoking (Botvin & Griffin, 2004; Menrath et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2004b), drug abuse (Botvin et al., 2001; Lillehoj et al., 2004), drinking, sexual behavior (Thompson et al., 2012), and mental health (Tuttle et al., 2006a). Pick, Givaduan, Sirkin & Ortega (2007), stated that life skills programs utilized as early interventions to develop communication skills can prevent risky sexual behaviors and positively influence the perception of norms and gender roles. Taken together, findings from the existing literature on life skills education highlight the specific competencies influence aspects of adolescent engagement (Arnett, 1997). An important research was to parse life skills education program from social psychological lens such as social learning theory on how knowledge is constructed, through thoughts and feelings and how ones' behaviour, belief and intentions influence interactions with others and influenced by their social environment and vice versa (Burr, 2003). Research on how young people translate their knowledge, attitude and skills in their everyday situations will be useful in development of intervention and prevention programs. It may also provide useful insight into existing intervention programs such as the life skills education program in understanding the skills that were useful during the transition to adulthood.

#### **1.4 The Maldives**

Maldives is the smallest nation state in Asia region and the United Nations classifies the Maldives as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS). SIDS is a grouping given to distinct countries with specific characteristics such as specific economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities (Asia Development Bank, 2015). The Maldives consists of 1190 islands, scattered across Indian Ocean of which 188 are inhabited (Asia Development Bank, 2015; National Bureau of Statistics, 2014) with an estimated area stretching over 800 kilometers in length and 130 kilometers wide. The total population of the Maldives is estimated at 407,660 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). The islands in the Maldives are small, with few longer than two square kilometers. Among the 188 islands, 36% of the islands have a population less than 1000 and 2% of the islands have a population of over 5000 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). The capital city, Male' estimated two square kilometers of land area is the most developed island of all (Asia Development Bank, 2015).



**Figure 1.1 : Location of the Maldives**  
(Source : <http://www.ticmv.com/maldives/>)

Despite the constraints and challenges arising from the size and geographical disparity of the islands, the Maldives achieved five out of the millennium goals (Department of National Planning, 2010). However, the problem of unequal population dispersal among the islands places huge challenges such as unemployment, underemployment, crime, violence, and abuse, access to high quality education and to reproductive and sexual health services for the young people (Asia Development Bank, 2015; Family Protection Authority, 2014; World Bank, 2014). Additional constraints arose with the development, globalization, modernization, level of education and exposure to the outside world as young people in the Maldives have become aware of opportunities they can aspired (World Bank, 2014b). As a result migration to the capital city, Male' for quality education and better opportunities has made the city one of the most densely populated city in the world with a population of 153,904 living in an estimated two square kilometers of land area (Ministry of Health, 2015; National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Figure 1.2 presents the Ariel view of Male'.



**Figure 1.2 : Ariel View of the Capital City Male'**  
(Source : <http://travelmaker.com.ua/222-maldivy-ot-420-evro-a-vdrug.html>)

The Maldives latest Population and Census report, 17.4 % (56,885) of the Maldivian population is aged from 10 to 19 years and 37% (20,930) of these adolescents live in the capital city Male' (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). According to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2014), there are 36,444 young adults between the age of 20 and 24 in the country, out of which 16,352 live in Male'. One of the main reason for dense population in the capital is the emphasis on quality education; many parents sending their children as young as seven years old, to Male' in the hope of giving them opportunity of a better future (Ministry of Education., 2008). This internal migration has contributed to a number of health and social problems, such as scarcity of land leading to congestion and poor living conditions, placing children and youth in danger of potential health and social risk-taking behavior such as smoking, substance abuse, drugs, violence and mental health problems (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2016; Ministry of Health, 2015).

#### **1.4.1 Challenges faced by Adolescents and Youth in the Maldives**

Literature points that children and youth living in the capital city, Male' and other populated islands in the Maldives are prone to crime and violence including bullying, discrimination and gender-based violence in schools, social settings and within their homes (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2016; World Bank, 2014b). The first empirical evidence regarding the realities of domestic violence in Maldives reveals that 14% girls between 14 and 17 years have been victims of sexual abuse at least once in their lifetime (Fulu, 2007). The baseline survey of Maldivian youth health and wellbeing reveals that young people's exposure to drugs has been on the raise (Ministry of Health, 2016). For example, in 2000 it was reported that the mean age of the onset of drug use was 17 years (WHO, 2000). However, seven years later the average age of drug initiation was reported as 14 years (Fazeela, 2007). According to World Bank (2014b), in a field based survey in the Maldives, out of the 47% of young people interviewed the highest portion of drug users are between 15 and 19 years and reside in the capital city Male'. A recent study conducted regarding bullying and mental health among 460 adolescents aged 11 to 16 years revealed that 80% of them have been targets to physical, verbal and relational/social bullying. Among these adolescents, mental health issues such as depression, loss of emotional control and low positive affect were prominent (Aishath Nasheeda et al., 2016). Sadly, inadequate rehabilitation services and stigma associated with these issues makes it more challenging for young people to integrate into the society, placing these adolescents' psychological wellbeing at risk (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2016; Naaz, 2012). Thus, the rapid increase in the number of adolescents involved in violence and crime in the capital Male' strongly suggest that the problems needs to be addressed.

The government, parents and other stakeholders have recognized that majority of the adolescents and youth of the country is at risk of becoming unproductive. Many people are unaware of the importance of social and emotional learning, which facilitates development of skills, attitudes and values for social and emotional development. To address adolescents' social and mental health issues, the National Health Master Plan was launched.

## 1.4.2 The Life Skills Education Program in the Maldives

The Health Master Plan of the Maldives placed high emphasis on skill building and behavior change programs for different target groups; these included adolescents and youth on violence, reproductive health, drug abuse and mental health and life skills education through schools and informal systems (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2016). In 2003, Ministry of Education of the Maldives initiated the skills education program with the help of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), focusing on secondary schools students and children out of school (UNICEF, 2015). The program focused on topics relating to adolescents' issues. As a result, four different age appropriate life skills manuals (known as life skills packs) were developed and teachers were trained to implement the life skill education program (Munsi & Guha, 2014). Table 1.1 illustrates the life skills focus areas in each pack, each including a number of different sessions (15 on average). Per sessions was 60 minutes duration (UNICEF, 2015). Since then, LSE programs are being conducted in a number of schools of the Maldives particularly in the capital city Male'.

**Table 1.2 : Life Skills Packages and Its Content**

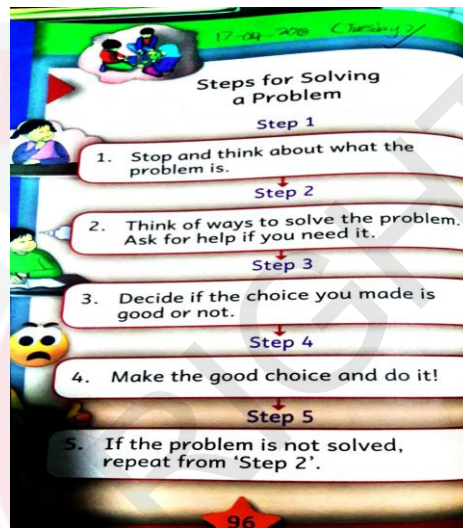
<b>Package</b>	<b>Target grades &amp; age group</b>	<b>Main focus of life skills</b>
Pack 1	Grades 6& 7 (12-13 years)	Communication, Assertiveness, self-esteem, Values, Self-awareness, Relationship, Decision Making, Peer Pressure, Anger, Conflict Resolutions, Child abuse, Media Influence
Pack 2	Grades 8 & 9 (14-15 years)	Communication, Assertiveness, Values, Self-esteem, Self-awareness, Body Image, Relationship, Decision Making, Peer Pressure, Anger, Stress, Conflict Resolution, Media Influence, Gender and Sex, HIV/AIDS
Pack 3	Grade 11&12 group (16 to 18)	Communication, Assertiveness, Peer Pressure, Conflict Resolution, Media Influence, Gender Roles, Anger Management, Starting a family, Conception and Pregnancy, Contraception, STIs, Use of Condoms, Responsible parenthood, Domestic Violence and abuse, becoming Organized
Pack 4	Out of school group (16+)	Communication, Assertiveness, Self-Awareness, Values, Relationship, Decision Making, Peer Pressure, Stress, Conflict Resolution, Media Influence, Anger Management, Starting a Family, Conception and Pregnancy, STIs, Responsible Parenthood, Domestic Violence and Abuse, Pregnancy and Contraception

(Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2016)

In 2008, a review recommended the need for integrating life skills into existing curriculum. Hence, aspects of life skills were integrated into the new national curriculum with the support of UNICEF to ensure all students in Maldivian schools received



knowledge and skills to develop their personal, interpersonal and social competencies (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2016; UNICEF, 2015). The content analysis of the new school curriculum (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2016), reveals that the topics allocated as life skills were mainly discussed in specific lessons within existing subjects such as Islamic Studies, Science, Social Studies, Biology, Health and Physical Education. For example; Islamic Studies taught in grades 11 and 12 included components on responsible parenthood and marriage, students of grade 6 and 7 were taught about appropriate and inappropriate touching in Health and Physical Education classes. Figure 1.3 illustrates a lesson in problem solving steps taught as life skills components included in the school curriculum.



**Figure 1.3 : LSE Components in Physical Education -Grade 1 Book**  
(Source : Health and Physical Education grade 1 text book 2013)

In April 2015, “Ufaa”, a new project launched by the Ministry of Education took over the implementation of the extracurricular LSE program (UNICEF, 2015). Since then, life skills packs have been revised to cater to the needs of the students and the community. Hence, the life skills education program in this study represents the extra-curricular life skills education known as life skills packs. The expected outcome from LSE program is for individuals to be equipped with knowledge and skills to protect them from exploitation, abuse and to deal with their daily life challenges (UNICEF, 2015). Since adolescence is a crucial period for development and growth (Mangrulkar et al., 2001) acquiring knowledge, skills and values from LSE can facilitate individuals in taking adult roles in later years.

Given the role of LSE programs as a strong precursor for promoting positive behaviour, teaching life skills through the early years in children’s life will help them deal with their social, emotional and relationship issues (WHO, 1997). Adolescents living in small

island nations such as the Maldives face challenges, such as environmental and socio economic issues. These challenges constitute significant issues to the health and wellbeing of the adolescents. Moreover, life skills have been taught in the Maldives for over a decade, with much focus directed towards evaluation of the LSE program, no attention has been given to the practical knowledge of adolescents' experiences of life skills education programs. There exists a need to understand adolescents' social learning experiences within LSE and to identify which skills are most useful at times of difficulty.

## **1.5 Problem Statement**

Despite the fact, there are a number of studies (Giannotta & Weichold, 2016; Weichold et al., 2016; Weichold & Blumenthal, 2016; Wenzel et al., 2009) which identify the success of LSE programs, few studies (see, Chaudhary & Mehta, 2008; Kazemi, Momeni, & Abolghasemi, 2014; Maryam et al., 2011; Parvathy & Pillai, 2015; Vatankhah et al., 2014; Yadav & Iqbal, 2009) actually address the type of knowledge, skills and values acquired from LSE programs. A systematic literature search was conducted (Aishath Nasheeda et al., 2018) to produce the available research on the effectiveness of LSE programs, and to identify main concerns and research gaps.

### **1.5.1 What is known about Life skills Education programs**

The findings of the review revealed that successful life skills programs have implemented cognitive, affective and behavioral intervention with the goal of prompting individual learning with ongoing support from the community (Aishath Nasheeda et al., 2018). These programs such as Botvin Life Skills Training, are well planned with concise modules specifically designed to address at-risk behaviors (Botvin et al., 2001; Botvin & Griffin, 2004). Contrastingly, fewer studies were conducted in developing country contexts compared to those carried out in developed countries (Givaudan et al., 2007; Maryam et al., 2011). Many life skills education programs in developing countries were short-term interventions instead of ongoing activities, and lacked emphasis on individual learning (Parvathy & Pillai, 2015; Teyhan et al., 2016; Tuttle et al., 2006a).

The systematic review (see Nasheeda et al., 2018), findings also suggest that LSE programs conducted around the world focuses on the areas of concern of the respective countries. These studies were limited in their scope to specific research designs, such as experimental, quasi-experimental or randomized control groups. Studies limit their reporting on short term results with small samples sizes without any follow-up to establish the success of the respective programs (Jegannathan et al., 2014; Maryam et al., 2011). Qualitative studies on LSE were limited (Holt et al., 2008). Several of the identified studies were based on assessment of life skills components rather than exploring what knowledge, skills and attitudes change adolescents require in order for positive behavior change.

## **1.5.2 Research Gaps and Research Priorities**

The systematic reviewed (Aishath Nasheeda et al., 2018) articles also suggest shortcomings in the transfer of skills, as the programs lacked emphasis on acquiring skills through various approaches such as modelling, imitation and reinforcement (Botvin, 1998; Botvin & Kantor, 2000; James et al., 2006b; Kazemi et al., 2014; Maryam et al., 2011). These findings indicate a need for further research to explore the usefulness of the programs from different angles.

### ***Knowledge Gap***

Assessments of life skills education programs are too quick to jump into evaluation of behavior change rather than understanding what knowledge, skills and attitude, adolescents acquire in order for a change to occur. Therefore, gaps in LSE programs, such as which life skills are translated into everyday life (Jegannathan et al., 2014), call for future research. Little is known about how life skills knowledge is translated into behavior and attitude change. Inquiry into how adolescents gain knowledge and skills from LSE programs and adopt positive attitudes and behaviour change as a result of the program is not well documented.

### ***Theoretical Gap***

A large body of literature on life skills is focused on developed countries, whereas only a limited number of studies have focused on developing countries, let alone on small island nations. The life skills education programs conducted in different parts of the world are examined through number of theoretical lens such as Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems (Holt et al., 2008), cognitive-behavioural approach (Botvin et al., 2001; Naseri & Babakhani, 2014; Tuttle et al., 2006a), social learning theory (James et al., 2006b; Lillehoj et al., 2004; Maryam et al., 2011; Parvathy & Pillai, 2015), theory of reasoned action (Givaudan et al., 2008), problem behaviour theory (Lillehoj et al., 2004), theory of planned behaviour (Givaudan et al., 2007; James et al., 2006b) and social influence approach (Weichold et al., 2016). Examining adolescents' emotions, thoughts, and how they adopt positive behavior is important in understanding how they construct their knowledge of life skill program in the real world. A social constructivist approach in understanding, the subjective realities of how life skills education program experiences are acquired within the adolescent's social, cultural and familiar context had not been fully investigated (Aishath Nasheeda et al., 2018).

### ***Practical Gap***

No voice has been given to individuals to retell their stories of life skills education program experience (Aishath Nasheeda et al., 2018). According to Krauss (2005), the best way to comprehend any issue is to view it in its social and cultural setting rather than objectively measuring it. Narratives from adolescents' life experiences, analyses of multiple perspectives and specific social contexts that shape their life skills education experiences will provide a comprehensive understanding of the reality of the

effectiveness of the life skills program. As the nature of life skills education is abstract and complex (UNICEF, 2012), understanding this issue requires in-depth descriptions of the impact process of life skills education programs on adolescents moving towards transition from adolescence into young adults can provide useful information to policy makers, school teachers, life skills facilitators and parents in strengthening their role in imparting life skills to adolescents. It will also contribute to the design and delivery of life skill programs can significantly influence long-term program quality. It is important to deliver programs systematically in order to influence positive change on the participants (Holt et al., 2008). Scholars have underlined the need to implement sustainable life skills programs as a top priority (James et al., 2006; Jegannathan et al., 2014). Therefore, it is essential to develop programs that can be sustainable so that children learn skills and develop attitude change (UNICEF, 2012).

### **1.6 Research Purpose**

The purpose of this narrative study was to describe young adults', experiences of life skills education program during their adolescence. To do so, the study takes on a retrospective approach so the respondents can reflect on their experiences of life skills education programs during that period of their lives. At this stage in the research, construction of life skills education program experiences is described from a social constructionism perspective, through emotions, cognition and behaviour with combination of cognitive, psychosocial and interpersonal competencies enabling adolescents to progress towards a healthy transition to adulthood.

### **1.7 Research Question**

How did adolescents' experience in a life skills program shape their transition into adulthood?

#### *Sub Questions*

The following research questions were formulated based on the specific objectives.

1. What are the adolescents' experiences with life skills education programs?
2. Which life skills competencies from life skills education programs contributed towards a healthy transition into adulthood?



## 1.8 Significance of the Study

Although, LSE programs have been taught in the Maldives for over a decade, the effectiveness of the program remained under evaluation (UNICEF, 2015). Therefore, this study is important for its theoretical and practical significance.

### *Theoretical Significance*

Since this study takes on a retrospective approach towards understanding the experience of young adults' life skills education programs during their adolescence, individuals reflect upon the role of life skills education programs during their transition towards adulthood. Through these retrospective reflections, individuals come to understand their social and emotional competencies that successfully managed learning, such as establishing relationships, solving day-to-day problems and learning to adapt to the complex demands encountered during their adolescence. The retelling of young adults' experiences of their life skills education program facilitates in understanding how they construct their realities. The social constructivism in social psychology provides a theoretical basis for understanding how realities and views of the world are individual specific and created through social interactions within the individual social environment.

### *Practical Significance*

The experiential basis of life skills education knowledge within the adolescent's everyday life facilitated in identifying the skills required by adolescents during their transition into adulthood. The unique experiences of the individuals provides insights to the life skills education program conducted in different parts of the Maldives. This insight deepens the understanding of the life skills education program and helps in identifying the gaps in delivery of the program.

Additionally, stories about young adults' struggles and challenges during their adolescence may help young people who are dealing with similar issues to better cope with their everyday issues positively. The study findings may provide useful insight to stakeholders, school authorities and community in strengthen their role in building the nation with healthy young adults.

This study also adds to the limited literature of life skills education in the Maldives. The findings of the study helps in generating hypothesis for future research in life skills such as mixed method approaches to explore the life skills education program and its benefits to adolescents in the Maldives.

## **1.9 Scope of the Study**

The study takes on a narrative inquiry approach to describe accounts of young adults' LSE program experiences during their adolescence. A narrative approach is effective in retelling stories of lived experiences and giving meaning to these experiences. This study accentuates stories of behavioral and attitude change during adolescence that influenced their transition to adulthood. Hence, the study describes young adult's experiences of life skills knowledge, and how the individual coped with issues and pressure from the society. Individuals' feelings, thoughts and behavior were analyzed in order to understand the holistic adolescence experience and the attainment of life skills. The scope of the study is limited to young adults' experiences with LSE program during their adolescence. The scope of the study were limited to those individuals who have undergone life skills programs throughout their adolescence (10 to 17 years). The study does not focus on the adolescents who are currently engaged in life skills education program, as these adolescents would not be unlikely to have enough experiences to reflect on the program. Young adults with minimum one year of life skills education program experience during their adolescence were chosen as participants for this study to gauge retrospection into their adolescence experience and how they construct their life skills experiences when they made their transition to adulthood. The study does not focus on the adulthood of these individuals.

## **1.10 Limitation of the Study**

Due to the nature of the study; social construction of the experiences in retrospection, individuals had difficulty in recalling how the social environment and their interactions within the social environment shaped their transition into adulthood. While one participant did not remember much about the program, other had difficulty in recalling how and to what extend their experiences were influenced within their social settings. The two participants who were willing did not have any photos nor kept a journal which could have helped in recalling their experiences. Since the objective of the study was to understand the process of how the individuals constructed their subjective realities of their experiences during their involvement in the life skills education program, the study findings can only be used to generate hypotheses for further research, hence findings cannot be generalized.

## **1.11 Definition of Terms**

The following definition were used to define the terms used in this study.

### *a) Social Construction of Experience*

To socially construct means that each individual perceives the world differently by actively constructing their own meanings from everyday situations (Burr, 2003).

For the purpose of the study, social construction of LSE program experience is defined as process of subjective experiences of the individual learning. The subjective experiences were created through knowledge (what they know), and life skills education program (what they learnt from the program) to create a set of competencies that enables them towards a healthy transition to adulthood. In this study the term social construction is referred as a social psychology lens in understanding the life skills education experiences and how those experiences have been constructed through affects, cognition and behavior.

*b) Life Skills Education (LSE) Program*

In this study, LSE program refers to the extra-curricular LSE program conducted using life skills packs. Which include communication skills, assertiveness, peer pressure, decision-making, conflict resolution, self-esteem, values, anger management, stress and relationships. These skills are taught to develop cognitive, psychosocial and interpersonal competencies, which translates into developmental positive behavior, knowledge, attitude and values for young people to survive in any given situation. Thereafter, for the purpose of the study, only the after mentioned skills will be considered as life skills education program.

*c) Adolescents*

According to UNICEF (UNICEF, 2011), an adolescent is an individual who is between 10 and 19 years. In this study, the reference to adolescents is being made to those individuals between 10 and 18 years.

*d) Young Adults*

In this study, individuals between the age 19 and 24, who have completed their higher secondary education will be considered as young adults.

## **1.12 Conclusion**

This chapter began with introduction to the research by providing a background for the study with a brief synopsis of life skills and the life skills concepts. The chapter focused on the worldview of life skills education programs and presented the status of LSE program in Maldives. Furthermore, in this chapter, the statement of the problem was presented. When presenting the problem statement the researcher identified the gaps from the existing literature. Based on the problem statement, a research purpose was identified, and its objectives were derived. Further, research questions were formulated to facilitate in achieving the objectives of the study. The chapter emphasized the significance of the study by highlighting the knowledge and practical contributions. The chapter presented the terms that are used in this study. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction on the proposed methodology of the study.

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