

# **AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING LIFE SKILLS:**

DG3S41 Research Project  
(Investigation)

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# **HOW GRAPHIC DESIGN PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE?**

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# INTRODUCTION

This report investigates the importance of teaching life skills to those who are in education and what impacts it has as students begin to experience real-world decisions, by applying existing data and gaining further insights with primary research.

**The term 'Life Skills' refers to the basic skills needed for individuals to effectively deal with the issues and challenges they encounter in their daily life, in order to make the correct decisions.**

Reach School (2021) believes that "Life is 10% what happens and 90% how you respond to it." There is no list that defines what these life skills are, as each individual will likely have a different set of skills that they find essential depending on their lifestyle. Although, this report will focus on skills such as; financing, employability and cooking along with many more, which are essential

for every individual to learn no matter their background.

"As economic, societal and technological advances drive forward the pace of change in the workplace, today's young people need to be more able to adapt than any other generation." Barclays (2018, p.2) Yet a study found that "94% of employers say that life skills are at least as important as academic results for the success of young people, ... however 68% say 18 year old school leavers they are looking to recruit don't have the required skills for the workplace." Cullinane and Montacute (2017, p.4)

This information suggests that there is a lack of awareness surrounding this educational issue. There may be issues in the way schools are preparing students for life outside of school, but it is also important

to consider the parent/ guardians role in teaching life lessons, as it is just as much their responsibility to provide their children with decision-making skills required to

overcome challenges throughout their lives. That's why this report will primarily focus its research on the educational system and parenting that surrounds life lessons.



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# AIMS & OBJECTIVES

This report will aim to investigate and understand the challenges faced by young people who are leaving education and whether life skills impact their decisions to solve the problems that life throws at them.

The methods required to successfully gather the appropriate information in order to understand this topic will be a healthy mixture of primary and secondary research. To ensure there are balanced views from multiple sources.

The second point of inquiry in this report will be to explore what is currently being done at an educational level to teach students life skills.

Research needed to gain an insight into this topic will primarily consist of secondary sources, along with quantitative primary research. To compare findings from both resources to allow for a wider explanation from a large set of data.

Another key aspect that this report will investigate will be the influences parents and guardians may have on their children within the field.

To obtain this information, this report will analyse qualitative primary sources to gain first-hand insight into the topic. The primary data will then be compared against secondary findings from journals and articles to prove its relevance and validity.

Lastly, this report will investigate what educational materials are currently being used that don't currently exist within academia or parental teaching, in order to study what materials may be applicable to student learning.

This information will be collected through secondary sources, then by using a mixture of analytical judgement and asking questions through primary sources, this report will be able to remain objective.

# METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach was applied in this report, using both qualitative and quantitative processes to gather data. In order to obtain a range of relevant statistics to understand the scope of the topic, as well as collecting data from primary sources to gain empathetic opinions. This will allow the data to be compared against multiple viewpoints, to ensure reliability and eliminate bias, while warranting further discussions. It is important to note that all data collected was obtained remotely. This report includes a wide range of research from an assortment of different sources to understand the perceptions regarding life skills in education.

Existing data in the forms of reports, journals and articles played a sizable role in establishing an understanding of the scope of the current issues within this area. The

use of presentations and discussions such as TEDx Talks, provided great insights into the subject, often demonstrating positive outlooks. Data provided by Cullinane, C and Montacute, R. at Sutton Trust, has been analysed throughout this report to give an understanding of the current state of the educational system in the UK.

A number of surveys were created in conjunction with this report in order to obtain specialised data that can be compared alongside existing sources to create more informed opinions. The surveys were distributed online through relevant message boards, emails and social media outlets, to gain accurate insights. Three surveys were created in total, each aiming to collect a range of information from a select range of demographics, to collect a range of viewpoints. The audiences targeted for surveying included;

current students, parents and adults who are no longer in education. It was imperative to collect data from these demographics to gain a broad understanding and create balanced debates.

Further information was gathered by carrying out a small number of semi-structured interviews with a select few individuals from a range of demographics, purely led from an educational standpoint.

The interviews were conducted in order to gather specific opinions and current views on the topic of life skills. These responses were critical in providing this report with detailed perspectives, which was necessary as there is a lack of literature surrounding current views of key skills within education. Referenced quotes from interviewees will be displayed as follows: Surname before Initials (year of interview).



Photo by Lukas from Pexels

**“HAVING LIFE SKILLS  
IS AN ESSENTIAL  
PART OF BEING ABLE  
TO MEET THE  
CHALLENGES OF  
EVERYDAY LIFE.”**

Macmillan Education (2019)

## **WHY DO LIFE SKILLS MATTER?**

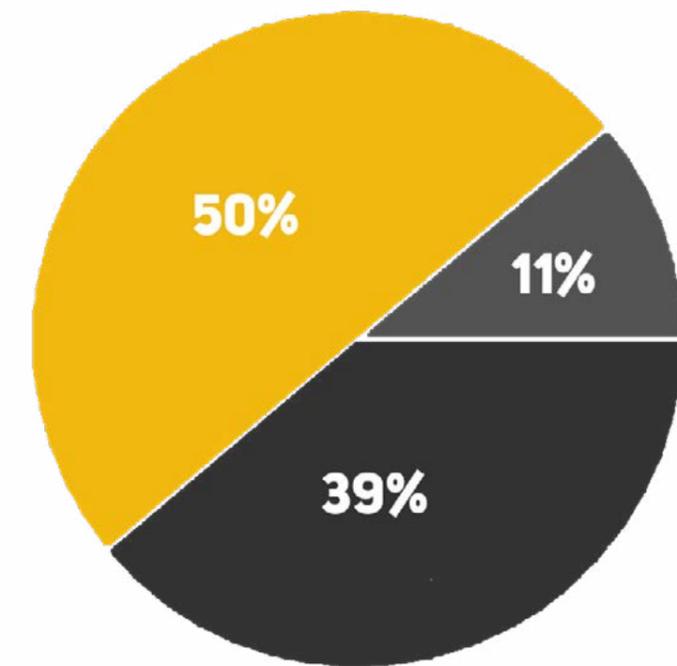
“The development of life skills allows youth to cope with their environment by making responsible decisions, having a better understanding of their values, and being better able to communicate and get along with others.” Boyd, B and Herring, D and Briers, G (1992) These skills can benefit individuals in society, employability and home life. “In a constantly changing environment, having life skills is an essential part of being able to

meet the challenges of everyday life.” Macmillan Education (2019) The teaching of life skills to students can also be found to push them in the right directions and steer clear of dangerous situations. According to Jill Siegal Chalsty “Studies show when we teach life skills to our children, graduation rates increase, incidences of violence, bullying and substance abuse decrease and the employability of our kids improve dramatically.’ (TEDx Talks, 2014).

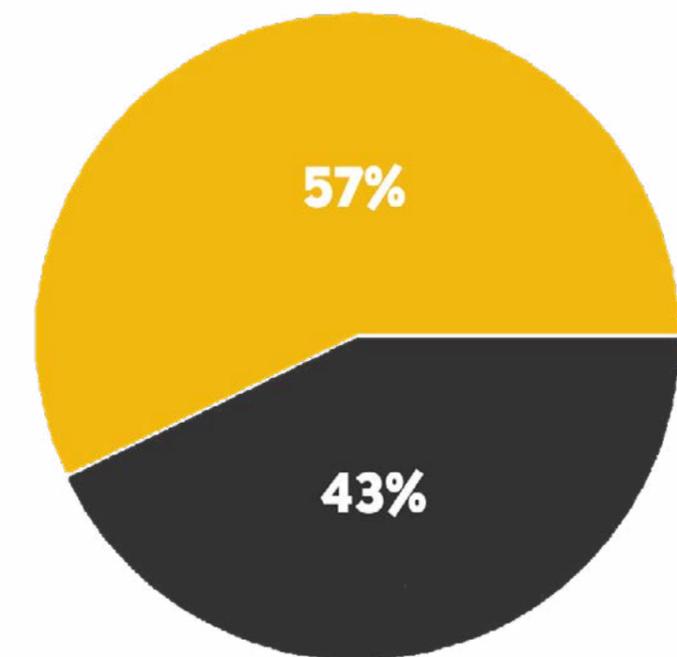
# WHAT IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE AT AN EDUCATIONAL LEVEL?

Currently in the UK, compulsory education is not obliged to teach life skills to their students. However, the PSHE (Personal, social, health and economic) Association advises that at least one hour of timetabled PSHE studies should be taught every week. This is primarily a guideline and it does not state the importance or the effects these studies can have on students. This suggests that there is an unfair advantage to pupils across the UK. This is evident when looking at the survey results.

With over half (57%) of students who are currently in education saying that they do not study any form of life skills. As well as, half of school leavers saying they did not have any life skill lessons during their education. Roberts, E. (2020) an interviewee believes "it is important that everyone gets a chance to learn these skills. So, schools would be a great place to learn because it will provide an equal opportunity".



Did/ do you have any form of life skills in your education?



During education did you study any form of life skills?

The Welsh Youth Parliament report suggests that some teachers “did not feel comfortable in delivering the lessons and some were worried about “not being in touch, and getting things wrong”.” Lewis, B, (2019) Yet, The Department for Education (2019) say “PSHE education is an important and necessary part of all pupils’ education.” They also want “teachers to be free to address the topics most relevant for their pupils”, but this means that there is a lack of structure to teaching these valuable skills.

This may imply that students that graduate from the same school could come away learning completely different topics from their PSHE education. Jones, T. (2020) says this topic “crops up in conversation with friends now that I’m getting older. We are all just trying to figure out the best ways to get through life, with the bits and pieces we’ve each taken away from school teaching”. As well as what seems like a lack of uniformity and

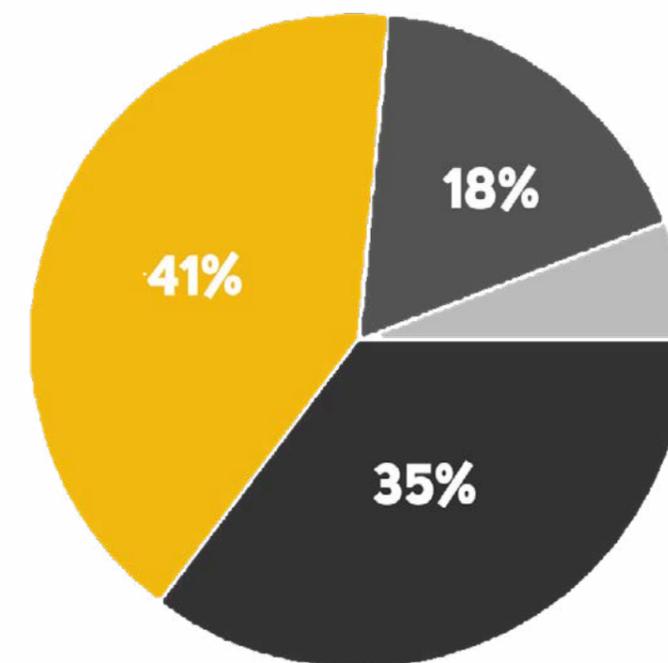
cohesive structure to learning life skills, it is found that life skill related teaching is often “crammed” into personal and social education days, which are viewed as “days off” by pupils.” Lewis, B, (2019) This may be why students don’t seem to engage with the information being taught at schools.

According to a survey produced for this report, only 35% of students thought that the information being taught was beneficial to them and could be applied to real-life situations. Yet the PSHE Association (2019) still believes that “PSHE education gives pupils the knowledge, skills, and attributes they need to keep themselves healthy and safe and to prepare them for life and work in modern Britain”. One respondent feels that “most skills are better learned through experience and practice than theory.” And another said “It needs to be constantly taught to keep it fresh in your mind.” Which is something the UK educational system can’t currently provide.

This outlook may soon change for students across the UK. As of September 2020, the UK Government has made it compulsory for schools in England to teach relationship and health education across both primary and secondary schools, along with sex education for those in secondary education. This is certainly one step in the right direction. Making these topics compulsory demonstrates that these skills are important for

students to study, and will hopefully lead to more life-related skills becoming mandatory in schools across the whole of the UK. It is important to teach these life long skills to students and children seeing that “Adolescence offers a window of opportunity to teach life skills when the human brain is malleable.” Schurer, S. (2017) Then these children can retain this information and continue to develop these skills into adulthood.

**Did you benefit from learning these skills?**



Schools that specialise in catering for children with a special educational need or disability have a much better grasp on the importance of teaching their pupils life skills. A study conducted by National Longitudinal Training Study-2 found that 77.4% of students with Autism received life skill studies at school. "Students received life skills training in general education classrooms, special education classrooms, individual instruction, and community settings." Hsu-min, C and Xinyu, N and Young-sun L. (2017, pp. 1.)

Special Educational Needs Schools (SEN) are generally better equipped to teach life skills, due to a higher staff ratio required to deal with student's individual needs, along with access to resources and equipment not often available in mainstream schools. Reach School in South Birmingham, is an example where they are recognising the importance of life skills. They believe that life skills are "one of the most important subjects in a school curriculum" Reach School (2021) and they are taking extra steps to prove

it's importance by recognising it as a qualification, which can be used for their students C.V. and college applications.

Another great example of a school that takes life skills seriously is The Grove School, London, who cater to students who are diagnosed with Autism. They aim to develop life skills in their students to allow them to lead substantially independent lives. They understand that the curriculum should include

**"ample opportunity to develop life skills through the experience of daily activities ... integrated across the day in addition to discrete sessions." The Grove School (2021)**

They also work in close partnership with parents to ensure these skills can be transferred into home life. Which comes back to an earlier statement shared by a student who feels that skills should be taught 'constantly' for them to remain effective, which is something that the Grove School is trying to achieve. They ensure every child can put these skills into practice with the help of their parents and guardians.

There are many courses available to students that offer life skill-based qualifications at a further education level. These courses can offer skills such as; managing money, increasing self-esteem and being part of a community. In the UK, Pearson and OCR are the main providers of these courses, which are often targeted to traineeships, non-native English speakers (ESOL learners), offender learners and students with a disability. Which provides these students a stepping stone to further learning.

However, there is the view that by offering life skills in this way, through optional courses at further and higher education, it is no longer accessible to all young people. It has been suggested by Stephen Guise (2017) to "Start teaching this [life skills] sooner than college.

Not everyone goes to college, but everyone needs to know this stuff."

Barclays launched a Life Skills programme in 2013 to help teach young people life skills needed for the world of work. Their programme includes support for skills such as; CV building, interview training and work experience. As of July 2015, over 18,000 educators have signed up for the programme. They provide a range of lesson plans, tools and guides "to help embed LifeSkills into the curriculum and support young people to succeed". Barclays (2021) This demonstrates that businesses outside education see the need to teach young people the skills needed to transition into the world of work. To ensure that these life skills are being taught to students as part of the curriculum.

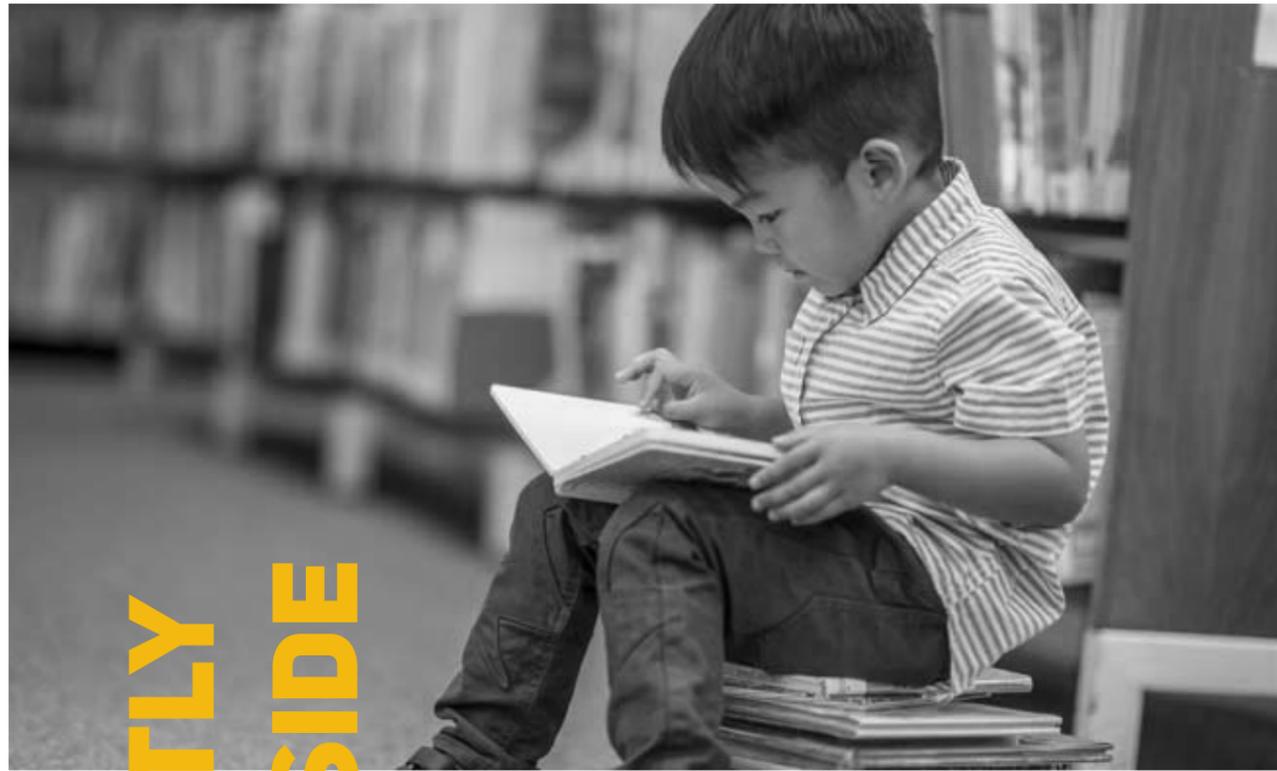


Photo from Nuvision Credit Union

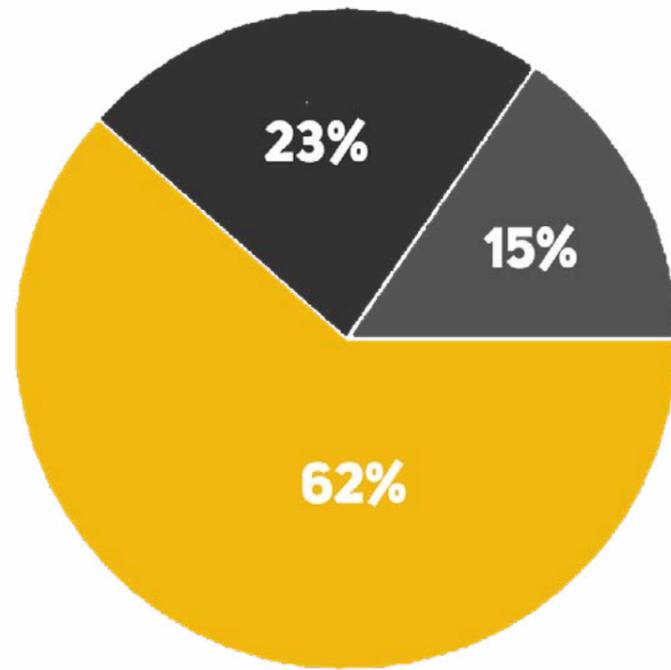
# WHAT IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE OUTSIDE OF EDUCATION?

As stated by Stephen Guise (2017) "Schools are not set up to teach us what matters most." This statement can be further supported by Sophie Howe, who told the BBC Sunday Politics Wales "'our obsession with exams" was not giving young people the right skills they needed for the future." Gruffydd-Jones, E. (2019) So, this raises the question, if schools are not providing relevant skills for young people, what is currently being done outside of education to help develop these skills?

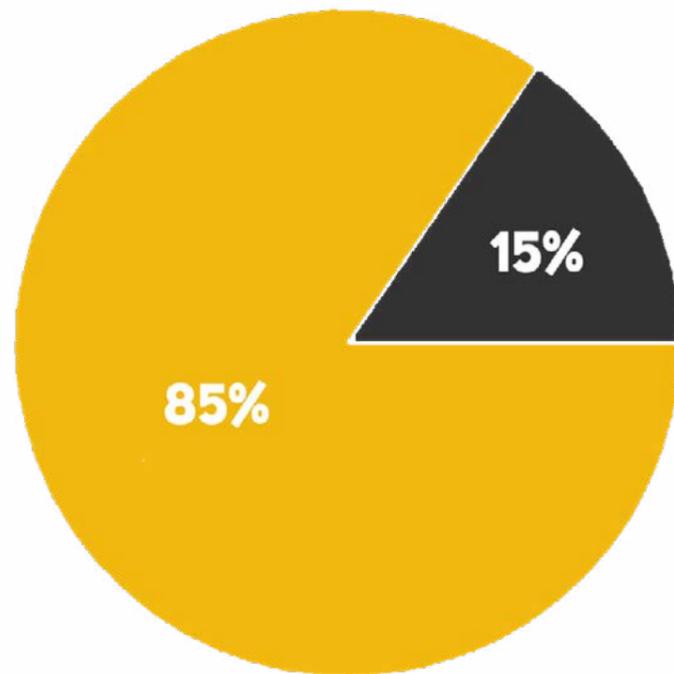
Parents and guardians can have a substantial influence on their children and can provide valuable life lessons throughout their upbringing, often unintentionally. The previous research suggests that there is a disconnect when it comes to school and parent cooperation. The survey found that only 62% of parents know if their children are studying life skill related topics in school. But, 84% of parents still expect these topics to be covered in their child's education.

The Center For Parenting Education (2021) believe that "One of the

most important jobs parents have is preparing their children for the day when they will leave home and enter the "real world." It is apparent that parents know the importance of teaching their children these valuable life skills as, 100% of parents asked in the survey said that they currently teach life skills to their children. In a survey conducted by Learning Heroes "parents are more likely to view home as the place where these skills are "taught" (95%) and schools as the place where they are "reinforced" (92%)." Hubbard, B and Learning Heroes. (2019, pp. 34)



Does your child/ children learn life skills in school?



Do you expect schools to include life skills in the curriculum?

There is a plethora of information out there for parents for teaching life skills to young children, in the form of blogs and literature. The materials aimed at parents generally include lengthy texts with little visual information, which is great for providing parents large amounts of information, but it may become an issue when it comes to keeping parents engaged.

Which is unlike the teaching materials found in the classroom, that usually include colourful imagery to help keep the children engaged. Classroom materials

used to teach life skills, primarily consist of; presentations, handouts and physical activities, which all aim to include visual elements. They may often use characters and stories that may provide children something to relate to, making the situations easier to understand. Yet, these teaching methods are rare when looking at the materials used to inform parents. When it comes to educating parents, the lack of visual stimulus may be a missed opportunity considering that "Approximately 65 percent of the population are visual learners". St. Louis, M. (2017)

There are many books for key stage 1 and 2 children that teach life lessons, these books provide plenty of visuals and relatable storytelling. These books can help children develop skills such as; general hygiene, friendships, being part of a community as well as many more.

Books that are aimed towards children between the ages of 7 and 11 generally include fictional characters demonstrating the skills being taught, to visually teach practical skills. Figure 1 is an example taken from the book

'Sesame Street: Ready, Set, Brush!' which illustrates the skill in action. Collecting information in this way can be very beneficial, according to Hotchkiss, J. (2017)

**the brain "stores visual information in ... A way that will make the memory easier to recall."**

However, when it comes to books targeted towards young teens, between the ages of 12 to 18, the content changes dramatically. Focusing primarily on presenting the information in a text-based format, with the occasional diagram.

**"65% OF THE POPULATION ARE VISUAL LEARNERS."**

Molly St. Louis (2017)

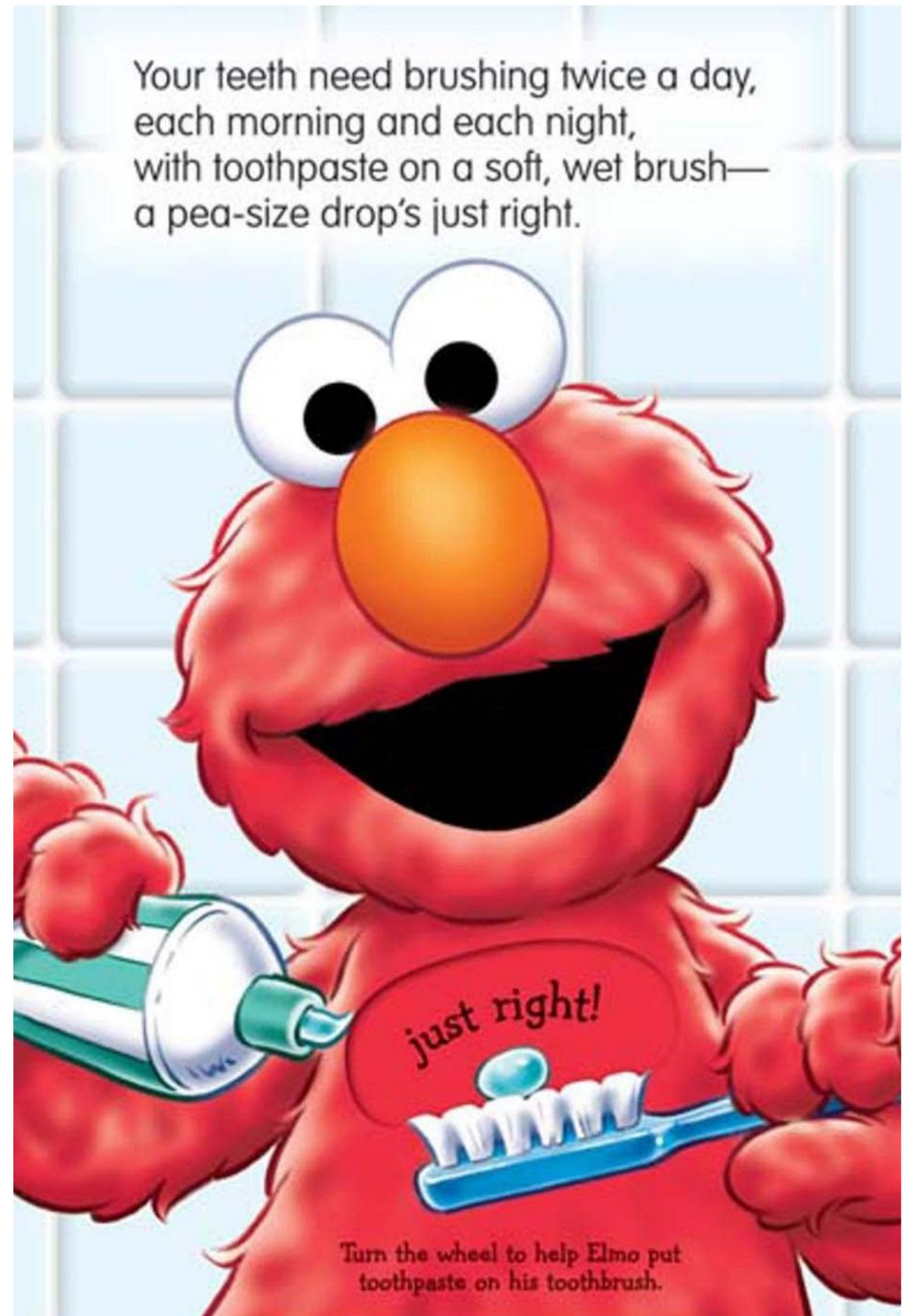
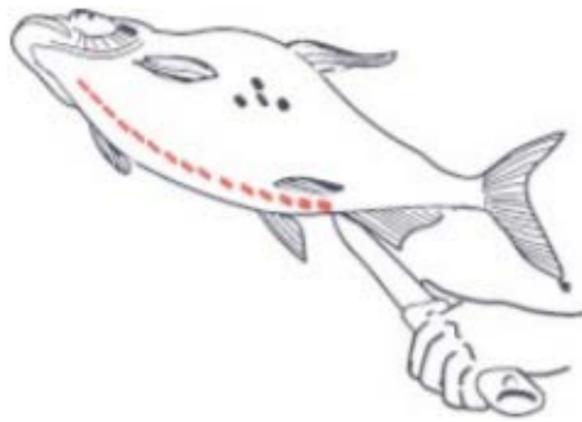


Figure 1: Sesame Street: Ready, Set, Brush! (Rudko, C. 2008)

## HOW TO GUT A FISH

- 1 Place the fish on its side on a chopping board (preferably one color-coded blue for fish), or on its back if it is a big fish. Wear latex gloves if you'd rather. Take a sharp knife and slice the fish open as shown.



- 2 Insert the knife through the gills and slit through the skin flap.



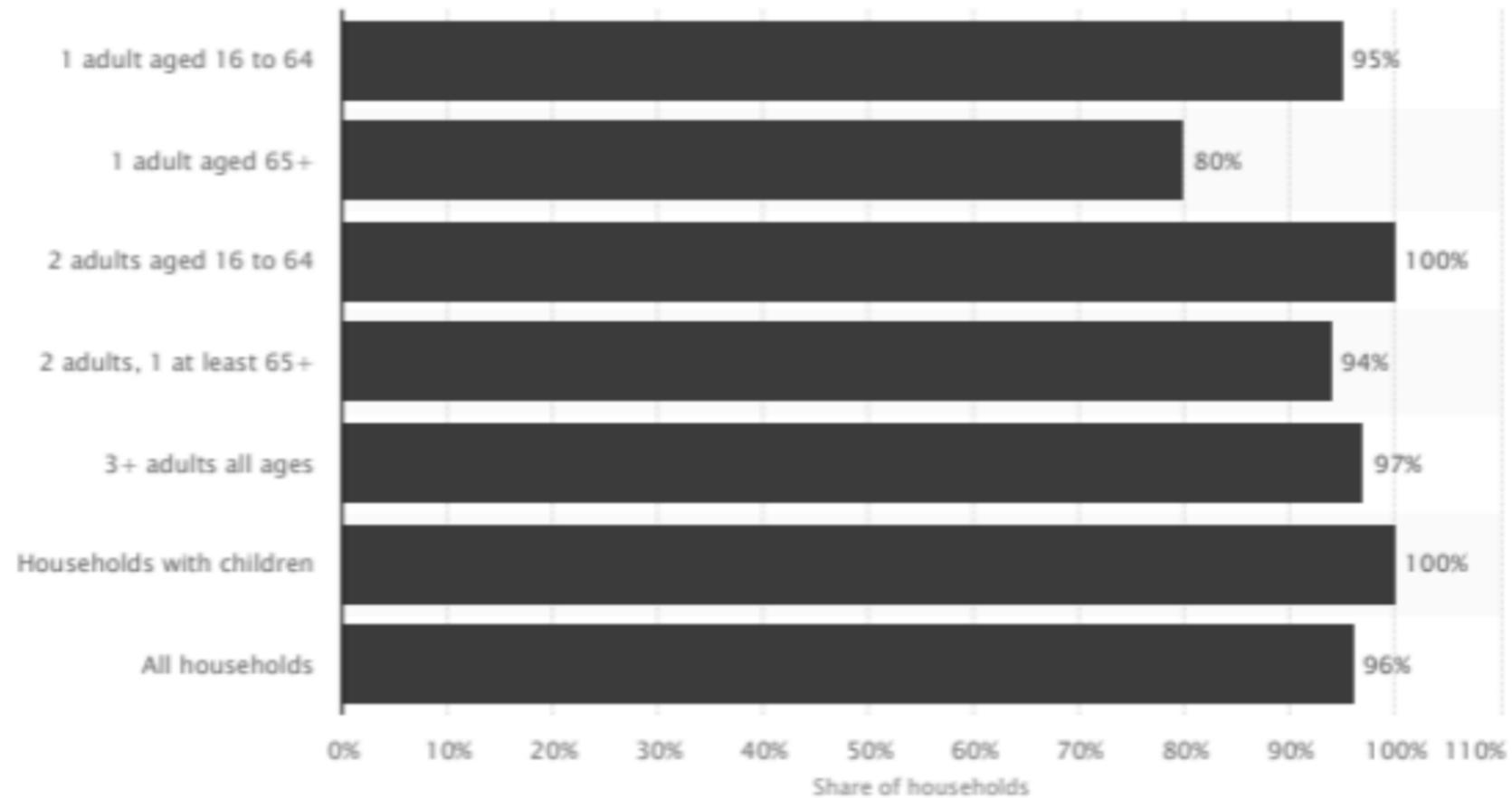
Figure 2 shows a page taken from Julia Laflin's book, 'Life Skills'. Although the information given in this book provides short quick answers to the skills outlined, in an easy to read chronological format, the pages all begin to look the same. There is little use of diagrams throughout the book, giving little visual instruction. Louise, S. (2020) was asked to share what she thought of the books from a parental perspective and she considers "Both of these books have their merits but I can see why teenagers may lose interest in this book [figure 2] and opt for say a YouTube video instead".

Television shows can provide great visual learning techniques for life skills among children and young people. Again these shows use characters and narratives to demonstrate common situations

where these life lessons would be used in everyday situations. One of the most popular long-running educational children's shows that includes life skill elements is; Arthur. According to Rasmussen "research has found that kids who watch the show develop advanced perspective-taking, which helps them understand situations from others' points of view, and moral-reasoning skills, which helps them determine if something is right or wrong." Miller, Z. (2020)

Educational television programmes can be a great learning device, studies show that children "are more likely to stay focused and pay attention" Western Governors University (2014) to visual learning. It can contribute to a portion of life lessons learnt at an early age, setting a path to further learning.

Figure 3: Share of households with internet access in Great Britain, by household composition. (Statista, 2021)



As of 2020, 100% of households with children have internet access, which means that more children than ever before are consuming information online. It's true that using the internet to learn about life skills is a popular method of learning, as it is the second most common way people gain new skills outside of education.

According to the survey, 50% of participants said that they use online sources such as YouTube

and blogs to find new information, while 79% said they learn new skills through their parents.

There are many different ways children and young people can collect information about life skills online, one of the biggest platforms currently used is; YouTube. YouTube statistics show that "70% of Millennial YouTube users use the platform to learn a new skill". Iqbal, M. (2020)

There is an abundance of videos that aim to teach children and young people life skills, often sharing real experiences with their viewers, which can help to form a more realistic view of these skills in action.

**However, this overabundance of data online can lead to misinformation within the field of life skills,**

especially when it comes to specialised topics such as finances and employability, as there are a

variety of distinctive guidelines in every country and region. It can be difficult to find the appropriate information online. Roberts, E (2020) says "Whenever I need to learn something new, I immediately look online but it does take time to cross reference the information between websites and YouTube videos to find exactly what I'm looking for". This makes learning information online time consuming and unreliable, especially if the information displayed is incorrect.

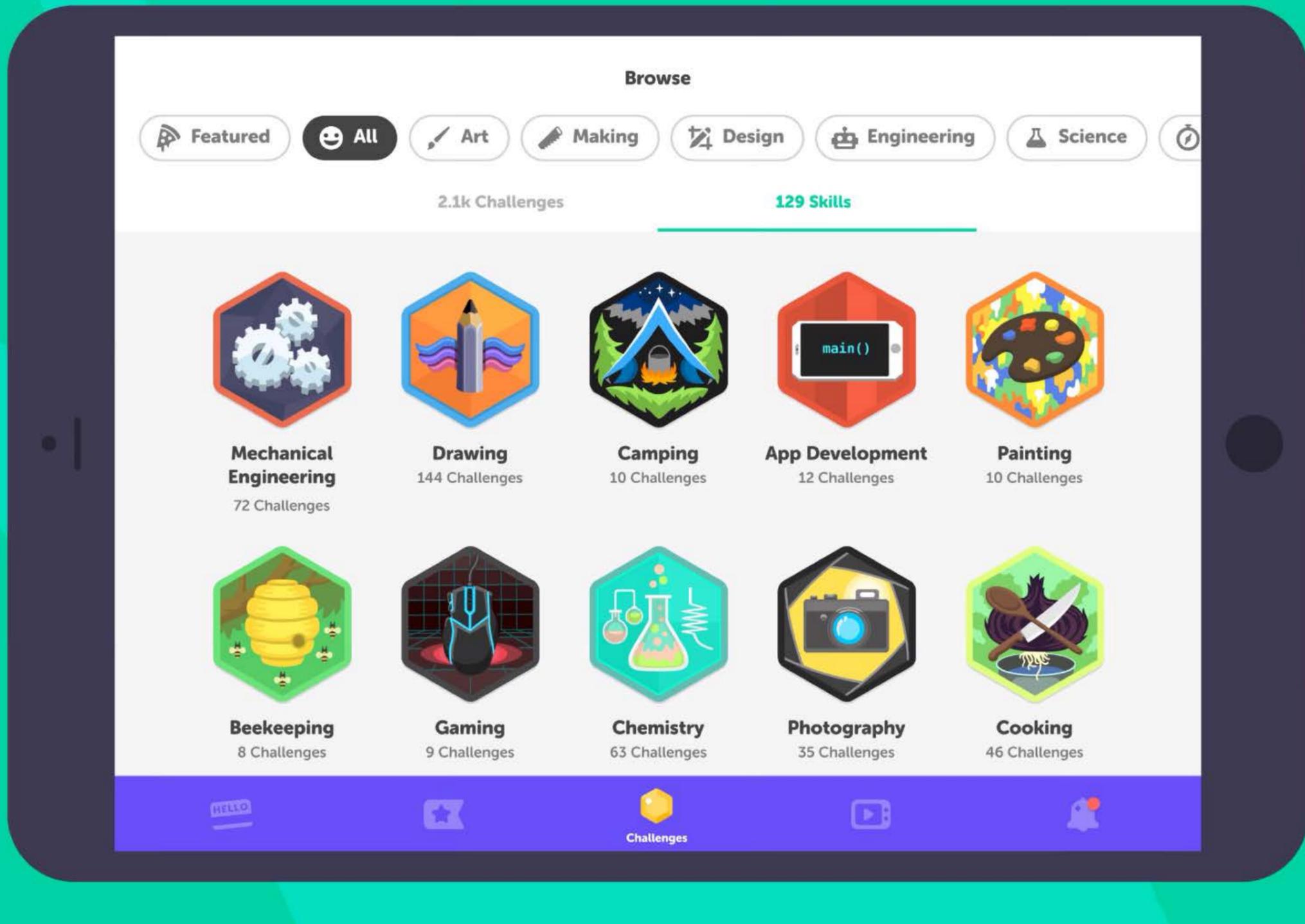


Figure 4: Skills for Life. (DIY.ORG, LLC. 2020)

A benefit to using applications like DIY.org is that it gives children a sense of achievement and progression, by earning badges when learning new skills. It also works in conjunction with parents, allowing them to see their child's achievements and track their progress. Which is something that many parents appreciate.

Webb, E (2020) says "the way I can get involved with this means that I would be able to continue to involve these skills throughout the day." By introducing applications such as DIY.org into children's schooling, allows the parent to be confident in knowing that the information being taught is collected from credible sources and available all in one place. Which is unlike the risks of using the internet to explore these subjects.

One area that has been growing rapidly in the past few years is, the development of educational apps. There are a variety of applications out there that aim to teach life skills to a range of age groups. DIY.org is an application targeted towards elementary schools in America, it has a

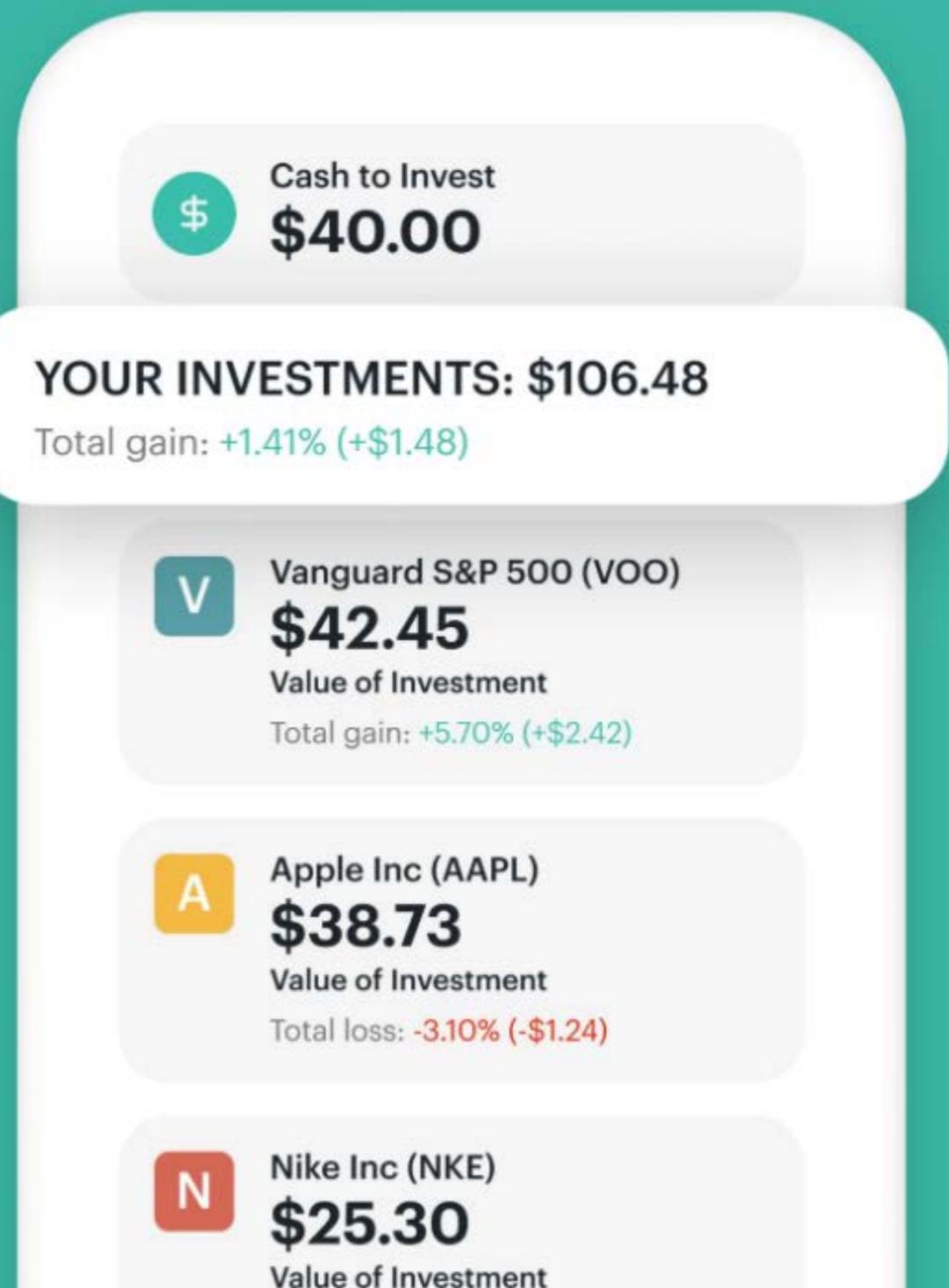
large library that supports a wide range of skills on their platform, including life skills such as; cooking, first-aid and home repair. It's aim is to keep children engaged with educational step-by-step videos and creative projects, to keep minds active.

There is a large number of apps on the market that are targeted towards secondary school children, with one of the most prevalent topics being money management.

One of the most recent applications to be published is called 'Greenlight', and it is "the first educational investing platform designed for kids... the new program for kids is an "all-in-one plan [that] teaches them money management and investing fundamentals—with real money, real stocks and real-life lessons."” Wood, K. (2021) Their goal is to raise 'financially-smart' children. They believe that money management is an important life skill that children should be

learning. It is evident that students feel the same way, as it is the most common skill that students wish they had learnt in school, according to the survey. The app allows the parent and child to work together, allowing children to see real-time updates which helps them grow their understanding of the value of money.

Personalised experiences like this are not currently available to children in schools, but it is something that parents believe to be an effective teaching method. Matthews, L. (2020) says "I like to show my children how to do things rather than telling them how to do it".



# WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG PEOPLE?

Every year school leavers are faced with a myriad of new problems and important decisions that will impact their futures. Yet, the majority of students feel lost after leaving education. Kyra, 15, feels that “A lot of people probably come out of school after having so much support and then ... it’s all gone, and a lot of people are going to be lost from that”. Lewis, B, (2019) Many students feel ‘unprepared’ according to the survey. When students were asked if they felt the life skills being taught in schools were effective, the results were overwhelmingly negative. One student responded “definitely not as you can tell I can’t even remember half of it.” With

another student adding, “[the skills were] very forgettable”. It’s not just the students that feel this way, there are many academics that are advocating for improved life skills across schools. Cullinane, C and Montacute, R. (2017) notes, “life skills are crucial to people achieving their potential, and therefore it is natural that they should also lie at the heart of our education system.” Matthews, L. (2020) a parent of two, also believes “children should be taught more life skills overall, to prepare them for leaving school.”

This report has already implied that many students feel that life skills taught in education are irrelevant

and vague, compared to the issues that they come across when leaving education. So, what actions are school leavers taking to solve these problems? Reynolds, A. (2020) who is currently looking to rent a property for the first time says, “it’s tough sometimes I can spend hours researching, looking through tonnes of videos and blogs and in the end the best advice comes from those who have gone through the same experiences, because I can relate to it.” Young people can gain insights like these from Social media, online forums and YouTube videos. What’s great about these platforms is the community element, which gives young people the ability to share

their experiences and knowledge about the life lessons they have gained.

Other students say “If I come across an issue I always go to my parents for advice, they usually know what to do because they have probably gone through the process before.” Roberts, E. (2020) But this statement does not ring true to everyone in this situation. There are a number of factors to why young people may not have the opportunity to speak to parents/guardians regarding life skills, so this should not be a ‘go-to’ solution for school leavers.



Photo by Zen Chung from Pexels

An analysis documented by UNICEF found that “approaches relying on life skills have been effective in educating youth about health-related issues—such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; nutrition; pregnancy; ... and (STIs).” Nalla, V. (2015) This view can be supported by Wilson, B. (2020) who says “It’s good to teach children about the misuse of drugs and alcohol but I feel that the school environment would also be the best place to learn about topics surrounding money management ... at least the basics, enough to support students who face these obstacles”.

In contrast, other students believe that “the sex education program in schools is pretty bad and outdated”

(data taken from survey). This indicates that the information being taught across schools is inconsistent, therefore some students may leave school at an disadvantage.

Research conducted by Welsh Youth Parliament found that “the Welsh Baccalaureate was not “successfully achieving its aim”, and therefore a new life skills qualification or certificate should be introduced for 16-year-olds.” Lewis, B. (2019) In our rapidly changing world “it has been estimated that two-thirds of children today will work in jobs that don’t currently exist.” (TEDx Talks, 2018) A parent who completed the survey believes “students ought to be taught how to find information and that it’s okay not to know.”

# SUMMARY

After exploring the importance of learning life skills and the role it plays in aiding young people's decisions, it is apparent that students don't feel that they are obtaining enough applicable information to begin to make informed real-world decisions.

Research from a range of sources has unveiled problems within the areas of accessibility, applicability and awareness. The most prevalent finding was that students and school leavers identify that the life skills taught within schools currently, don't suit their lifestyle. Research suggests that schools do not prioritise the teaching of life skills, and with that only a select few topics are taught in schools. According to school leavers these topics are often 'forgettable'. There are certainly methods to overcoming these issues with the

help of educational devices and implementing continued learning techniques. Along with introducing more visual aids, for a more engaging program. Data revealed that there is a lack of consistency surrounding academic materials, which means the solution now becomes; making relevant life skills accessible for young people. This can be aided by the development of digital educational platforms.

This report also acknowledges that insufficient life skill subjects are being covered during compulsory and further education, and that this information can become obsolete by the time children need to use these skills. The research suggests that a proposed solution to this issue may be to expand the list of subjects and promote further life-long learning strategies.

This now makes the question **'How might design be used to make a range of relevant life skills accessible for all young people across the UK?'**

This will now be investigated further to develop a design solution for this significant 21st century educational problem. It is important

to tackle this issue to ensure future generations do not face the same extent of challenges when leaving education and transitioning into adulthood. To improve the knowledge of life skills among children and young people now and for the future, and showcase the importance of life skills.



Photo by Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels

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