

Decision-Making as a Foundational Life Skill: Reviewing Home Science as a “Decision Laboratory” for Middle School Learners

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ABSTRACT

- Have you ever had to make an important decision and wondered what the right choice was?
- Have you ever made a decision that you later wished you had made differently?
- Have you ever found decision-making challenging, especially when there was no clear right or wrong answer?
- Have you ever wished you had been taught in school how to make better decisions in real life?

If your answer is YES, and if you believe decision-making deserves a more intentional place in education, this paper is for you to read and support.

Education prepares its learners to navigate and sail smoothly through life. Life skills which schools and the educational sector inculcates in them will be their biggest tool during the sail. Life-skills frameworks identify decision-making, problem-solving, critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, empathy, self-awareness and coping skills as important competencies for effective functioning. For achieving the above goal, they will have to analyse demands, choices and responsibilities of everyday life through effective decision making. Although decision-making is generally positioned as one life skill among several, this paper proposes that it can be conceptualised as a foundational and integrative life-skill competency through which cognitive, social-emotional and practical skills are translated into purposeful action.

The paper examines the role of decision-making in the development of life competence and argues that its systematic development should begin during middle school, when learners increasingly explore independency. They also experience self-direction, self-reliance, peer influence, academic choices and everyday responsibilities. The paper further examines the potential of Home Science as an experiential context for developing decision-making through authentic situations involving all the major areas from the subject of Home Science. Namely food and nutrition, resource management, consumer choices, clothing, health, human development, safety, sustainability and household responsibilities.

Drawing upon the author's doctoral research on Home Science as a Transdisciplinary Subject for Developing Life Skills among School Students in Noida, the paper uses existing empirical findings regarding stakeholder awareness, perceptions of life skills, gender-neutrality and the availability of Home Science to contextualise the argument. It further examines the potential of Kaushal Bodh and a Parent Calendar as complementary mechanisms for developing and transferring decision-making competence. Kaushal Bodh can provide opportunities for experiential decision-making within school, while structured Parent Calendar activities can extend such experiences into authentic home contexts.

The paper proposes a Decision-Making Learning Cycle—Identify, Explore, Compare, Choose, Act and Reflect—and a developmental progression from everyday decisions to practical, social, academic and

life-course decisions. Play, simulations, role-play, decision cards, budgeting challenges, decision trees, escape-room activities and changing-variable scenarios are proposed as age-appropriate pedagogies. The paper concludes that Home Science can be repositioned as a “Decision Laboratory” in which learners repeatedly practise making informed choices, evaluating consequences and reflecting on outcomes. Such an approach can help bridge the gap between knowing and doing and prepare students not merely for employment or examinations, but for responsible and independent living.

Keywords: Decision-Making, Life Skills, Home Science, Experiential Learning.

Introduction

“Education is not preparation for life: Education is life itself,” is by John Dewey.

Education prepares children for the future, but the future is not experienced only through examinations, degrees and employment. It is experienced through decisions.

Every day, young students take many small and big decisions. Very basic ones include what to eat, how to use pocket money, how to manage time, how to respond to another person, what information to trust, what risks to take, how to solve a problem and how to prioritise demands and needs. As one grows older, these decisions become increasingly complex, including subject selection, educational pathways, career choices, financial decisions, relationships and family responsibilities.

A critical question therefore arises: If children are eventually expected to make significant decisions about their education, careers and lives, when and how were they taught to make decisions?

The World Health Organization identifies ten core life skills, with Decision making being one of them. Others are problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, communication, interpersonal relationships, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions and coping with stress. Listing decision-making alongside other competencies may unintentionally obscure its distinctive role.

- A child may possess knowledge but does not know what to do with it or use it appropriately.
- A child may analyse alternatives but struggle to foresee the impact of its final choice.
- A child may communicate effectively but make an impulsive decision.
- A child may understand another person's perspective but fail to translate that understanding into appropriate action.

Thus, this paper proposes and views decision-making as not yet another life skill, but as the ability to combine and apply knowledge, skills, and data from different fields to solve complex problems. It bridges gaps between separate skills or systems to create a unified, practical solution, through which several other life skills are brought together to produce action.

This proposition does not suggest that decision-making is literally the biological or developmental “root” of every life skill. Rather, it proposes a conceptual model in which decision-making acts as a functional bridge between knowledge, thinking, social-emotional competence and action.

The paper further argues that the skill of decision making should be developed in a systematic manner right from middle school rather than just ask them to choose major academic or career decisions. It will ensure that, when students finally make the decision, they are equipped not merely with facts and figures about different careers, but with the ability to identify their strengths and interests, compare alternatives, consider consequences, evaluate opportunities and constraints, and make a reasoned choice. In this way, career decision-making becomes the culmination of years of practising decision-making in smaller, meaningful contexts rather than a one-time choice made at the end of schooling.

Home Science, being the science behind every day living, offers an especially appropriate base for the above argument. As it deals directly with real-life situations. Food selection, budgeting, nutrition, clothing, personal care, resource management, consumer behaviour, safety, caregiving and sustainability all require analysis of available choices and decisions to be made on daily basis. With NEP 2020 providing the policy foundation, Kaushal Bodh supporting experiential and skill-based learning, and Home Science offering authentic contexts for everyday living, the Home Science curriculum can be repositioned as a powerful space for developing decision-making from middle school onwards.

Rather than limiting Home Science to the acquisition of practical or vocational skills, the curriculum can deliberately embed decision-making processes across its domains—food and nutrition, resource management, clothing and textiles, human development, health and safety, consumer education, sustainability and financial literacy. Students can learn to identify problems, gather information, generate alternatives, evaluate consequences, make informed choices, implement decisions and reflect on outcomes. Such an approach would transform Home Science from a subject focused primarily on “how to do” into one that also teaches students “how to decide what to do, why to do it and when to change course.” In alignment with the experiential-learning vision of NEP 2020 and the practical orientation of Kaushal Bodh, students can develop these competencies through projects, simulations, role-play, budgeting challenges, home-based tasks and real-life problem scenarios. The Parent Calendar can further extend these experiences into the home, creating continuity between school learning and everyday life. Consequently, Home Science can serve not merely as a vocational or domestic subject, but as a transdisciplinary life-preparation curriculum in which decision-making becomes the connecting thread linking knowledge, practical skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, empathy, self-regulation and responsible action.

Therefore, Home Science can become a “Decision Laboratory” where children learn not only how to perform tasks, but how to think, choose, act and reflect on a daily basis. Such a learning environment recognises that decision-making, like any other competency, develops through practice, experience, mistakes and reflection rather than through instruction alone. Students should be provided with safe, age-appropriate opportunities to make decisions, including opportunities where their choices may not produce the desired outcome. A poorly planned budget, an unsuitable food choice, an inefficient use of time or an unsuccessful solution should not necessarily be viewed as failure; instead, it can become a valuable learning experience when students are encouraged to examine what happened, why it happened and what could be done differently.

Repeated exposure to such experiences can help children gradually develop the confidence to make choices, the resilience to accept consequences, and the flexibility to reconsider and modify their decisions. Importantly, the objective is not to train students to always arrive at one predetermined “correct” answer, but to develop their ability to weigh evidence, consider different perspectives, recognise consequences, understand competing needs and make decisions that are appropriate, responsible, fair and just within a given context. Through reflection, children begin to understand that a decision that benefits one person may affect another, that individual wants may need to be balanced against collective needs, and that fairness sometimes requires considering perspectives different from their own.

In this sense, the Home Science classroom can become a low-risk rehearsal space for real life. Children can make small decisions today, learn from their mistakes, try again and gradually develop better judgement before they encounter higher-stakes decisions in adolescence and adulthood. The process can be represented as:

Experience → Decide → Act → Encounter Consequences → Reflect → Reconsider → Try Again → Develop Judgement

Over time, this cycle can nurture not only decision-making competence but also resilience, responsibility, empathy, self-regulation, critical thinking and ethical reasoning. The ultimate aim is therefore not simply to produce independent decision-makers, but thoughtful decision-makers who can balance personal needs with the needs of others and make informed, appropriate, fair and just choices. Home Science, with its everyday and authentic contexts, is uniquely positioned to provide these repeated opportunities, transforming ordinary tasks into meaningful rehearsals for responsible living.

Importance of Skill-Based Education in School Curricula

A major shift has been seen from rote learning to emphasis on skill-based education. traditional rote-learning has been considered irrelevant in current educational sector. This new approach emphasizes not just conceptualises knowledge but majorly focuses on the development of skills. Skills which are essential such as critical thinking, collaboration, decision making and real-world problem-solving. GRAAM et al. (2021) agrees that Skill-based education aligns closely with 21st-century demands, where workplaces increasingly require individuals who can adapt, communicate effectively, think creatively, and work in teams.

With specific reference to Indian context, this shift is reinforced by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Chakraborty et al, explicitly mentions experiential learning, life skills, and competency-based education to be integrated into core learning from early grades.

A study done by Zhao et al. 2024 supports the positive impact of skill-based learning on academic and life outcomes. It quotes the example of self-management and self-efficacy, which is the key to life skills, are strongly associated with higher academic achievement. Students engaged in self-regulated learning report to have better intrinsic motivation and performance.

Global studies have highlighted the importance of skill-based education in school curricula. It focuses on empowering students with hands on experiences, practical skills and competencies that are directly relevant to survival in the world. A study by Ali, S. (2024) emphasizes the development of skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and technical expertise

Prince et al. Life skills can be utilized in many content areas: prevention of drug use, sexual violence, and also can be extended into environmental education, peace education or education for development, livelihood and income generation. In short, life skills strengthen young people to take positive action to promote health and positive social relationships. Implementing the above strategies can be useful for students to acquire 21st-century skills besides the regular knowledge from textbooks. They will begin to face challenges and grow efficiently in the competitive world with critical and creative thinking skills and social skills.

An 85-year ongoing study conducted by Harvard Research has found a strong connection between doing chores and later professional success and happiness. The findings of study as mentioned by Brandes, R. (2024, May 1) showed that shared responsibilities help children develop greater self-worth, confidence, work ethic, and empathy for others.

“By making them do chores — taking out the garbage, doing their own laundry — they realize ‘I have to do the work of life in order to be part of life,’” says Julie Lythcott-Haims, former dean at Stanford University. “It’s not just about me and what I need in this moment, but that I’m part of an ecosystem. I’m part of a family. I’m part of a workplace.”, as reported by Brandes, R. (2024).

Integrating skill-based education into school curriculum helps build skills. As is embedded in progressive national policies like NEP 2020, without such reform, schooling risks producing students who are academically literate but ill-equipped for real-world challenges.

Understanding Life Skills from the Lens of Decision Making at the Core Level

Skills can be understood as abilities, capabilities, competencies, or the practical know-how required to perform a task or respond effectively to a situation. When these skills function together as an interconnected network rather than as isolated abilities, they contribute to the development of life skills—enabling individuals to think, make decisions, solve problems, communicate, manage relationships, and respond appropriately to everyday challenges.

- Foundational skills
- Cognitive skills
- Social-emotional skills
- Practical and functional skills

These domains should not be viewed as independent categories. In everyday life, they interact continuously, and decision-making provides the point at which these different competencies come together and are translated into action.

• Foundational Skills

Foundational skills can also be understood as conceptual Skills help you understand educational concepts clearly and develop deeper knowledge and understanding of ideas. Example: Understanding how plants need sunlight, water, and air to grow. These include reading, writing, comprehension, numeracy, basic scientific and social-science understanding.

This foundational knowledge enables the individual to process the information, analyse and take proceed towards decision-making. A student cannot compare two food labels without literacy. A student cannot construct a budget without numeracy. A student cannot evaluate a health decision without relevant knowledge.

- **Cognitive Skills**

Cognitive skills refer to the mental processes through which learners understand, analyse, question, evaluate and generate ideas. These include:

- Analysis – examining information and understanding relationships such as cause and effect;
- Reasoning – using logic and evidence to reach conclusions;
- Critical thinking – questioning assumptions, evaluating information and judging its reliability;
- Creative thinking – generating new possibilities and alternative approaches;
- Problem-solving – identifying problems and developing possible solutions.

These skills have a particularly close relationship with decision-making. A decision rarely involves simply choosing between two options. It often requires understanding the situation, identifying alternatives, comparing them and anticipating what might happen as a result of each choice.

Here, analysis identifies the factors, reasoning connects them, critical thinking evaluates them, creative thinking generates alternatives, and problem-solving helps construct possible solutions. Decision-making then brings these cognitive processes together to select a course of action. Thus, cognitive skills can be viewed as the thinking machinery that supports the quality of a decision.

- **Social-Emotional Skills**

Social-emotional skills enable individuals to understand themselves, manage their emotions and interact constructively with others. They include communication, empathy, teamwork, interpersonal relationships, self-awareness and self-regulation.

Decision-making is not always an individual cognitive exercise. Many decisions affect other people and require an understanding of different perspectives.

Communication enables a child to seek information, express a viewpoint, listen to others and explain a decision.

Empathy allows the child to consider how a decision may affect another person.

Self-awareness helps children recognise their own needs, preferences, strengths, biases and emotional responses.

Self-regulation enables them to pause, manage impulses and avoid making decisions purely in response to anger, excitement, fear or peer pressure.

Teamwork and interpersonal skills become important when decisions need to be negotiated or made collectively.

This is particularly important because a decision can be logically efficient but socially insensitive or unfair. Life-skills education must therefore move beyond “Can I make a decision?” to “Can I make a decision that appropriately considers myself and others?”

- **Practical and Functional Skills**

Practical and functional skills are the abilities required to manage everyday life independently and effectively. They may include:

- self-care and personal hygiene;
- food preparation and clothing care;
- basic safety and household organisation;
- budgeting and resource management;
- time management;
- consumer awareness and environmental responsibility.

These skills are particularly relevant to Home Science because they emerge from authentic everyday situations. However, practical competence involves much more than knowing how to perform a task. Practical skills provide the real-life contexts in which decision-making is exercised. This makes practical and functional skills particularly valuable for experiential learning because the learner is not merely discussing a hypothetical problem; the learner is making choices in a meaningful context.

Decision Making as an Integrative Skill

As represented in fig 1, decision-making is at the core of life skills because it represents the point at which multiple competencies come together and are translated into purposeful action. The four surrounding domains—foundational, cognitive, social-emotional, and practical and functional skills—contribute different capabilities to the decision-making process. Foundational skills enable a learner to access and understand information; cognitive skills help analyse, reason, evaluate and generate alternatives; social-emotional skills enable the learner to understand personal needs, regulate emotions, communicate and consider the feelings and perspectives of others; while practical and functional skills enable the application of knowledge within authentic situations and real-life constraints. For instance, when deciding whether to purchase a snack, a child may need literacy to read the label, numeracy to compare price and quantity, nutritional knowledge to understand its contents, critical thinking to evaluate claims, self-awareness to recognise personal needs, empathy to consider family requirements, and problem-solving to identify alternatives. These skills do not operate in isolation; they converge when the learner asks, “Which option should I choose?”—and this is where decision-making becomes the integrative competency. The decision then leads to action, followed by reflection on the outcome, allowing the learner to learn from both successful and unsuccessful choices. Thus, decision-making is positioned at the centre not because it replaces other life skills, but because it connects knowledge, thinking, emotions, social awareness and practical competence, enabling the learner to move from knowing and understanding to choosing, acting and learning.

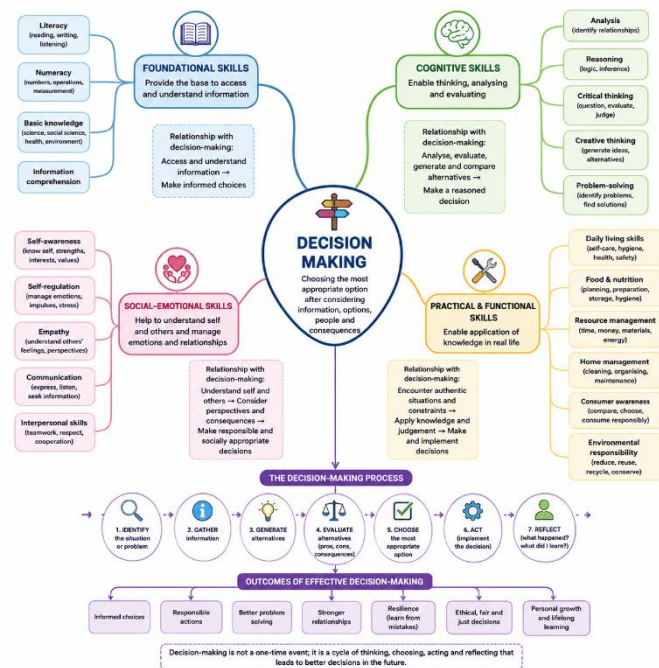


Fig. 1: Decision Making: A Core Skill

(AI Generated Image)

The WHO's Perspective

The World Health Organization (WHO) life-skills framework provides an important foundation for understanding the role of decision-making in human development. WHO identifies ten core life skills: decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, communication, interpersonal relationships, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions, and coping with stress. These skills are intended to enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Importantly, the framework does not suggest that these competencies function independently. Rather, they are interrelated and mutually supportive, with different skills being activated according to the demands of a particular situation.

Within this framework, decision-making is distinctive because it represents the point at which thinking, information, emotions, values and social considerations are translated into a choice and ultimately into action. Effective decision-making requires an individual to identify a situation, consider possible alternatives, anticipate consequences and select an appropriate course of action. In doing so, it draws upon several of the other life skills identified by WHO. Critical thinking helps individuals question assumptions and evaluate the reliability and relevance of information; creative thinking enables them to generate alternative possibilities; problem-solving supports the identification and evaluation of possible responses; self-awareness helps them recognise their own needs, values, emotions and biases; empathy and interpersonal skills enable consideration of how choices may affect others; while coping and self-regulation support thoughtful choices even in situations involving stress, pressure or strong emotions.

Consequently, decision-making should not be understood merely as an isolated skill that sits alongside the other nine competencies. Rather, it can be viewed as an integrative process through which several life skills are mobilised simultaneously to respond to a real-life situation. For example, a student deciding whether to purchase a particular food product may need to read and interpret information, critically evaluate health claims, compare alternatives, consider affordability, recognise personal preferences and anticipate the consequences of the choice. The final decision is therefore the product of multiple interacting competencies.

This perspective strengthens the central proposition of the present paper: decision-making can be conceptualised as a functional core of life-skills education—not because it replaces other life skills, but because it provides a mechanism through which they are brought together and translated into purposeful action. Teaching decision-making, therefore, should involve more than explaining how to choose between alternatives. It should provide learners with repeated opportunities to think, question, compare, consider perspectives, anticipate consequences, choose, act and reflect. Such an approach can help children progressively develop informed judgement, independence, resilience and responsibility, preparing them not only for immediate everyday choices but also for increasingly complex academic, career and life decisions.

Home Science as a “Decision Laboratory”

Home Science can be reconceptualised as a “Decision Laboratory”—a space where students learn not only how to perform everyday tasks, but also how to think, choose, act and reflect. As an applied, skill-oriented discipline, Home Science connects theoretical knowledge with practical life through areas such as Food and Nutrition, Family Resource Management, Clothing and Textiles, Human Growth and Development, and Communication and Extension.

Each domain provides authentic opportunities to develop multiple life skills. For example, meal planning involves critical thinking, problem-solving, numeracy, health awareness and decision-making; resource management develops planning, financial literacy and prioritisation; and human development and communication foster empathy, self-awareness, collaboration and ethical reasoning.

The “laboratory” also provides a safe space to make mistakes. Students can make a choice, experience its consequences, reflect on what went wrong and try again.

This repeated cycle—

Experience → Decide → Act → Reflect → Reconsider

—can build resilience, adaptability, confidence and judgement.

Importantly, students gradually move from asking “What do I want?” to asking “What is appropriate, responsible and fair?” This brings decision-making together with empathy, ethical reasoning, collaboration and social responsibility.

Thus, Home Science need not be limited to teaching practical or vocational skills. It can become a transdisciplinary life-skills space where foundational knowledge, cognitive abilities, social-emotional competencies and practical skills converge through decision-making. By providing repeated opportunities to make small, meaningful decisions, learn from mistakes and reflect on outcomes, Home Science can prepare students for increasingly complex decisions in education, careers and everyday life.

Evidence from the Author's Doctoral Research

The present conceptual argument is informed by the author's doctoral research, “To Assess the Knowledge of Stakeholders about Home Science as a Transdisciplinary Subject for Developing Life Skills among School Students in Noida.” The study included 32 principals, 269 teachers, 210 parents and 501

students, thereby incorporating perspectives from four key stakeholder groups. The study provides useful contextual evidence for reconsidering Home Science as a vehicle for systematic life-skills development.

The findings indicate a considerable level of stakeholder awareness of Home Science. Approximately 84.8% of parents, 74.7% of teachers and 82.2% of students reported awareness of the subject. However, awareness did not translate consistently into institutional provision. Among the 32 principals, only 7 reported that Home Science was available in their schools, while 13 reported that it was not available and 12 did not report its availability. This contrast is significant: stakeholders appear to recognise the subject, while opportunities for students to experience it systematically remain uneven. The finding therefore points towards a recognition–implementation gap—between understanding the potential of Home Science and creating curricular structures through which that potential can be realised.

Further evidence from the study supports the relevance of Home Science to life-skills education. Among principals, the correlation between Awareness and Knowledge of Home Science and perceptions of its Life-Skills potential was strongly positive ($r = 0.807$). This is an important contextual finding, although it should not be interpreted as evidence of causation. It suggests that greater awareness and understanding of Home Science were associated with stronger recognition of its capacity to contribute to life-skills development. This supports the broader argument that the subject may have educational value extending beyond conventional academic or vocational preparation.

The study also revealed strong stakeholder support for gender-neutral participation in Home Science. The proportion agreeing that Home Science is suitable for both boys and girls was 95% among principals, 92% among teachers, 93.83% among parents and 89.83% among students. Such broad agreement is particularly relevant to a decision-centred approach. If Home Science is positioned as a subject for independent living, responsible citizenship, health, resource management, relationships and informed decision-making, its relevance cannot logically be restricted by gender.

The doctoral findings also align with the broader skill-oriented conceptualisation of Home Science. The subject integrates critical thinking and practical problem-solving, decision-making, creativity, self-awareness, emotional intelligence, resilience, communication, collaboration, empathy, ethical reasoning, financial literacy and self-reliance within authentic contexts. Importantly, decision-making is already visible across the different domains of Home Science—for example, prioritising needs and wants in resource management, selecting nutritious foods, making informed health choices, choosing appropriate clothing and selecting effective communication strategies.

The evidence further suggests that Home Science can bring hard and soft life skills together. Its practical domains provide opportunities for students to develop financial literacy, resource management, self-reliance, teamwork and workplace-related competencies alongside cognitive and social-emotional skills. This is particularly important for the present argument because decision-making rarely occurs as an isolated cognitive act. A real-life decision requires knowledge, reasoning, emotional regulation, communication, empathy and practical judgement to operate together.

Taken collectively, these findings provide a meaningful empirical backdrop for the proposed “Decision Laboratory” model of Home Science. The study does not directly test whether decision-making is the foundational life skill, nor does it establish that Home Science causes improved decision-making. Rather, it demonstrates three conditions that make the proposed model worthy of further investigation:

Stakeholders recognise Home Science and its life-skills potential.

Home Science naturally provides contexts in which multiple life skills and decision-making can be practised.

There remains a gap between stakeholder recognition and systematic curricular availability.

The implication is therefore not simply that Home Science should be made more widely available, but that its purpose and pedagogy may need to be reimagined. Rather than presenting it primarily as a subject associated with domestic tasks or later vocational preparation, it can be positioned from middle school onwards as education for independent living, responsible citizenship and informed decision-making. Its practical contexts can become safe spaces in which students learn to make choices, encounter consequences, reflect on mistakes and progressively develop judgement, resilience, empathy and responsibility.

This provides a strong basis for the central proposition of this paper: if decision-making is a core mechanism through which other life skills are translated into action, Home Science offers an authentic curricular environment in which that integration can be deliberately taught, practised and reflected upon.

Teaching Decision-Making the NEP Way: Experiential, Playful and Reflective Learning

If decision-making is to become a foundational life skill, it should not be taught merely as a definition or a set of steps to memorise. It needs to be experienced, practised, discussed, tested and reflected upon. This approach is consistent with the emphasis on experiential, competency-based and skill-oriented learning under NEP 2020 and the practical orientation of Kaushal Bodh. Home Science provides an especially appropriate context because everyday tasks naturally require children to make choices, manage resources, solve problems and consider consequences.

• **A Simple Decision-Making System**

For middle-school learners, decision-making can initially be introduced through a simple, memorable cycle, as shown in figure

STOP → THINK → EXPLORE → COMPARE → CHOOSE → ACT → REFLECT

- STOP: What is happening? What decision do I need to make?
- THINK: What do I already know? What information do I need?
- EXPLORE: What choices or alternatives do I have?
- COMPARE: What could happen with each choice?
- CHOOSE: Which option is most appropriate, and why?
- ACT: Put the decision into practice.
- REFLECT: What happened? Would I make the same decision again?

The strength of such a system lies in its transferability. The same process can be applied to choosing food, managing money, resolving conflicts, selecting extracurricular activities, making consumer choices, managing time and eventually making academic and career-related decisions.

• **Learning Through Play and Simulation**

Decision-making should initially be taught through play, simulations and real-life challenges rather than lectures. Play creates a relatively low-risk environment in which students can experiment, make mistakes, reconsider choices and observe consequences without facing serious real-world repercussions. With repeated use, this can become a familiar thinking routine that students apply independently.

Traffic-Light Decisions A simple visual strategy can help younger middle-school students internalise the process:

- **Decision Cards** Students receive everyday dilemmas
- **"Change One Variable"** This develops flexibility, critical thinking, resilience and adaptability, rather than encouraging children to believe that changing one's mind is a sign of failure.
- **Decision Detective:** Students can also become Decision Detectives by examining scenarios involving poor, incomplete or impulsive decisions.
- **Decision Trees** Students analyse the possible consequences of each pathway. This makes abstract concepts such as consequences, trade-offs and opportunity cost visible and understandable.
- **Decision Auctions** Students then explain what they prioritised, what they gave up and why. This transforms prioritisation into an engaging experience while developing financial literacy, reasoning and responsible decision-making.
- **Decision Escape Rooms** A Home Science Decision Escape Room can bring several life skills together in one experiential challenge.

From Play to Real-Life Transfer The ultimate purpose of these activities is transfer. The game is not the learning endpoint; it is the rehearsal space. Students should gradually be encouraged to apply the same decision-making system to authentic situations at school and home—for example, planning a meal, managing pocket money, organising their time, resolving a disagreement, choosing between alternatives or planning a small project.

Ultimately, the aim is to help students progress from “I have to be told what to choose” to “I can understand the situation, consider my options, think about consequences, make a reasoned choice, take responsibility for it and reconsider when necessary.” This is the essence of teaching decision-making the NEP way—through experience rather than instruction alone, through reflection rather than rote learning, and through meaningful choices that gradually prepare children for independent and responsible living.

Extending Decision-Making Beyond the Classroom: Kaushal Bodh and the Parent Calendar

The proposed model does not require schools to begin from zero. Existing experiential approaches such as Kaushal Bodh provide a valuable foundation by engaging students in practical, real-world tasks and learning through doing. The present paper proposes adding an explicit decision-making layer to these experiences. Rather than assessing only “Can the student perform the task?”, learning can also explore: What decisions did the student make? What alternatives were available? Why was one option selected? What were the consequences?

For example, while preparing a simple food item, students can be encouraged to select among alternatives, work within a budget, consider nutritional requirements, adjust quantities, respond to constraints, minimise waste and justify their choices. Thus, the existing experiential cycle can be strengthened through:

Kaushal Bodh Experience → Identify → Explore → Compare → Choose → Act → Reflect

This does not position Kaushal Bodh negatively; rather, it builds upon its experiential structure by making decision-making more visible, intentional and reflective.

However, life skills cannot be developed entirely within the classroom. Many of the most meaningful decisions occur in the home and community, making the Parent Calendar a valuable extension of school-based learning. Rather than adding academic work for families, it can introduce small, authentic “Family Decision Challenges” that allow children to practise decision-making in everyday contexts.

Examples could include:

- Food: Compare two packaged foods and explain which one you would choose and why.
- Budgeting: Help plan one family meal within a given budget.
- Resource Management: Identify one household resource that can be conserved and suggest how its use could be reduced.
- Sustainability: Identify an item that could be repaired, reused or repurposed instead of discarded.

Importantly, parents should function as facilitators of thinking rather than providers of answers. Instead of telling children, “This is the correct choice,” parents can ask:

- What choices do you have?
- What information do you need?
- What might happen with each option?
- Who might be affected?
- Why did you choose this?
- Would you make the same choice next time?

This preserves student agency while extending decision-making practice from school into authentic family life. The combined approach can therefore be represented as:

School Experience + Home Experience → Decision Practice → Reflection → Transfer

In this way, Kaushal Bodh provides the experiential context, the classroom provides guided practice, and the Parent Calendar provides opportunities for authentic application. Together, they can create a continuous ecosystem in which children gradually learn to make, explain, evaluate and revise decisions rather than simply follow instructions.

Conclusion

Life does not present children with examination questions. It presents them with choices.

Some are small. Some are difficult. Some have consequences that extend for years.

Education therefore needs to prepare students not only to know, but to choose, act and reflect.

Decision-making is commonly identified as one among several life skills. However, this paper proposes a broader conceptualisation: decision-making can function as an integrative competency through which cognitive, social-emotional and practical skills are translated into action.

This does not mean that decision-making replaces critical thinking, problem-solving, empathy, communication or self-regulation. Rather, these competencies interact within decision-making situations and influence the quality of choices individuals make.

Middle school provides an important developmental opportunity to begin this process. Students at this stage are already making increasingly independent decisions about food, money, time, friendships, technology, learning and personal responsibilities.

The educational response should therefore not wait until a student has to select subjects, choose a career or enter the workforce.

The big decisions should have small rehearsals.

Home Science can provide these rehearsals.

Through food and nutrition, resource management, consumer education, clothing, human development, health, safety and sustainability, students encounter authentic situations requiring choices.

Kaushal Bodh can provide an experiential school-based foundation.

Play can make decision-making engaging, visible and low-risk.

Decision cards, simulations, role-play, decision trees, budgeting games, escape rooms, changing-variable challenges and decision auctions can transform abstract concepts into lived experiences.

The Parent Calendar can extend this learning beyond the classroom, allowing children to practise decision-making within authentic family situations while parents act as facilitators rather than decision-makers. The paper therefore proposes Home Science as a “Decision Laboratory” for middle-school learners—a space where children can practise making informed choices before life demands increasingly complex ones.

The ultimate goal is not to produce children who always make the “right” decision.

It is to develop children who can:

identify a situation, seek information, consider alternatives, anticipate consequences, make a reasoned choice, accept responsibility for it, reflect on the outcome and change course when necessary.

That is not merely preparation for an examination. It is preparation for life.

And perhaps the most important shift in life-skill education is therefore this:

We should not wait until children are old enough to make big decisions before teaching them how to decide. We should give them meaningful small decisions early enough for them to learn how to make the big ones later.

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