

# DEFINITIONS AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF LIFE SKILLS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION: A SYSTEMATIC SCOPING REVIEW

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## INTRODUCTION

Education should stimulate students to become active and responsible citizens of the future (MER, 2017). Teaching life skills in primary education equips students with skills on how to handle life.

Globally, life skills education is frequently associated with preventive intervention initiatives aimed at adolescents, with a focus on mitigating high-risk behaviors such as tobacco, alcohol, and substance abuse (Bansal & Kapur, 2022; Botvin & Griffin, 2004). In Norway, life skills were implemented as an interdisciplinary topic as a health promotion strategy from a perspective of holistic and lifelong learning for children and young people.

While there are studies investigating life skills programs with specific outcomes, there is a gap about the understanding of the overarching concept of life skills and its definition (Dupuy et al., 2018). Consequently, this review aims to systematically identify and map the current scope of research concerning the definitions and understandings of life skills within the context of primary education, both in Norway and internationally.

"Life skills are abilities for **adaptive and positive behavior**, that enable individuals to **deal effectively** with the **demands and challenges of everyday life**"

(WHO, 1997, p. 1)

## OBJECTIVES

The aim of this systematic scoping review is to investigate the empirical research on life skills as a topic in primary education, including definitions and understandings of the term. The review will address the following questions:

1. What characterizes the Norwegian and the international research on life skills in primary education?
  - a. What specific topics, focus areas, demographics, study designs, and methods are prominent?
2. How are life skills defined in Norwegian and international research within the context of primary education, and are there any differences?

## METHODS

Two searches were conducted in the review, one in English and one in Norwegian. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established (see Table 1).

### The Norwegian search

The search string in the Norwegian search consisted of "livsmestring" (life skills in Norwegian). This search strategy was broad because there was limited research available.

The Norwegian search was conducted in the following databases:

- Idunn
- NORA
- Oria

### The English search

The search string in the English search:

**TI/AB/SU** (("life skill\*" OR "life-skill\*") **AND** (school\* OR educat\* OR class\* OR teach\* OR learn\* OR student\* OR pupil\*))

The English search was conducted in the following databases:

- Academic Search Premier
- ERIC
- PsycInfo
- Scopus
- SocINDEX
- Web of Science

### Reference management and screening process

- References uploaded to EPPI-Reviewer
- Duplicate removal
- Double-blind screening on title and abstract
- Double-blind screening on full text

### Data analysis

Data extraction forms were developed to collect descriptive details in EPPI-Reviewer related to RQ 1 & 1a. Data was extracted from the included studies by double-blind coding according to the pre-developed coding schemes. A thematic analysis was conducted related to RQ 2, using NVivo software.

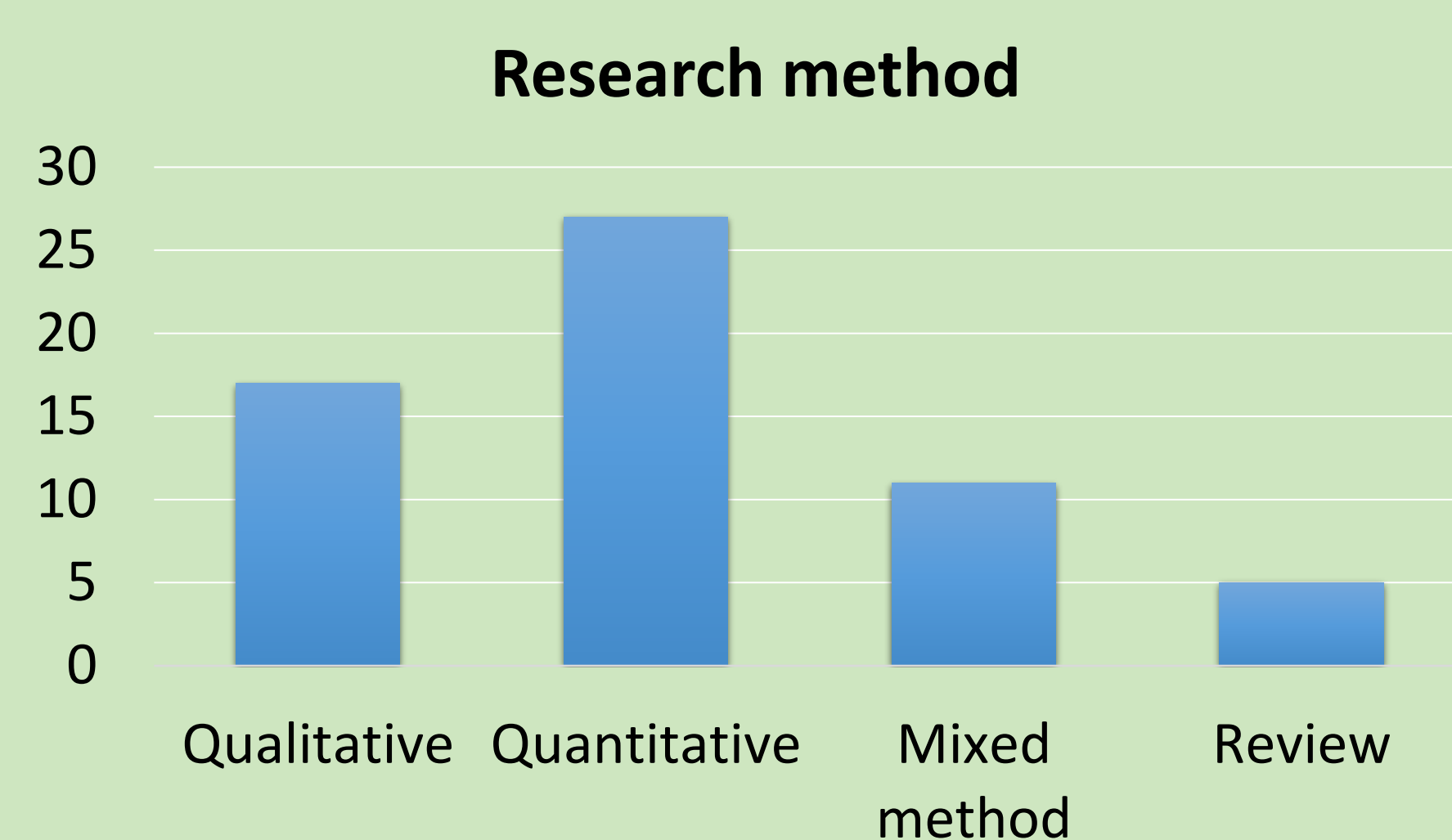
Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<b>Population</b>	Students aged 6-15 Teachers teaching students between the ages of 6-15	Children younger than 6 years old and students older than 15 years old. Other school staff members or external professions.
<b>Main concept: Life skills</b>	<b>Life skills</b>	<b>Life skills</b> as basic skills (i.e., simple everyday tasks). <b>Life skills</b> with a main focus on diseases, disorders, reproductive health, sports, substance use, violence and others.
<b>Other phenomena of interest: Inclusion</b>	<b>Inclusion</b> in teaching, in terms of high-quality educational opportunity for everyone.	<b>Inclusion</b> in teaching, in terms of children with special needs.
<b>Other phenomena of interest: Diversity</b>	<b>Diversity</b> in the classroom related to students' backgrounds, values, interests, and aims.	<b>Diversity</b> in terms of a main focus on vulnerable groups.
<b>Context</b>	School setting	Outside of school context
<b>Design of study</b>	Empirical studies	No data included
<b>Language</b>	English and Norwegian	Other languages than English and Norwegian
<b>Publication year</b>	2013-2023	Older than 2013
<b>Publication type</b>	Scientific peer-reviewed articles	Other than scientific peer-review articles

## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

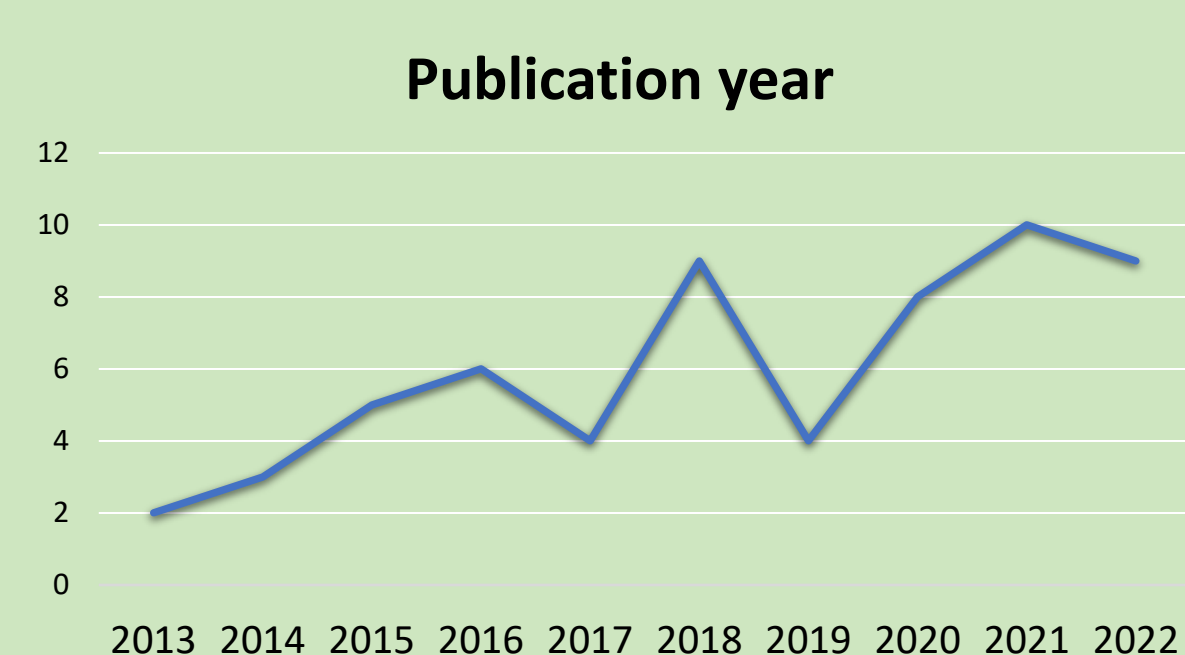
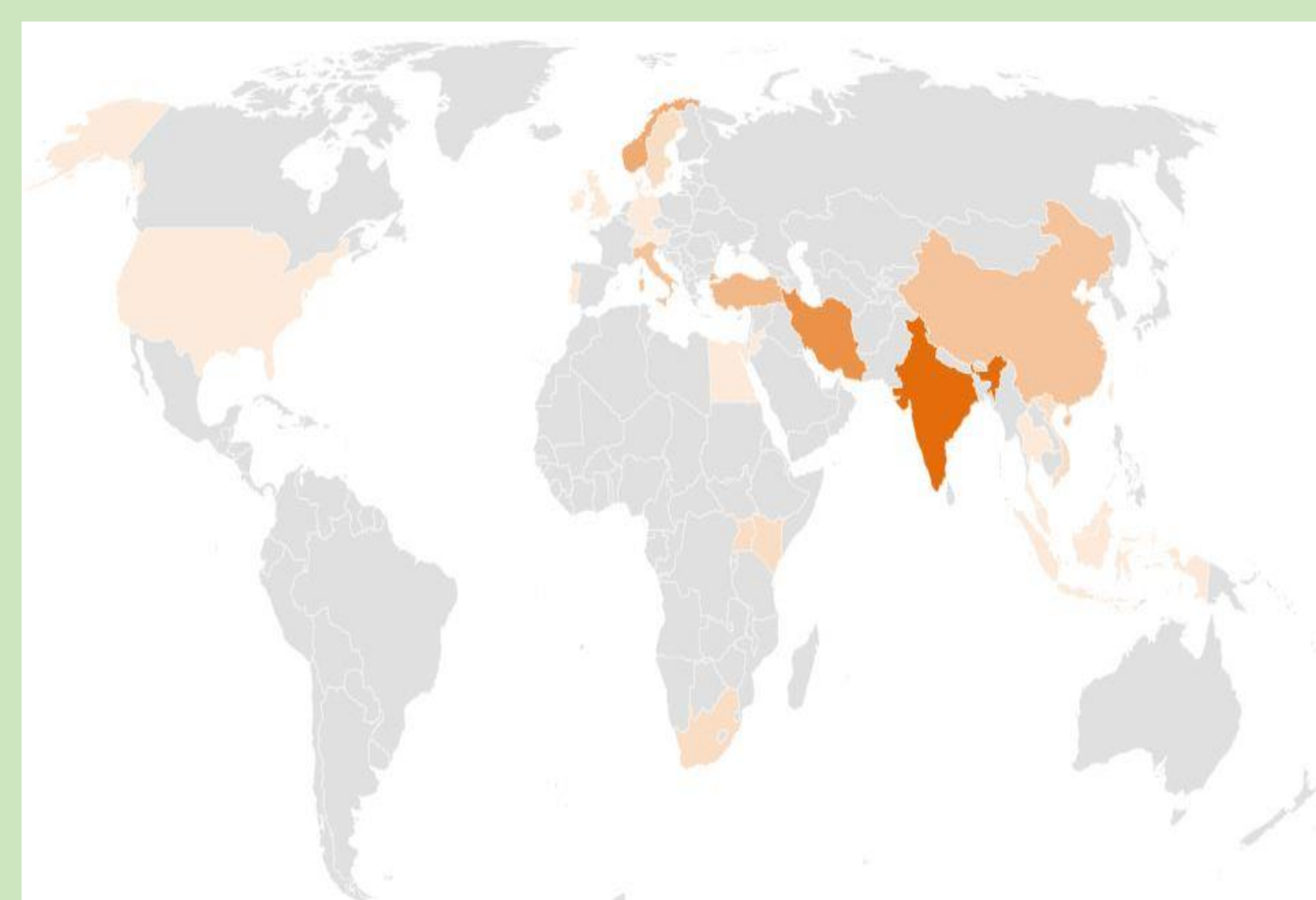
### Number of articles

- 7725 records from database searches; 2916 duplicates removed
- 4809 titles and abstracts screened; of which 4660 were not considered relevant
- 149 full text reviewed
- **In total 60 articles included** for data extraction and analysis



### Prominent countries

- India: 11
- Turkey: 5
- Iran: 8
- China & Italy: 4
- Norway: 6

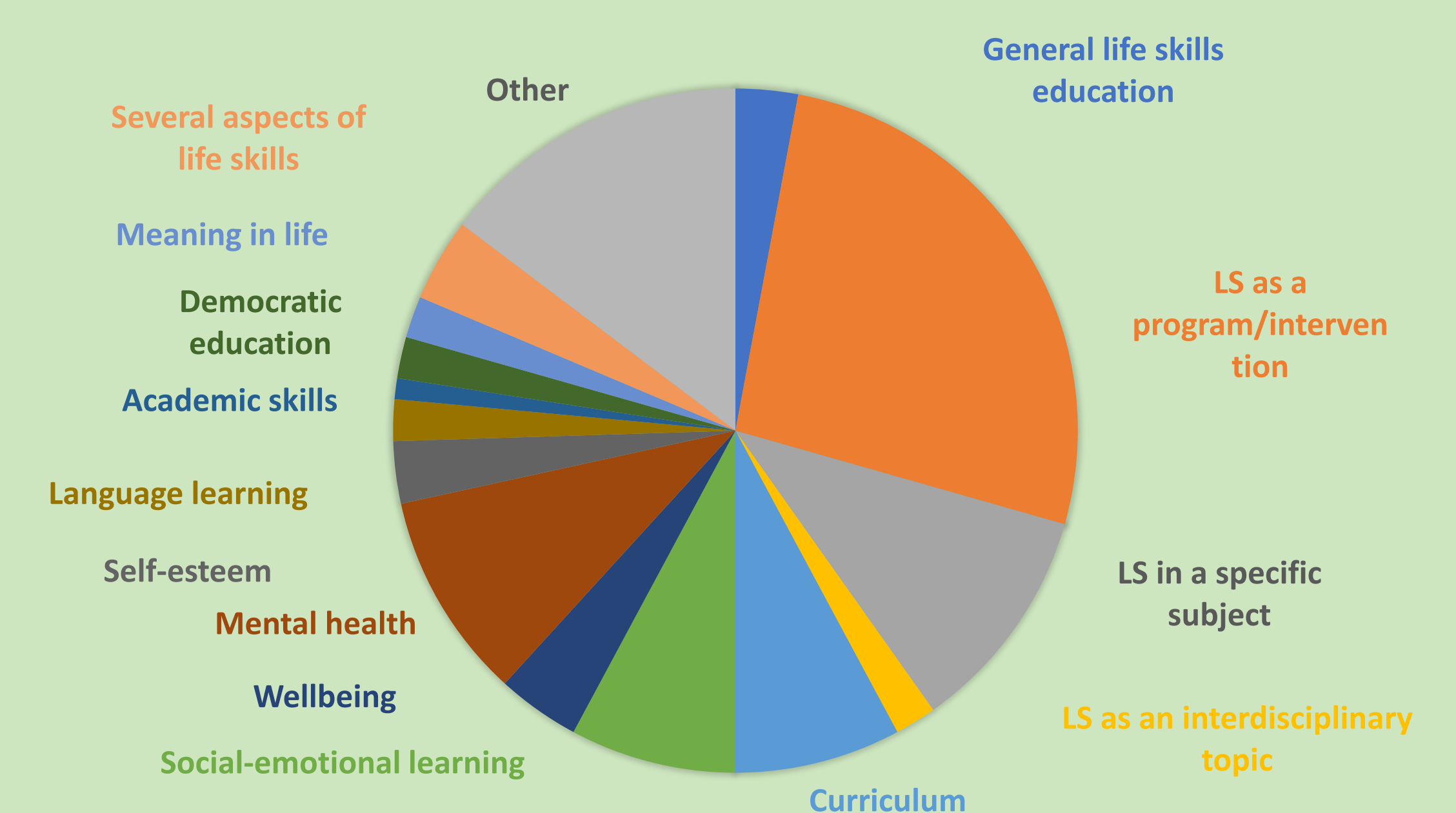


### Definitions and understandings of life skills

- 63% of the studies provided a specific definition of life skills, meanwhile 37% did not include a definition.
- The preliminary findings suggest that the studies with a definition of life skills mainly used WHO's definition, and others used UNICEF or other sources.

### Explicit focus areas

- Life skills as a program or intervention
- Life skills in a specific subject
- Mental health
- Social-emotional learning
- Curriculum



## CONCLUSION

The preliminary findings suggest that Norwegian and international research on life skills in primary education is characterized by life skills programs, mental health perspectives, social and emotional learning, and others. Further, the preliminary results show that definitions and understandings of life skills within primary education in Norwegian and international research is mostly related to WHO's definition of life skills.

### REFERENCES



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