

## **Strategy (ies) in Dealing with HIV/AIDS in Our Schools: Changing the Lenses**

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**ABSTRACT** The purpose of the study is to evaluate the impact of life skills as a strategy to combat HIV/AIDS among school-going young people. Life skills as an intervention strategy were implemented in one secondary school in Free State Province in Motheo District. A cohort of 120 learners from secondary schools in Botshabelo, Free State Province participated in the study. The respondents comprised forty learners from grade 10, forty from grade 11 and forty from grade 12. Learners were between the ages of 15 and 19 years. Between these ages their cognitive development allows them to be more aware of life skills as an intervention strategy to combat HIV/AIDS at school. Thus, it was easy for them to verbalise life skills as an intervention strategy to fight HIV/AIDS because at these ages, their operational thinking allows them to develop hypotheses about the possible outcomes of the problems and to evaluate these outcomes comparatively. The results showed that most learners were orphans as result of AIDS and that the households were now headed by teenagers who have had to take on parental responsibilities. According to the results, life skills changed the behaviour of the learners and their attitude towards HIV/AIDS. Therefore, learners should be educated about HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy and its prevention, as a strategy to reduce HIV/AIDS in schools. In addition, the study revealed that learners feel free to talk to one another and that coaching by a life skills educator assists in ensuring that the HIV/AIDS-related topics are discussed with ease. The results showed that most learners agree that life skills empower them with a sound and helpful background to HIV/AIDS. From the study a few valuable lessons were learned by the learners: an awareness of the epidemic and its consequences on their lives.