



## Lifelong Learning

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### Abstract

*The concept of lifelong learning has become one of the most widely discussed concepts in the field of adult education. Lifelong learning is about acquiring and updating all kinds of abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications from the pre-school years to post retirement which promotes the development of knowledge and competences that will enable adaptation to the knowledge-based society and also valuing all forms of learning. It is the broad term for education that is conducted beyond school. Therefore it's voluntary, rather than compulsory, and is completely self-motivated – with the main goal being to improve personal or professional development. This paper examines the scope of the field of lifelong learning, covering definitions and exploring its benefits. It also gives an overview of the skills that can help individuals become lifelong learners. Our world is changing around us in such a frantic pace that if we do not continue to grow and develop; we will soon be left behind. Lifelong learning is an essential challenge for inventing the future of our societies; it is a necessity rather than a possibility or a luxury to be considered. Three objectives of this paper are: first, to clarify the concept of lifelong learning; second, to focus on the benefits of lifelong learning and its importance; and third, to discuss crucial capacities for the development of the individual as a lifelong learner.*

**Keywords:** *lifelong learning, education, knowledge*

## 1. Introduction

Lifelong learning is not a brand-new concept. It has been defined in a variety of ways throughout a lengthy period of time. The idea of lifelong learning is currently being actively promoted by supranational organisations such as the OECD, UNESCO, and the European Union, in addition to the growth of the "knowledge" society and the myriad social, economic, and educational changes it appears to entail. The topic has been taken up by numerous European national governments, who have made it a far more important part of their political agendas. An increasing amount of knowledge, particularly advanced knowledge, is obtained through educational methods that are not centred around the traditional school, often much beyond the age of official schooling (Illich, 1971). Examination of learning is necessary.

Though the term "lifelong learning" has many different meanings, the following can be used to summarise its essential qualities: learning throughout one's lifespan; a diversity of teaching and learning methods and modes of delivery, unlike conventional education; a shift in emphasis from learning substance to learning process; and a shift in educational provisions from teaching to learning and from supply to demand. A strong emphasis on the intrinsic rather than the instrumental value of education and learning. Universal access to learning opportunities. Recognition of learning in diverse settings and not only in educational institutions.

Instead of being a procedure isolated from the rest of life, learning ought to be a natural byproduct of being alive and connected to the outside world (Rogoff & Lave, 1984). Therefore, in addition to instruction, what students need is

access to the outside world (Norman, 1993) and the opportunity to participate meaningfully in it. Learning in work and in schools must be combined. In this paper, first I define a few terms related to lifelong learning. Then, I discuss the advantages of lifelong learning and crucial capacities for the development of the individual as a lifelong learner.

## 2. Defining Lifelong Learning

The issue of defining learning is a complex one. In the United States and Canada, journals have adopted the label, state departments of education have been renamed, and legislation has been passed to ensure its growth. However, with all of this activity and interest, there is still no agreement on a definition of the basic concept of lifelong learning and no consensus on the elements that make up the concept. Bowers and Fisher (1972) have referred to this definitional problem as the "semantic jungle." This monograph is a response to that confusion. It is obviously not the final answer, but is possibly a step forward that will lead to further clarity.

The term "lifelong learning" was used as early as the late twenties. There is a bit of confusion as to what lifelong learning means exactly. According to Knapper & Cropley (1991), lifelong learning has a different meaning in different countries: "in the United States it has frequently been regarded as simply a new term for adult education and has been linked with "alternative" educational activities such as educational brokering (Knapper & Cropley, 1976). In Europe the concept has more frequently been associated with the linking of learning and work especially through provision of paid educational leave, recurrent education, or with open learning".

At European level, the challenge is to adopt definitions that are wide enough to embrace national and regional specifics and cultures, but at the same time focused enough to make exchange of experiences possible (Colardyn, D. & Bjornavold, J., 2005).

No doubt is about a dearth of information as applied to the meanings and values of LLL. To think that one can find an essential, basic or uncontested definition of LLL is to embark upon a search for a chimera. Despite the term has a wide currency and great practice in contexts, its meaning is often uncertain (Aspin, D. N. & Chapman, J. D., 2000).

Gelpi stated a lack of conceptual clarity for this term and a need for a clear definition of it. He continued that although there is a clear meaning and definition for such terms as nurse education, lack of clarity is about the definition of LLL (Gelpi, E., 1984).

Globalization and the growth of the fast-changing knowledge economy mean that people require upgrading their skills throughout their adult lives to cope with modern life, both in their work and in their private lives. Nowadays, there is an increasingly important basic skill in ever-changing technological universe: ability to learn and adapt to the needed new skills and training (OECD, 2007).

The learning society is the vision of a society where there are recognized opportunities for learning for every person wherever they are and however old they should be (Green, A., 2002).

As Walters S. (2010) claims; our planet won't survive, if it is not a learning planet, and sustainable development will be achieved by learning through life.

There is an important point to be made when one is considering the positions that have been taken in the past in respect to the concept of LLL and the arguments put forward by various proponents of these positions. This article attempts to offer an applicable concept of the term which is possible and conceivable.

LLL literally means that learning should take place at all stages of life cycle (from the cradle to the grave) and, in more recent versions that it should be life-wide; that is embedded in all life contexts from the school to the workplace, the home and the community. The learning society therefore, is the vision of a society where there are recognized opportunities for learning for every person wherever they are and however old they should be (Green, A., 2002).

The implementation of this idea will be facilitated by bringing together education and vocational education in central aspects of different policies such as education, youth, employment and research. A LLL framework is to be developed to enable each individual to choose among learning environments, jobs, regions and countries in order to improve one's knowledge, skills and competence, and to use them optimally (Harvey, L., 2004-9).

The search for who we are goes on in this new context and these new agendas for our growth and development constantly emerge. Just as children and adolescents have developmental needs which are learning needs, so too do older adults. One difference is that there are not as many facilitators about who can, from their own experience, facilitate the transitional changes of later life. These are lifelong developmental needs (Fleming, T., 1997).

## 3. The Benefits of Lifelong Learning

**Improved Cognitive Functions:** Lifelong learning has been linked to cognitive benefits such as improved memory,

problem-solving abilities, and overall cognitive function. According to a study published in the journal *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, engaging in mentally stimulating activities throughout life can help maintain cognitive abilities and delay cognitive decline in older adults (Hertzog, Kramer, Wilson, & Lindenberger, 2009).

**Career Advancement:** Continuous learning and skill development throughout one's career are considered essential for keeping up with changes in the workplace, according to a report by the Pew Research Center (2016).

**Personal growth and fulfilment:** It contributes to personal growth, satisfaction, and a sense of fulfilment. Research published in *Adult Education Quarterly* indicates that adult learners experience personal transformation, increased self-confidence, and improved well-being as a result of engaging in lifelong learning activities (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006).

**Social Connections and Community Engagement:** A study published in the *International Journal of Lifelong Education* found that participation in lifelong learning programs leads to increased social interaction, networking opportunities, and a sense of belonging within communities (Holford, 2007). These programs contribute to increased social interaction, networking opportunities, and a sense of belonging within communities (Holford, 2007).

**Adaptability and Resilience:** Greater resilience and coping strategies in adults, are fostered enabling them to navigate life transitions and challenges more effectively (Tough, 1979).

#### 4. Developing the Individual as a Lifelong Learner

Developing lifelong learning capacities and general skills like problem solving are crucial goals for the development of the individual as a lifelong learner. The OECD has identified "transformative competencies" that support learner agency and help young people become innovative, responsible, and aware. These are in addition to the essential generic skills that support learning throughout life, which can be found in the De Se Co project and the OECD Key Competencies.

The OECD named these transformative competencies as follows:

- creating new value;
- reconciling tensions and dilemmas;
- taking responsibility.

In a similar approach, the World Health Organisation defined functional capacity as including the following abilities in its World Report on Ageing and Health (2015):

- move around;
- build and maintain relationships;
- meet their own basic needs;
- learn, grow, and make decisions;
- contribute.

Developing these abilities and skills can help individuals become lifelong learners who can act as responsible local and global citizens.

While developing the lifelong learner's competencies and skills is essential, there are three other key pillars that need be laid before creating a learning culture:

- building an ethical and moral framework to guide the process of building a learning culture for a just society;
- connecting learning and enterprise in many contexts;
- fostering systems thinking as a gateway to holistic sustainable development.

The interaction of these abilities, capabilities, and systems will drive the advancement of human awareness towards a culture where local and global consciousness supports a just sustainable future.

#### 5. Methodology

In order to evaluate the significance of this type of learning a study is conducted based on the experiences of adult learners who participated in at least one liberal adult education course during the past 12 months.

The distribution of the questionnaire was conducted online through the link. For the purposes of the analysis, the course types were also classified into main categories to narrow down the number of types and to combine similar types of courses into the same main category. Respondents were introduced to a list of potential elements in learning situations that might have been important for the development of benefits. The elements were selected with the help of results of previous studies and adult education literature. For example, the importance of the group is well described in adult education handbooks (Knowles, 1985) and various theories of learning.

In order to capture the wide range of potential liberal adult education course topics, a list of these was created and used as a guideline when targeting respondents. The sample contained the following course topics: Health and sports, ICT, languages, creative arts, society and culture, work-related, others.

## 6. Results and Discussion of the Statistical Analyses

Out of the 100 respondents, 62 % had participated in only one liberal adult education course during the past 12 months; the rest had taken two or more courses.

Through a quantitative study, the following questions should be answered:

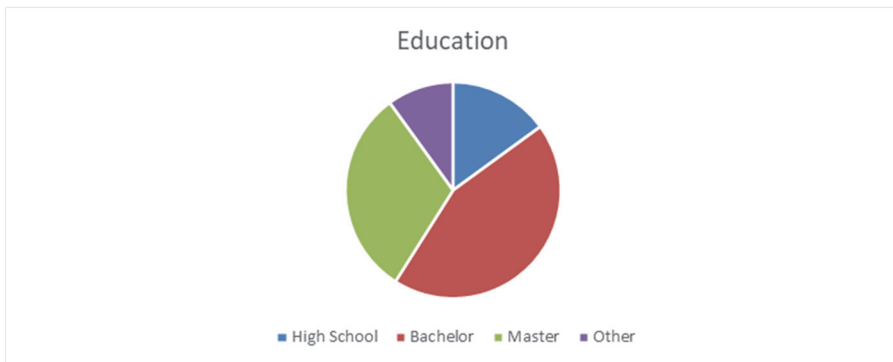
Level of education the participants have;

Type of course they attend or have attended;

Importance of the capacities gained in these courses in their personal and professional development.

The target group for the research are 100 young people from the cities of Tirana and Durres.

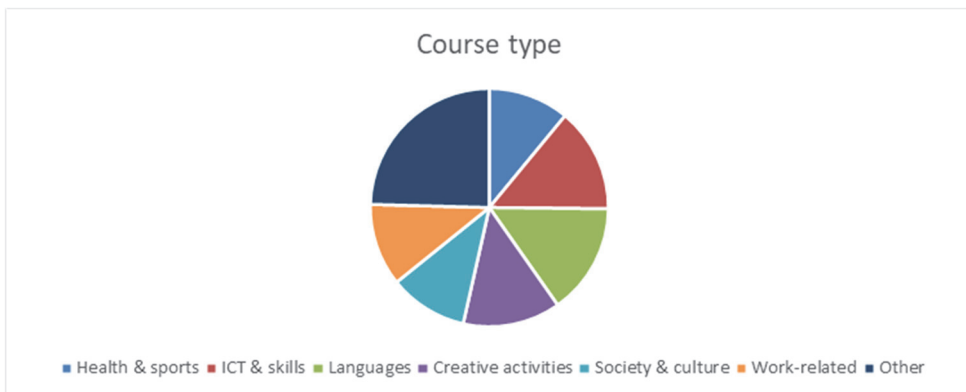
The majority of them have a rather high educational level; and most are active in work life or social activities. Age ranges from 17 to 27.



**Chart 1.** Composition of sample by educational level

Respondents have a rather high level of education. 44 % have a Bachelor's degree; the second largest group has completed a Master's degree 31%.

Chart 2 shows the list of course types listed in the analysis. The participants were asked to select the course types they had attended (maximum: 3 course).



\* This category includes participants who participated in more than one type of course

**Chart 2.** Categories of course types

Participants of this study have mostly participated in other different courses (24.60%). Participants' engagement was also in high on courses such as language courses (15.10%), ICT (14.20%), and creative activities (13.30%). Chart 3 shows the importance of the capacities gained in these courses in their personal and professional development.

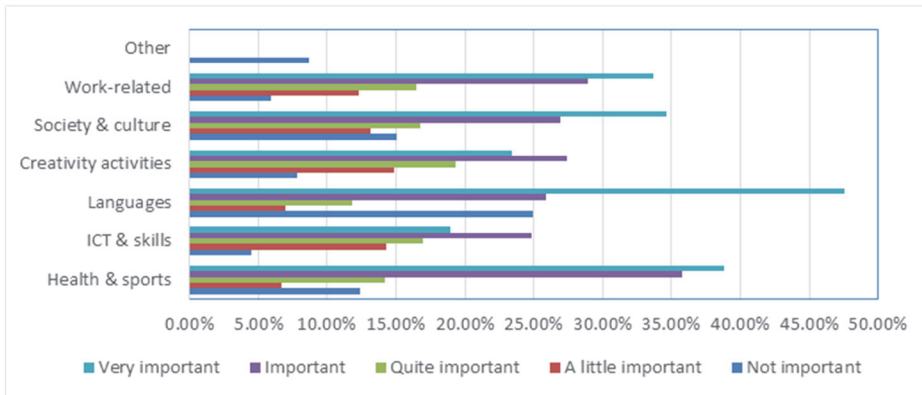


Chart 3: Importance of the capacities gained.

The results show that adults participating in certain types of courses seem to experience more changes in their personal and professional development due to the learning courses they have participated. The participants evaluate the importance of the capacities gained as "Very important".

## 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

In a technology-driven or knowledge-based society like ours, lifelong learning becomes the order of the day. The 21st century needs lifelong learners, who will constantly keep themselves updated in order to meet the current realities. This article explained the concept of lifelong learning; examined its different types. It further examined the need for lifelong learning in modern-day society. The paper additionally highlights the benefits to lifelong learning in today's context.

We have to be open to change as it occurs, and in order to have an impact, each of us have to give it our all. Companies and individuals need to be able to adapt and improve their knowledge and skills to fulfil the necessary evolving needs in order to remain viable and successful in such changing situations.

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