



LIFELONG LEARNING: CONCLUSIONS FROM A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Lifelong learning is one of the most frequently used learning approaches and is based on all of an individual's life processes from birth to death. This research is a literature review which aims to examine the historical development process, application areas, place in educational programmes, competencies and the importance in terms of human life of the lifelong learning approach. In order to answer these general questions, scientific studies retrieved from different databases and the results of these scientific studies were examined in detail.

Key words: lifelong learning, educational programmes, lifelong learning approach

1. Introduction

In modern society, education is an important factor in every individual's life in order that they sustain their lives in a qualified way. Furthermore, it is widely known that education is a leading concept which facilitates the development of all aspects of society and paves the way to achieve this. Education is defined as "the process of changing behaviour" in its most general and simple terms and there are many other definitions of education in academic literature. Uzunboylu and Çelik (2011), Latagan and Jedlikowska (2014) defined education as all social processes that are effective in an individual's acquisition of society's standards, beliefs and living styles and all processes in which individuals develop talent, attitude and other behavioural patterns that are valuable for society.

Changes and innovations in the world require individuals to constantly evolve, which has resulted in a need for lifelong learning throughout society. In other words, people need lifelong learning in order to keep up to date with the changes in the world, sustain their occupational and intellectual development and improve their personal skills in different areas. In modern society, the lifelong learning approach plays an important role in human lives and has emerged as a research subject which requires detailed examination. The main aim of the current study was to evaluate the lifelong learning approach from different perspectives based on the current academic literature. In order to achieve this general aim, the following questions will be answered.

- 1) What is the lifelong learning approach?
- 2) What are the general characteristics of the lifelong learning approach?
- 3) What are the general skills of the lifelong learning approach?
- 4) What are the general characteristics and the structure of lifelong learning programmes in the European Union?

2. METHOD

This research, which examined the lifelong learning approach according to different literature sources, is a qualitative study that used a documentation screening model. In order to achieve this general



objective and other sub-objectives, descriptive content analysis was used to analyse the data obtained from scientific studies retrieved from different databases and sources.

3. RESULTS

In this section, the results obtained through the sub-objectives of this research are provided and discussed.

3.1 Lifelong Learning

According to Smith (2001), the concept of lifelong learning was first proposed by Basil Yeaxlee in 1929. Furthermore, the concept of lifelong learning was also adopted and discussed in detail by UNESCO in a conference organized in 1960 (Ohidy, 2008; Günüç, Odabaşı&Kuzu, 2012). According to another source, the concept of lifelong learning reached an intellectual dimension as a result of studies on adult education by Eduard Lindeman in the 1920's (Bilir, 2004). Aksoy (2008) stated that the concept of lifelong learning was firstly suggested in 1919 as a discussion regarding the educational needs of individuals who work in the armed forces and industry. It can therefore be understood from this information found in previous studies that there is not a consensus about the emergence of the concept of lifelong learning.

Karaman (2012) stated that the importance of lifelong learning has increased as a result of rapid change in the world, and the lifelong learning approach began to appear in educational systems in the 1970s. Hürsen (2012) and Akbaş and Özdemir (2002) summarized the statements in the UNESCO international education commission:

1. Educational activities should not be limited to school age and school buildings.
2. Education should be considered as the main component of all educational activities, which includes both school education and out-of-school education.
3. Educational activities should have a more flexible structure.
4. Education should be designed as a lifelong process.

Although the historical development process of lifelong learning approach is summarized in this above mentioned way, there are different opinions towards this concept.

The lifelong learning approach is an educational phenomena that includes all life processes from birth to death and all activities that aim to develop individuals' knowledge, skills and competencies (Lengrand 1989, Celep 2003, Güneş 1996, Cassin 2002, Freref 2004, Commission Européenne 2008 & European Commission, 2002). Klug, Krause, Schober, Finsterwald and Spiel (2014) and Ozcan and Uzunboyly (2012) described lifelong learning as a process that includes a rapid change through which individuals acquire competencies in different areas during their lives. Ozdamli and Ozdal (2014) stated that every individual needs lifelong learning for both their occupational and individual needs; they also indicated that changing world conditions and developing technology makes lifelong learning essential for all individuals.



In their studies, Demirel (2011) and Gorghiu, Gorghiu, Doğan and Gerçeker (2013) stated that the lifelong learning approach is a recognition of the world and oneself, creating new things, learning habits and behavioural mannerisms. According to a similar definition, lifelong learning was defined as all activities that include formal, prevalent and informal learning that continue from birth to death and it has a comprehensive and visionary structure (Preece, 2013). Ersoy and Yılmaz (2009) described the lifelong learning approach as “a road with no ending” and indicated that it has an important role in the development of individuals and therefore society as a whole.

Jarvis (2004) and Özcan (2011) defined lifelong learning as a complement of theoretical and individual learning. A similar definition by Dinevski and Dinevski (2004) stated that lifelong learning is an approach which provides equal opportunities to individuals by removing restrictions related to location, time, age, socio-economic status and education. According to Bosher (1988), lifelong learning is a set of organizational regulations that would provide learning opportunities based on the interest of the individuals throughout their lives. Gökşan (2009) and Hus (2011), with a wider definition, indicated that lifelong learning includes learning acquired in both formal and informal educational processes and subsequently provides the opportunity to complete the learning that was unfinished or deficient during formal education.

Based on these general statements, generalizations can be made regarding the lifelong learning approach as listed below.

- Lifelong learning contains all life processes from birth to death.
- Lifelong learning is based on the personal and occupational needs, interests and learning requirement of individuals.
- Lifelong learning contributes to the development of skills and talents of individuals.
- Lifelong learning is an approach which includes comprehensive components.
- Lifelong learning has become a compulsory aspect of individuals’ lives as a result of changing world conditions and developing technology.
- Lifelong learning provides equal opportunities to individuals and removes restrictions such as learning, age, socio-economic status and educational level.

In order to better understand the lifelong learning approach and interpret it in detail, it is also important to examine its general characteristics. There are many opinions suggested by researchers regarding the general characteristics of the lifelong learning approach.

3.2 General Characteristics of the Lifelong Learning Approach

When opinions regarding the general characteristics of the lifelong learning approach were examined, it was found that there are similar expressions in previous studies. According to these opinions of the lifelong learning approach, it can be said that:

- It is regarded as a guide for educational and instructional information resources.
- It is an approach based on learning through “doing and experiencing”.
- It supports learning of individuals from each in groups.
- It takes a guiding role for evaluation and learning strategies and contributes to the discovery of the learning methods in further processes.



- It contributes to the development of educational and individualized learning plans.
- It states that learning is a continually ongoing process.
- It supports the view that people have access to opportunities to learning facilities during their lives (World Bank, 2003; Hürsen, 2012; Günüç, Odabaşı&Kuzu, 2012).

3.3 Lifelong Learning Skills

Hürsen (2011) examined lifelong learning from the perspective of six competencies:

- Self-management competencies: ability to make own decisions for occupational development; realize the inadequate aspects in the process of individual development; make self-evaluation in the learning process; make collaborative research; motivate oneself for occupational development and new learning; take individual responsibilities in team work; actively participate in activities; find creative solutions for problems which might occur in occupational life; adjust to new ideas; manage projects which aim to achieve occupational development; and study continuously to learn a new subject.
- Learning to learn competencies: ability to identify available opportunities for occupational development and know necessary learning activities; ask questions in the learning process without hesitation; select the important components and documents when learning a new subject; realize the problems which might occur in the learning process; use language effectively in the learning process; and develop empathy.
- Initiative and entrepreneurship competencies: ability to make decisions about any subject; adjust to information change in occupational life; convert ideas for occupational development into action; plan the activities which can meet the information needs in occupational life; direct oneself to reach determined targets and select the appropriate learning environment; use knowledge for the determined targets; produce creative solution suggestions for problems.
- Information acquisition competency: ability to communicate in an effective way in the process of acquiring information; express ideas about any subject without hesitation; provide information transfer via e-mail; use the methods of accessing information on the internet; use mobile devices to access new information; use social networks in the process of acquiring information.
- Digital competencies: ability to use a computer for storing information; use the internet and other communication tools
- Making decisions competency: ability to evaluate to what degree he or she has reached their determined targets; resolve all problems that prevent occupational career development; evaluate the possible risks in the process of occupational development; make evaluations about time when learning a new subject.

The European Commission (2007) examined the lifelong learning skills under eight headings, which are: communication competency in the native language; communication competency in foreign languages; basic competencies in mathematics; science and technology competencies; digital competencies; learning to learn competencies; social and citizenship competencies; taking initiative and entrepreneurship competencies; and cultural awareness and expression competencies. Similar to these headings, according to Knapper and Cropley (2000), individuals who have lifelong learning skills;



- Plan their own learning.
- Evaluate their own learning.
- Are active.
- Are open to learn in both formal and informal environments.
- Integrate the knowledge to different subject fields in appropriate situations.
- Use different learning strategies for problems or different situations.

When the data in previous studies was examined, it was found that there is a consensus concerning the basic skills that the lifelong learning approach embraces. According to the lifelong learning approach, an individual generally should have communication skills in both native and foreign languages, use technology effectively, be open to learn, be social, be active, be entrepreneurial and should have cultural awareness.

3.4. Lifelong Learning Programmes in European Union

Lifelong learning programmes in the European Union were constituted with the aim of transforming the European Union into an advanced information society that has social coherence and a sustainable economic structure.

The European Union's approach to lifelong learning consists of six programmes. These are (Turkish Republic European Union Ministry, 2011):

1. Comenius Programme: The basic aim of this programme is to develop the knowledge and understanding of students and educational staff towards European culture, language diversity and values. Furthermore, it aims to develop their basic skills of individual development. The target audience of the Comenius programme is pre-school, primary and secondary educational institutions as well as education faculties.

2. Erasmus Programme: This programme was generated to foster collaboration between higher education institutions in Europe. Through this basic aim, the Erasmus programme provides unrequited economic opportunities for higher education institutions to produce and apply common projects as well as to make short-term student and personnel exchanges. In addition to this, it contributes to the increase in collaboration between higher education institutions and other business environments to improve employment opportunities for university graduates by developing the system of higher education institutions in line with the requirements of the business world.

3. Leonardo Da Vinci Programme: This programme was generated to support and improve the occupational education policies of countries that are either members or candidates of the European Union. Furthermore, this programme contributes to the improvement of collaboration between countries and increases the quality of occupational education. Occupational education and occupational education practices are the basis of this programme.

4. Grundtvig Programme: This programme was generated to satisfy the needs resulting from the changing structure of knowledge and provides opportunities for adult individuals to develop their knowledge and qualifications during their lives. The Grundtvig programme focuses on informal education and adults apart from the occupation education.



5. Programme with Common Subject: This programme was generally constituted to support the quality and recognition of the education systems of countries that are members or candidates of the European Union in domains including activities of two or more sub-programmes.

6. Jean Monnet Programme: This programme was constituted to encourage instruction, research and intellectual activities in European integration studies and supports the presence of institutions that focus on the topic of European integration.

According to the data retrieved from previous studies, although the properties of the lifelong learning programmes of the European Union are different from each other, it can be seen that they have the same fundamental aim. The lifelong learning programmes of the European Union are shaped based on topics such as occupational education, collaboration, supporting educational institutions and foundations, training qualified manpower, opportunities for employment and coherence to the European Union.

4. RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this research, which examined documents concerned with the lifelong learning approach, varied results were obtained. The notion that the lifelong learning approach is a phenomena which continues from an individual's birth to death is one of the most distinct and general results. Additionally, it was found in the previous publications that there is a consensus on the basic skills which the lifelong learning approach embraces. It was also found that the basic competency and skills that the lifelong learning approach embraces are communication skills in both native and foreign languages, digital competencies, taking initiative and entrepreneurship, making decisions, learning to learn as well as social and citizenship competencies.

In this research, different results related with the basic characteristics of lifelong learning approach were obtained. It was discovered that the lifelong learning approach is considered as a concept that provides the opportunity to access educational and instructional information sources, is based on learning through "doing and experiencing", removes restrictions resulting from factors such as time, age, socio-economic status and argues that learning should be a continually ongoing process.

In the light of this information, the European Union lifelong learning programmes were also examined in this research. The primary lifelong learning programmes of the European Union are the Comenius programme, the Erasmus programme, the Leonardo Da Vinci programme, the Grundtvig programme, Programme with Common Subject and the Jean Monnet programme. Although the characteristics of the lifelong learning programmes of the European Union are different from each other, they are based on the same fundamental aim. The lifelong learning programmes of the European Union are shaped based on topics such as occupational education, employment, coherence to the European Union, creating awareness about different languages and cultures, fostering collaboration between the higher education institutions of countries that are the members or candidates of the European Union, and satisfying the needs resulting from rapid information change.

This research was conducted using information obtained from the documents in previous publications. In the future, the number of studies on the lifelong learning approach should increase in terms of quality and application.



Lifelong learning is an important approach for an individual's personal development as well as their occupational information in terms of basic characteristics and practice areas. In particular, rapid information change and technological advances in the world have made lifelong learning essential for individuals. Further awareness about the lifelong learning approach should be created through activities such as seminars, conferences, panels etc., which will be organized in the light of this information. Furthermore, through collaboration between universities and the Ministry of Education, new lifelong learning programmes should be constituted and they should contribute to the development of society as a whole.

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