

E-LEARNING AND LIFELONG LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

It is supported that the object of education is to provide results. Hence, it is of crucial importance to economic development globally. In our era, globalization is a highly disputable event with strong persuasive arguments and equally solid disagreements. The impact of globalization in our everyday activities has been increased. In parallel, technological developments have contributed considerably to dramatic changes in economic, social and educational sectors. Globalization trends and technological developments demand from enterprises and educational organizations innovative ways of business practices and educational delivery in order to cope with the real market demands. Educational planners and policy makers have been trying to design new curricula in an attempt to adequately prepare the workforce to meet the current market requirements. Yet, the anticipated results have not been attained mainly because traditional educational systems proved to be inadequate to link the supply of knowledge and skills with the contemporary needs. This paper will connect e-learning educational/training courses delivery with lifelong learning (LLL). It will further analyze certain factors from the professional and educational point of view and provide recommendations on how to accelerate the implementation of LLL supported by e-learning.

Keywords Economic/technological development, e-learning/lifelong-learning, globalization, adult learning

INTRODUCTION

The historian Arnold Toynbee in a paper prepared for Britannica's Board of Editors (1968) wrote: "What we know compared with what there is to be known is infinitesimal". It is not surprising that even after 42 years this notion is still valid. For decades, educational planners, policy makers and educational participants, in general, have been proceeding to reforms in educational systems in their attempt to equip the workforce at national and international level with the necessary knowledge and skills. Yet, the anticipated goals have not been attained. The fact that economy has turned to be exclusively knowledge-based has exhibited an increasing demand for innovative ways of delivering education. (Zhang, D., Zhao. et. a., 2004)

EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Besides the astonishing development of technology and science in our times, globalization movement created new conditions in our everyday activities.

Evidently, globalization is not simply a unique contemporary economic trend, but has considerable impact in educational, industrial, cultural, ecological and sociological sectors. To cope with the pressing demands it is important to proceed to educational reforms which will enhance the qualifications of all the persons involved in the production and services sectors. According to a review of national e-learning strategies by Anderson et al (2006), the two key drivers underlying the adoption of e-learning are;

- the need to upskill the population to meet the challenge of the information and knowledge society and
- the need for accessible and flexible access to tertiary education to meet the changing nature of society and the lifelong learning agenda.

Given that traditional educational systems failed to satisfy the necessary learning needs demanded by markets, transition to new forms was evolved. As a result, methodology shifted from teacher-centered to learner-centered. Obviously it was time for the e-learning system. The old adage "there are two sides to every story" has attracted controversial opinions among analysts. Many people can attest that there are many sides to every story. Speaking about e-learning it cannot be claimed that there is a good or bad characteristic. The vast movement towards e-learning is clearly motivated by the many benefits it offers. (Kruze, K. (2008) The question is whether the benefits provided outweigh the drawbacks as compared with the classroom learning.

<u>e-learning advantages</u>	<u>classroom disadvantages</u>
Learner-Centered	Teacher-Centered
Any location	Specific location
Time flexibility	Scheduled time
<u>e-learning disadvantages</u>	<u>Classroom advantages</u>
Technophobia of learners	Comfort for learners
Increased preparation time	Normal preparation time
Lack of immediate feedback	Immediate feed back

Continuing education (Duke, 1999) has long been a popular idea among some people concerned with the education of adults. It has gone under a variety of names in different countries: permanent education, lifelong education, and recurrent education. UNESCO initially adopted the term 'lifelong education' which later was known as 'recurrent education', and was the concept espoused most frequently by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) until the 1980s, when the term appeared to fall into disfavor (Belanger, 1997).

As pointed out by a number of relative studies, e-learning is reshaping the way knowledge is distributed even to the most remote geographical areas and is recognized as the most reliable contemporary media of educational and/or training courses delivery. Apart from being more effective in meeting real market demands, e-learning has emerged as a promising solution to lifelong learning and on the job workforce training (Zhang, D., et.al.–op.cit.) However, e-learning cannot be considered panacea. There are certain drawbacks which should be given the proper attendance.

Being in a relatively early stage, the effectiveness of e-learning is influenced by many factors, technological, sociological, psychological and educational. Additionally, there are issues of confidentiality, responsibility and trust concerning the users.

LIFELONG LEARNING LLL)

Lifelong learning is a process in which individuals retain their development of knowledge, skills, and interest in their lives and opportunities of learning (Richardson, 1978), a lifelong learning individual has a continuous aspiration for learning and the responsibility for his/her own learning, Crowther (2004). According to the European Commission (briefing paper 20, 2001) in recent years lifelong learning has become a fundamental goal of educational policies at national and international level.

Additionally, as no universal definition of lifelong learning exists, the following was adopted and proposed: "Those novel forms of teaching and learning that equip students (learners, individuals) to encounter with competence and confidence the full range of working, learning and life experiences" (European Commission, op. cit.).

The meaning of lifelong learning includes a process from cradle to grave without constraining it to specific time periods, years, certain organizations or institutions (Çolakoğlu, 2002).

Besides, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD- 2001) defines LLL as "all purposeful learning activity, from the cradle to the grave that aims to improve knowledge and competencies for all persons who wish to participate in learning activities". Lifelong learning is the process of learning which occurs throughout life (Jarvis, 2009). According to Reinsch (2007), lifelong learning can be defined in these three terms:

- **The entire educational system should focus on raising lifelong students.**
- **In addition to the educational system industries, business and organizations will also need lifelong learning processes.**
- **Individuals, within this respect, should be self-directed learners.**

European Commission Education and Training actions aim to improve the quality of learning systems and provide greater opportunities for the total workforce. To strengthen these initiatives the European Commission has integrated all its educational and training programmes under a single plan, the Lifelong Learning Programme with a budget of nearly Euros 7 billion for 2007 to 2013. There are four sub-programmes focusing on different stages of education and training and continuing previous programmes:

- **Comenius: It seeks to develop knowledge and skills among young people and educators of diverse European cultures and values.**
- **Erasmus: It places great importance on mobility, furthering career prospects through learning.**
- **Leonardo da Vinci: It funds a wide range of actions, mobility initiatives, co-operation in projects to develop innovation.**
- **Grundtvig: It aims to provide adults with ways to improve their knowledge and skills.**

Evidently, this initiative covers the whole life span of individuals, either employed or unemployed. Importantly, this initiative of EU generates some hope that not only schools and colleges will be encouraged to use e-learning in future, but, also, other parts of the learning system (The European ODL Liaison Committee, 2004).

Moreover, the fact that in seven European Countries, i.e. France, Germany, Greece, Norway Spain, Sweden and U.K. (Kokosalakis, N. 2001) Universities are involved in LLL is a positive development towards a successful implementation of LLL courses supported by e-learning. European Universities will play a key role in achieving the strategic goal set at the Lisbon European Council, i.e. to make the E.U. the most competitive economy in the world (Europa, 2003) by producing new knowledge and distributing it to the most remote areas. To this end LLL is of major concern and e-learning is the most effective means of courses delivery.

LIFELONG AND ADULT LEARNING

Adult learning is embedded in the political, social, cultural and economic processes of society (Walters, 2006). Lifelong learning is the process of learning which occurs throughout life (Jarvis, op.cit.). In this case lifelong learning refers to formal (sponsored) and informal (unsponsored) learning. It is felt that there is a misunderstanding between the terms lifelong and adult learning. If we accept the definition of OECD particularly the lifespan (from the cradle to the grave) we will have to face considerable financial, employment and demographic problems. An empirical research was conducted among 138 employees of various ages ranging from 15 to 64 years old (15-24, 25-54 and 55-64 years old with 46 persons in each age group) All participants were asked to answer three questions as follows:

Q1. Do you intend to pursue lifelong courses?

a. age group 15-24	YES 38 (82.60%)	NO 08 (17,40%)
b. age group 25-54	YES 30 (65.22%)	NO 16 (34.78%)
c. age group 55-64	YES 20 (43.48%)	NO 26 (56.52%)

Q2. (among the 88 persons who answered YES) Would you prefer to take courses via:

a. e-Learning course delivery?	70 (79.54%)
b. Classroom attendance	18 (20.46%)

Q3. Why do you want to attend LLL courses? (one option only)

	Group age (a)	Group age (b)	Group age (c)
a. To develop more knowledge and better skills:	95%	15%	-
b. To get more salary and be a manager	05%	85%	10%
c. To extend my work life	03%	07%	90%

As evidenced from all previous data e-learning has to play a very important role in the implementation of lifelong learning courses. Moreover, specific and workable solutions have to be applied to the LLL programmes in the age group of 55-64 year old employees in all sectors.

According to the statistics of OECD (2010) the retirement ages for 2009 were: average 63.3 men and 61.4. women. Top ages (Mexico) men 73.8 women 67.2 and lower age (Hungary) men 57.5 and women 56.0. As the education expenditure is an investment in the economic development of societies (OECD average for 2009 5.81% of GDP– highest 7.98% (Italy) lowest 4.67% (Ireland) it is rather waste of governmental funds to offer courses to employees who will retire some time between 5-10 years and raise at the same time the unemployment rate of the age group 15-24 years which is considered to be 62.6% for EU countries average in 2007 and 56.5% average for OECD countries (See Figure: 1). (It is to be noted that life expectancy in 2009 has increased in the group age 55-64 years by 16.9 for men and 20.2 for women (OECD average))

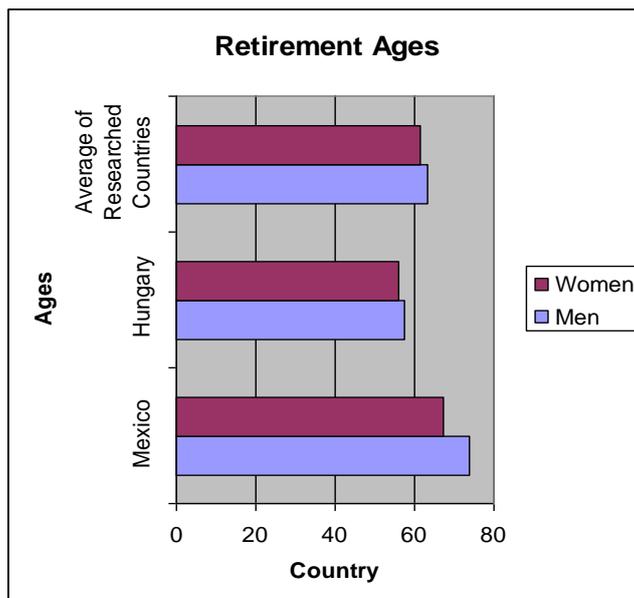


Figure: 1
Retirement Ages

CONCLUSION

Three trends in economic and educational sectors are considered to be innovative though their original concept goes back to 247 B.C (the first globalization trade), to 2000 for -learning and to 1960 for the LLL. In economy globalization has an astonishing impact in every sector of our daily activities. Education is the sector influenced by globalization considerably since to cope with real market requirements had to proceed to important reforms such as shift from instructor-centered to learner-centered form and development of new curricula, design of syllabi relevant to market needs analysis and mainly the mode of delivery of courses through internet. Lifelong learning has become a fundamental goal of education policies with the drastic support of E.U. programmes. The involvement of Universities will make the relative reforms more effective. The LLL programmes will upgrade the qualifications of workforce at all levels and equip its members with more accurate knowledge and better skills.

However, the age group of 55-64 needs careful consideration to prevent waste of money if the relative expenditure is covered by public funds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To maximize the effectiveness of LLL it is recommended that the following proposals are adopted:

- Clear distinction between LLL and Adult learning
- Motivation of learners to avoid dropouts
- Market needs analysis for LLL courses
- Universities should foster future developments
- Multidimensional LLL courses
- Flexibility of LLL courses
- e-learning courses delivery
- Variety of cognitive areas

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of AUTHORS



Prof. Dr. George S. MOUZAKITIS is the Manager of the LinkedIn Group entitled " e-Learning Think Tank Team". He is currently engaged in carrying out four research projects referring to (a) " Identification and Analysis of Contemporary Training Needs", (b) Linguistic Analysis and Classification of the Structural Properties of Scientific and/or Technological Passages", (c) "The Etymology of Scientific Terms of Greek Origin Used in Modern European Languages" and (d) " Towards a More Effective ESP Teaching." He develops appropriate materials and media for teaching ESP (Teaching English for Specific Purposes) and is author of ten books, total pages 5.460 under the general title " The English we use for..." in the cognitive areas of Economics, Tourism, Business Administration, Arts, Education and Electrical Engineering. Studies: B.A. in English/Greek Language (Athens University, Greece), M.A. in Special Education (Western Michigan University, USA) and Ph.D. in Communication (Columbia State University, USA) His teaching experience totals 43.245 hours, of which 24.241 hours at higher education level (ESP), 8.268 hours at professional training and 10.736 hours at secondary education level. He has participated in 43 international conferences of which 9 are on e-Learning.

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