

## Requirements of lifelong learning in the knowledge society<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The article aims to analyze, from a theoretical point of view, the aspects related to the presence of lifelong learning in the knowledge society, as a contribution to the perfection of human personality, but also as a mean to achieve balance and performance individually, professionally and socially. The features of the society we claim from the perspective of modern times will be highlighted, characterized, as a whole, by a dynamism and an unprecedented information-technological evolution, with a difficult future to predict.

In this context, man must constantly improve, be adaptable and perform, and the key to success is to invest in quality education (we refer here to any kind of educational influence), education that must - or should - overlap with throughout life.

The study aims to define lifelong learning, focusing on possible conceptual confusions, to establish the features of this education, as well as possible ways to achieve, but also warnings, which could generate possible errors, with effect on proper development and personal and social satisfaction.

### Keywords:

Lifelong learning, the knowledge society, demands, performance, adaptabilit

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## **Introduction**

Education should last a lifetime, if we talk about its personal side, and (at least) how long the profession is practiced, if we talk about the professional side. The personality that tends to be perfect develops throughout life, so it would be utopian to consider that the initial training, received in school or university, would be enough for us to cope throughout life personally or professionally. There is even talk of a distance or a lag behind the school compared to real life, which is in permanent dynamics. It is therefore necessary to redefine the aims of formal education and a critical re-examination, from the perspective of lifelong learning. (Fouquin J.-C., 2002).

Knowledge, skills and abilities will have to be constantly improved, either due to the evolution of society, various socio-professional or cultural-educational fields (discoveries, reconsiderations, new creations, etc.), or due to the fact that forgetting occurs, especially when not returned on superficially mastered contents, insufficiently fixed or poorly taught. Development in the personal, professional, cultural sphere, through continuing education, becomes in modern society not only necessary but also mandatory, in accordance with the new discoveries / evolutions.

After leaving school, in the field of formal education, individuals must know how to properly manage their own learning activity, in various contexts. Therefore, one of the goals of today's school should be to teach the student to learn in order to cope properly in an ever-changing, unpredictable world. (Bentley T., 1998). UNESCO experts also believe that the desire, skills and abilities of self-education must be implemented and developed by the school. (Dave R.H., 1973)

### **What is and is not continuing education? Conceptual delimitations**

As early as the seventh decade of the last century, those who dealt with the issue of lifelong learning drew attention to the fact that this concept has evolved over time. (Leon A., 1978)

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Broadly speaking, lifelong learning includes all the educational influences that affect the individual, in a formal, non-formal or informal context, with two major components, closely related: one general and one professional (Dave R.H., 1973).

If we refer to today's society, lifelong learning can be seen as a "response to the challenges, the challenges of rapid change." (Neculau A., p. 66). Let us not forget that all new educations have emerged as a response to the problems of the contemporary world, aiming to contribute to their management / improvement.

Internationally, among the many attempts to define the concept, the approach of Professor Peter Jarvis seemed more complex, stating that lifelong learning is „the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person's body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) - experience social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively and practically (or through any combination) and integrate into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person.” (Jarvis P., 2007)

In Romania, the decision-makers included in the National Education Law no. 1/2011 the concept of lifelong learning: Article 328, paragraph 2, stipulates that “lifelong learning represents the totality of lifelong learning activities carried out by each person, in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, for the purpose of training or the development of skills from a multiple perspective: personal, civic, social or occupational.” We cannot say that lifelong learning is a form of education (formal, non-formal or informal), a type of classical / traditional education (intellectual, moral, aesthetic, technological, physical) or that it would fit into the typology of new education (civic, for democracy, for change, modern economic and domestic, for peace, nutrition etc.), but includes, in a happy complementarity / interdependence, all these "influences" exerted throughout life.

Lifelong learning has often been referred to as adult education, but "while lifelong learning extends to adulthood, adult education is only one segment of it and requires, of course, a specific strategy."

(Neculau A., 2004, p. 68) We do not intend to discuss now the specifics of adult education, not being the subject of our approach.

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It has also been said that lifelong learning is what is "in addition" to the initial training, which means continuing education in personal or professional terms (here we include vocational retraining, but these are only sequences of lifelong learning, which integrates them).

We consider that lifelong learning is an educational project, of personal life, but also of the country, because the whole society benefits from an educated individual.

### **The knowledge society: contemporary features and challenges**

Today's man, whom we say must be "friends" with continuing education, lives in the so-called "knowledge" society. What is it characterized by? We are talking about an unprecedented technological evolution, major scientific discoveries, but which are doubled by the perishability of knowledge, an alert dynamism - renewals and changes - in many fields, including social. Then we mention a change in the professional and economic and social status of many people, through the disappearance of jobs / professions, and through the emergence of other areas of activity or the growth of the services sector. The deep economic crisis, the rise in prices of products, lead to a resizing of family budgets and a more careful management of funds. Not coincidentally, one of the new educations is modern economic and home education.

In a textbook on lifelong learning, published in New York, the authors even propose the term "knowledge economy" as an effect of the evolution of technology and globalization, in an age where requirements are complex, dynamic, and the only way to cope successfully with these situations is to embark on the path of lifelong learning, to be willing to accept change and to keep pace with evolution. (Aspin D. N., Chapman J., Hatton M., Sawano Y., 2001.

We also note the "permanent change in all aspects of culture." (Neculau A., p. 66), which leads to the need to deepen aesthetic education, focused on authentic values, unanimously recognized, taking into account the fact that modernism, incorrectly managed, can lead to personal and social imbalances, but also to the overthrow of value systems.

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Although we all complain about the lack of time, free time is a reality of all times, Aristotle drawing attention since antiquity to the fact that lack of occupation should not be characteristic of any age. The man who tends to perfect his personality must not stop his activity and training. Therefore, the free time, which we consider to be outside the obligations of personal, family, social, professional life, can be used for training, self-education, new projects and plans, feeding passions or can be a source of stagnation / personal degradation. / social / professional. An important sequence of new education - therefore a component of lifelong learning - is also for the efficient use of free time.

All these aspects lead to a lack of reluctance to change, rapid adaptation to the new, critical-analytical thinking, skills, decision-making skills, at a pace characterized by both efficiency and effectiveness.

### **Lifelong learning - between desideratum, legislation and European evolution**

The founder of the French school of sociology, Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), considered that a quality education must form physical, intellectual and mental states / competencies in order for a person to cope with social life and the social environment in which he lives. (Permanent) education, therefore, will not only focus on the development of the individual but, indirectly, also on social development, because an educated person is linked to the sustainable development of society (Breiting, S. M., 2005). Through lifelong learning, man must learn to contribute not only to his own development, in accordance with his biopsychic potential, but also to the development of the values of his people, to the protection of the environment, to the development of the community, including from the economic point of view. training others, either from the perspective of the teacher or from the perspective of a simple actor in society, given that one of the factors responsible for achieving education is society. (Lynch J., 1978). However, we recognize that it is not easy to talk about real, original values in today's society in which, according to Jacques Delors, who held the Presidency of the European Commission for a decade (1985-1995), education has a

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difficult mission. to transmit a culture accumulated for centuries, but also a preparation for a largely unpredictable future.

Lifelong learning is focused on internalizing the desire to learn, on objective self-analysis of one's own developmental needs, on creativity, careful selection of training situations, previous learning experiences, motivation, opportunity and desire to learn, involvement and time learning etc. (Candy P. D., 1991; Cranton P., 1997)

Some researchers have gone so far as to associate lifelong learning with a new educational order (Field J., 2006), with governments encouraging, through appropriate policies, lifelong learning for personal and social benefit. Longworth N. (2003) and Jarvis P. (2008) also analyzed the political and social implications of lifelong learning and educational policies in this regard.

The European Commission has declared 1996 the European Year of Lifelong Learning. On this occasion, a White Paper was drafted, followed shortly by a round table of European industrialists who, in collaboration with the University Board of Rectors, tried to give a definition to the learning community.

Another important moment in education policy is the 1996 OECD Ministerial Conference on Lifelong Learning, followed by the UNESCO-sponsored Delors Report on Education for the 21st Century: "The four pillars of „The Treasure Within” - „Learning to do, Learning to be, Learning to understand and Learning to live together” - put the needs and demands of the individual once more at the center of this quadrumvirate as the focus of educational activity. „Lifelong learning for All” OECD's flagship justification for lifelong learning, resulted from the 1996 conference of Ministers and provoked a great deal of national governmental activity in this area. For example, from 1998, the UK produced Green and White Papers on the subject as well as a flurry of recommendations, initiatives, reports and exhortations. Finland has produced its national lifelong learning strategy, the appropriately named "The Joy of Learning", and other countries, The Netherlands, Sweden, Ireland and Danmark, among them, have also produced similar national plans." (Longworth N., 2003, pp. 7-8)

Obviously, each community / state has its own particularities, a certain educational profile, conditioned by resources, traditions, educational ideal, learning needs, etc. Educational policies and those

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related to lifelong learning must be not only in the attention of the political factor, but also of all social actors, members of a given society (which can become a learning community) and beneficiaries of education. "Within the discussion of lifelong learning and a learning society we have, for instance, the discourses of learners, lecturers, managers, policymakers, academics, professional bodies, employers, trade unions, awarding bodies, think tanks, journalists and commentators. Each have their own discourses through which the terrain is constructed, contested and challenged, for example, liberal humanist, human resource management, skills training, social action." (Edwards R., 1997, p. 13)

There are various lifelong learning programs in the European Union. Some focus on economic and social development, others on cultural or educational development. We can exemplify through *Erasmus +* programs, which offer mobility / cooperation / exchange of good practices between specialists, representatives of educational institutions in the Union, decision makers, pupils, students, etc. for knowledge, adaptation, standardization (where appropriate), vocational training, in line with the objectives of the *Lisbon Agenda*. *Erasmus +* programs offer opportunities for mobility and cooperation in several areas, such as education and training, the youth sector, sports, higher education and pre-university education (including early childhood education).

Education policies should also aim at training trainers for continuing vocational education, taking into account the particularities of student groups and different learning needs.

An updated legislative framework, adapted to the particularities of the states, but also taking into account the other partners, coherent, stable, but also flexible, will increase the number of partnerships, attractiveness, accessibility and, ultimately, will strengthen the quality of continuous professional activity. Training. We recall a mention found in the strategy launched by the European Council, held in Lisbon in March 2000: *People are the most valuable in Europe and must be at the heart of the Union's policies* - including education, we added.

**Significant features of lifelong learning. About the need for lifelong learning**

Schools no longer enjoy exclusivity in the educational space, even if they are at the top of the hierarchy of factors responsible for achieving education. In fact, lifelong learning, in non-formal or formal contexts, can correct certain deficiencies in the formal education system, can reduce gaps, can benefit from a customized approach plan. (Cranton P., 1997). As a whole, lifelong learning, through all the forms through which it manifests itself, also has the role of feeding passions, inclinations, of developing / improving the quality of life. (Dave R.H., 1973). Therefore, continuing education must be flexible, offer the opportunity for online and distance learning (when required), take into account the skills, desires, needs and experiences of students, especially when it comes to education adults. (Edwards R., 1997)

The benefits of lifelong learning are multiple: psycho-social, educational, cultural, moral, professional, etc. According to the law, this type of education "*aims at the full development of the person and the sustainable development of society*" (LEN, art. 329, alin 1). In other words, not only the individual, as mentioned above, but also society as a whole benefit from continuing education. Perhaps that is why Aristotle once drew attention - and the topicality of the conception cannot be denied - to the fact that education must be permanently in the attention of the state and the legislator.

Why do we have to learn all the time? One of the basic features of education is that it must be achieved throughout an individual's life. It could not be addressed effectively and completely in a few years, possibly through family and school. The human being is complex, the cultural-scientific experience of humanity is vast, not to mention the novelty elements that appear during the life of an individual. All these are arguments in favor of lifelong learning. We also remember the need for permanent vocational education, argued by the changes in the labor market, the disappearance of some professions and the emergence of others (there is also the need for professional retraining), the need to be successful in your field and to be up to date. developments. We cannot talk about career progress and performance without ongoing training (Jarvis P., 2007). Continuing education can also provide skills that, coupled with experience, can

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support the active entry into the labor market of a person who has reached retirement age.

We also warn about the possibility of inefficient management of lifelong learning. An "overqualification" in several areas can lead to a certain state of discomfort, either due to not finding a job or relative to the job offers received, considered to be in dissonance with the type of qualification held or with the effort made to obtain a job. attestations.

### **"Providers" of continuing education**

Two factors with attributions in the accomplishment / provision of education have the task, among others, to form in the educated person the desire to study, to be permanently trained, to be efficient and to internalize his lifelong learning skills: family and school. It is essential in lifelong learning that it be perceived by the educable as a support and not a burden, an obligation (Dave R.H., 1973). Self-education or the approach of continuous training programs must be done on one's own initiative, there must be the person's consent for his own training, because only in this way can we talk about efficiency and quality. However, the school must be the main factor in promoting education and training throughout life, through scientific events, partnerships, opening the appetite of pupils / students for reading and self-education, etc.

We add non-formal education providers. For pre-university education, two well-known institutions are the Teachers' Houses and the Children's Palaces. We do not intend to detail, at this moment, the particularities of the training in the space of these institutions, the aspect will be detailed in a later approach.

It is no coincidence that we referred to the Children's Palace, a landmark in a sequence of continuing education. We propose, starting from this institution, a new institutional construction, which society and the decision-makers in the Romanian education system should reflect. In many European countries, "adult palaces" have developed, sometimes called universities (eg LiberEta University - Udine, Italy), much sought after by people. The benefits are many: from socializing and spending free time, to (re) considering the knowledge gained by

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adults or assimilating new ones, in the context of current developments (from the position of educator or educated). If we think about the old popular universities in our country (we give the example of the People's University of Ungureni), we will notice that the tradition exists. It only needs to be (re) capitalized and associated with the particularities of today's world.

We also pay attention to the importance of the media (with a necessary selection of content, either by the learner or guided by the trainer), but also to the involvement of society as a whole in education, perhaps in the perspective of developing real and functional "learning communities". There have been and still are projects focused on their establishment and development. I am reminded of the Xploit project, carried out about 10 years ago, in which Iasi educational institutions were partners, along with other institutions from Denmark, Italy, Romania, Spain, Israel and Great Britain. The project, funded by the European Commission, aimed at forming and developing learning communities through active cooperation between actors in the field of education.

True, our current approach is timid in this regard, compared to other states (Italy, Israel), but we note at least two benefits for the community: the opportunity to involve all social actors in education (providers, beneficiaries, decision makers), to meet new ideas, people and cultures, but also the possibility of implementation / development of activities in the field of lifelong learning at the community level.

### **Conclusions**

Education does not end at the end of the school year, but is a permanent process, which should overlap throughout life, bringing together formal and non-formal ways of education (organized), but also accidental, spontaneous elements in the field of informal education, social groups and the whole community playing an important role in educating people; we warn, however, about the need for a careful selection of content, environments and learning situations (Marsick V. J., Watkins K. E., 2001).

Lifelong learning is a challenge for all social and educational actors, contributing essentially to creating the balance and harmonization of the individual-society relationship. This educational approach essential for personal and social development proposes "a

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new resettlement of the various components of education in a complex and flexible structure at the same time - school, cultural institutions, media, family, educational organizations - all competing for the complex assistance of man, his whole life.” (Neculau A., 2004, p. 67)

Here are some things to think about: Do educational authorities / institutions have a long-term strategy for lifelong learning? What kind of educational and social challenges does the community face now and how (un) predictable the future is? Are we as individuals aware of the importance of lifelong learning? - because the main person responsible for a lifelong education conducted efficiently is the individual himself, willing and motivated, regardless of laws, regulations and methodologies. We remember, for a possible meditative stop, the words of N. Iorga (1871-1940), who warned that it is a great danger to be satisfied with yourself.

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