

LIFELONG LEARNING AS A PRIORITY OF DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

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Summary

The article explores the phenomenon of lifelong learning as one of the key priorities for the development of a European educational partnership. The importance of lifelong learning as a recognized theory and practice of the concept, which is the benchmark of broad modernization processes in the European Higher Education Area, is demonstrated. The main interrelated areas of action (defining strategic priorities for development, outlining key competencies of lifelong learning, identifying forms of lifelong learning, funding and investment efficiency) are considered. The potential of lifelong learning as a mechanism for promoting social stability and cultural convergence at the beginning of the third millennium is conceptualized. Productive links between lifelong learning and the processes of building a knowledge economy have been demonstrated. The methodological basis of the study was the analysis of the European Commission's educational policy (conceptual, regulatory and programmatic documents) in the field of lifelong learning. The results obtained in the study may be useful to both domestic researchers and practitioners in the field of public administration of higher education, university staff, involved in international cooperation.

Keywords: lifelong learning, educational policy, European Higher Education Area, knowledge economy, strategic partnership.

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1. Introduction

Lifelong learning as a priority for the development of European partnership is a popular and widely debated issue in the academic and political circles of Europe and the world in recent decades, the conceptualization of which is the subject of discussion and research of European educational officials, theorists and practitioners. The relevance of the development of the concept of lifelong learning is caused by the procedural and contextual features of the development of modern society.

The rapid progress of transformational socio-political and economic trends and structural changes in recent decades (digitalization, globalization, intensification of intercultural communication, migration, etc.) have had a decisive impact on the foundations of social systems and practices, led to profound changes in social institutions and mechanisms. These transformations

lead to the formation and development of a new infrastructure of social relations, provoke new challenges to the development of the European Union to build a developed knowledge-based economy.

In the outlined transformational conditions, lifelong learning appears not only as a source of development of personal qualities of each person, but also acts as a powerful catalyst of economic and social potential of each state, a factor in the development of European partnership. After all, as modern researchers point out, the European Union still remains a political formation, which currently cannot be considered a «union» at both the economic and socio-cultural levels (*Panitsides & Anastasiadou, 2015*). In addition, linguistic and cultural pluralism within the European Union complicates the emergence and development of a «European identity» that allows people to identify themselves as EU citizens.

The purpose of the article is to explore the phenomenon of lifelong learning as one of the priorities for the development of a European educational partnership and to carry out an overview of the «agenda» of key documents in the field of adult educational policy. Therefore, the methodological basis of the study is the content analysis of the European Commission's conceptual, regulatory and programmatic documents.

2. The socio-economic value of lifelong learning

Based on the indicated socio-cultural situation, the development of educational programs for lifelong learning is considered as a mechanism for promoting social stability and cultural convergence. Political discourse constantly emphasizes the socio-economic value of lifelong learning as a strategy, determines the modernization steps in the field of education in the domestic and European spaces, while its role in the knowledge-based economy lies in the effective implementation of three interrelated functions in practice: distribution, stabilization and development functions.

The distribution function of lifelong learning is to ensure equal learning opportunities for all citizens, regardless of socio-economic status and previous educational level. The function of stabilization of lifelong learning is realized through the acquisition of the necessary skills and knowledge by citizens, both for integration and for leaving in the profession, as well as for ensuring constant adaptation to socio-economic transformations. The development function is implemented by providing effective opportunities for continuous professional development, mastering new skills and knowledge to meet the dynamic needs of the labor market, increasing the efficiency of human resources (*Panitsidou et al., 2012; Savenkova & Svyrydenko, 2018*).

Due to the strengthening of cooperation between EU member states, in recent decades the European Commission has issued a significant number of normative, regulatory and program documents aimed at setting goals and priorities, as well as a coherent framework for action within the common European educational policy. In particular, we are talking about the following key documents on lifelong education:

- «*Adult learning: It is never too late to learn*» (*Commission of the European Communities, 2006a*);
- «*Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems*» (*Commission of the European Communities, 2006b*);
- «*Establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning. COM467*» (*Commission of the European Communities, 2006c*);

- «A coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training» (*Commission of the European Communities, 2007a*);
- «Action plan on adult learning: It is always a good time to learn» (*Commission of the European Communities, 2007b*);
- «Commission consultation on the future “EU 2020” Strategy» (*Commission of the European Communities, 2009*);
- «A new impetus for European cooperation in vocational education and training to support the Europe 2020 strategy» (*Commission of the European Communities, 2010a*);
- «An agenda for new skills and jobs: A European contribution towards full employment» (*Commission of the European Communities, 2010b*);
- «Lisbon Strategy evaluation document» (*Commission of the European Communities, 2010c*);
- «European Council Conclusions on Europe 2020: a new European strategy for jobs and growth» (*Council of the European Union, 2010*);
- «Supporting vocational education and training in Europe: the Bruges Communiqué» (*Commission of the European Communities, 2011*);
- «Partnership and flexible pathways for lifelong skills development» (*Commission of the European Communities, 2012*);
- «Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning» (*Council of the European Union, 2018*) etc.

The political rhetoric of the European Union emphasizes that education is a prerequisite for a harmonious life in a prosperous economy and a priority for the development of the European partnership. European Union policy documents recognize education as a key factor in fruitful progress towards integration, social stability and economic prosperity in the EU. However, this education appears in a modified form, compared to the traditional education of the twentieth century – it appears flexible and dynamic in content, effective, accessible and lifelong, responding to socio-cultural and economic transformations of society.

In particular, the program documents of the European Union emphasize that the development of lifelong learning actively contributes to the European Union’s goals of market growth and efficiency, ensuring a high level of education and training in entering the labor market and active participation of citizens in the knowledge-based economy. In addition, it is noted that lifelong learning can and should significantly strengthen social cohesion and facilitate the overcoming of new challenges that logically arise in the context of European enlargement (issues of national identity, social justice, tolerance, multiculturalism, inalienable human rights and freedoms, all forms of equality, etc.).

Achieving the outlined tasks is focused on two closely interrelated parameters of meeting the needs of general development and economic growth: the restoration of full employment; strengthening social cohesion (*Panitsidou et al., 2012*). However, both parameters are mediated by the third variable – the availability of lifelong learning and the openness of educational systems. As part of this effective approach to lifelong learning, the European Union has initiated and supported three areas of strategic development aimed at ensuring the transparency of qualifications; promotion and development of new key competencies – especially in the field of information technology; development of local training centers (*Panitsidou et al., 2012*).

Strategies for the development of lifelong learning as a priority of the European Partnership provide for the implementation of several interrelated areas of action: defining strategic

priorities for development, outlining key competencies of lifelong learning, identifying forms of lifelong learning, funding and investment efficiency. Let us consider each of the above areas of lifelong learning as a priority for the development of the European Education Partnership in more detail.

3. Strategic development priorities

The European Union's policy documents on the development of educational policy determine the further promotion of education, teaching and learning in order to ensure personal and professional development of all citizens, economic prosperity and further employment as the main purpose of the renewed structure of cooperation, promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue (*National Institute for Strategic Studies 2010; Council of the European Union, 2010, 2018; Nijhof, 2005*).

The decisive factor is that these documents identify four indicators that are called «European benchmarks» to ensure the assessment of the effectiveness of the member states in achieving the strategic goals of European education policy. These benchmarks are aimed at promoting lifelong learning; improving the quality and efficiency of education; increasing social cohesion and active citizenship; promoting innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship (*Commission of the European Communities, 2011; Nijhof, 2005*).

The role assigned to lifelong learning in the European Union's education policy development strategy is based on the assumption that new jobs that require new skills will be created. Moreover, given the economic recession, according to some expert estimates, new trends of multiple entry and exit from the labor market will prevail over the traditional sequence (classic linear scenario: education, employment and retirement). The predominance of these trends requires the development of a new institutional and regulatory framework for organizing and supporting these transitions, for example, part-time employment together with periods of training and retraining (*Commission of the European Communities, 2006b; Council of the European Union, 2010, 2018*).

In line with this “more flexible” employment scheme at different levels of discussion and in the language of documents there is an increasing emphasis on the need to ensure greater access to lifelong learning in order to organize and support a smooth transition between jobs and other activities, minimizing the risk of human capital losses due to potential long-term unemployment.

Thus, the growing role of lifelong learning is closely linked to raising the general level of qualifications and ensuring the acquisition of basic skills by all citizens; helping to respond to demographic change, such as Europe's aging population and migration issues; strengthening social inclusion, which is crucial as low levels of primary school education, high unemployment, rural isolation and reduced educational, social and economic opportunities can marginalize large numbers of citizens, and new forms of illiteracy provoked by restricting access to and use of modern information computer technologies, exacerbate the phenomena of social exclusion (*Commission of the European Communities, 2006b; Council of the European Union, 2010, 2018*).

4. Key lifelong learning competencies

The European Commission works with EU Member States to support and strengthen the development of basic competencies and basic skills for all, from an early age and throughout

life. Key competencies include the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by people for personal fulfilment and development, employment, social inclusion and active citizenship. This approach is to promote key competencies by:

- providing quality education, retraining and lifelong learning for all;
- supporting teachers in the implementation of teaching methods based on competencies;
- involving a variety of approaches and contexts for further learning;
- exploring approaches to assess and validate key competencies.

In 2018, the European Council adopted a Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, based on proposals from the European Commission. The Recommendation identifies eight key competencies needed for personal fulfilment, healthy and sustainable lifestyles, employment, active citizenship and social inclusion: literacy; multilingualism; mathematical, scientific and engineering skills; competence in the use of digital technologies; interpersonal skills and the ability to accept new competencies; active citizenship; entrepreneurship; cultural awareness and self-expression (*Nijhof, 2005*).

This Recommendation of the European Council offers a common European reference framework on key competencies for policy makers, educational and research institutions, social partners and lifelong learning participants themselves. Also, the Recommendation presents successful ways to promote the development of competencies through innovative approaches to learning, assessment methods and support for teachers.

5. Forms of organization of lifelong learning

Emphasizing that learning is not limited to one specific life phase, school education, but also takes place in different contexts throughout life, the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020) supports the concept of lifelong learning by coordinating cooperation between Member States as for education, formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Among the many forms of lifelong learning that are set and implemented in the system of lifelong education, the authors of the analytical note «Lifelong learning: world experience and Ukrainian practice» propose to identify the following three components:

1. Additional professional education – contributes to the formation of the professional basis of human resources of the modern high-tech economy. The consumers of this part of the system of lifelong learning are the socially adapted part of the population, receiving education consistently at all levels.

2. Component that provides various groups with the opportunity to adapt to changing living conditions; provides education aimed at adaptation and rehabilitation of social and professional groups, unable to adapt independently to the rapidly changing social environment. Citizens who do not have access to the formal vocational education system for various reasons are involved in this system.

3. A component of the system of adult education, which tries to meet the various individual educational needs of citizens: language training, psychological, cultural and other knowledge, communication skills, special skills and more. The formalized structures of additional vocational education are joined by various informal structures (training groups, training and retraining in enterprises, etc.), which sometimes operate on the basis of formalized structures, and are often created informally, usually for a short time. Also adjacent to this system is open education in its various forms as well as distance learning (*Commission of the European Communities, 2006*).

6. Issues of financing lifelong learning and investment efficiency

The issue of funding and efficiency of investment in lifelong learning is widely discussed by the European Commission. In particular, it is noted that investments in education and training have a significant cost, but high personal, socio-economic, medium and long-term returns exceed the initial costs. In addition, in the context of the spread of neoliberalism and the decline in welfare, for the first time in European Union policy documents it is necessary to place the cost of lifelong learning on the citizens themselves, urging Member States to encourage citizens to invest in their own learning for both personal development and employment (*Commission of the European Communities, 2010a, 2007*).

To achieve the necessary social consensus, the European Commission calls on the Member States of the European Union to pursue a better policy of informing all citizens about the need to increase participation in lifelong learning, by launching broad communication campaigns involving individuals with national, regional and local social partners (*Panitsidou et al., 2012*).

It should be noted that a significant progress in the development of European lifelong learning policy in recent years has been the approach to a coherent framework policy implemented through technocratic tools that allow comparisons between member states (introduction of «indicators» and «benchmarks») while emphasizing on increasing investment in lifelong learning. As a result, there was a gradual transition to a supranational educational policy, which was legitimized under the threat of socio-economic losses in the event of non-implementation of the Lisbon Strategy. Similar «evolutionary» processes do not play any significant role in the European Higher Education Area and, in a specific way, in Ukraine, in the process of developing academic mobility practices (*Commission of the European Communities, 2006a; Tuparevska, 2019*).

7. Conclusions

Over the past decades, lifelong learning has remained a priority area in the development of the educational policy of the European Union, aimed at increasing the participation of adults, especially the unskilled, in various educational programs of formal, non-formal and informal education. It acts as a powerful catalyst for the economic and social potential of each member state, and a factor in the development of European partnership. Also, within the framework of the article, an overview of the «agenda» of key documents in the field of educational policy of the European Higher Education Area was carried out, and this review itself can be useful both for domestic researchers and practitioners in the field of public administration in higher education, university staff, involved in international cooperation and the like.

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