

E-EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

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ABSTRACT. Lifelong learning is both a vision shared by all the European countries and, within countries, by all the actors involved in education and training. Lifelong learning has become a guiding principle for provision and participation across all learning contexts and is expected to drive fundamental change in education and training. It is also a conceptual framework for thinking about education and training.

Е-ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ И ПРОДЪЛЖАВАЩО ОБУЧЕНИЕ

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РЕЗЮМЕ. Обучението през целия жизнен път на човека е виждане, което е споделено от всички европейски страни, както и вътре в страните, от всички участници в образователния и обучаващия процес. Непрекъснатото обучение става водещ принцип за обезпечаване и участие в обучението през целия период на човешкия живот и предполага основна промяна в образование и обучението. Това е и идеената схема за размисъл относно образованието и обучението.

Introduction

Today's Europe is experiencing change on a scale comparable with that of the Industrial Revolution. Digital technology is transforming every aspect of people's lives, whilst biotechnology may one day change life itself. Trade, travel and communication on a world scale are expanding people's cultural horizons and are changing the ways in which economies compete with each other. Modern life brings greater chances and choices for individuals, but also greater risks and uncertainties. People have the freedom to adopt varied lifestyles, but equally the responsibility to shape their own lives. More people stay in education and training longer, but the gap is widening between those who are sufficiently qualified to keep afloat in the labour market and those who are falling irrevocably by the wayside. Europe's population is also ageing rapidly. This will change the make-up of the labour force and the patterns of demand for social, health and education services. Last but not least, European societies are turning into intercultural mosaics. This diversity holds great potential for creativity and innovation in all spheres of life.

Heads of state and government meeting of the European Council, Lisbon March 2000, defined a new strategic goal for the EU with a target date of 2010 as making the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustaining economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'.

Ever since it was created in 1958 the European Community has responded to a strategic goal. The first was to prevent war within Europe. The goal of the mid-1980s was to complete the

single market by 1992. The goal of the mid-1990s was to complete economic and monetary union by 1999 with the introduction of the euro.

A distinctive feature of the new strategic goal is that it is a social agenda related to employment, economic reform and social cohesion. Some of the most headline-catching aspirations are linked to employment, for example to create 20 million new and better jobs by 2010.

Education and training – and research – as well as employment and competition policy, are at the heart of the new strategy. These policy sectors will play a leading part in achieving the goal (**Bruges process**).

Globalisation and the new knowledge driven economy require major changes in education systems.

The Lisbon process and education

At the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, heads of government committed their governments to a new strategic goal with a target date of 2010. They will work together "to create the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion".

'People are Europe's main asset and should be the focal point of the Union's policies' declared the heads of government of the EU 15.

To that end, national governments in the EU will prepare the transition to a knowledge-based economy, modernise the European social model, investing in people and combating social exclusion, sustain the healthy economic outlook and favourable growth prospects.

Heads of government agreed on an 'open method of coordination' in the policy areas concerned by which they agree common objectives and common methods of evaluation in a spirit of stimulating and spreading better practice.

This voluntary commitment to work together to a common European pattern is remarkable for occurring in a policy area - **education** - which is defined by the Treaty of European Union as strictly national. The Treaty makes it explicit that the content and organisation of education systems is a national responsibility. The Community must 'fully respect the responsibilities of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of educational systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity'.

On May 5, 2003, the Education Ministers of the 15 Member States, meeting in the Council, agreed to five common education and training **benchmarks** - or 'reference levels of European average performance' - they were prepared to apply to their very different national education systems. It is part of the process that they should then take into account the findings in preparing national policy in the perspective of the year 2010.

This EU education benchmarking is new. It is a tool, which fits into an elaborate EU social and economic strategy, with a target date of 2010, to develop Europe's innovatory potential in a way which accords with its cultural and linguistic diversity. The political leaders of the EU want the EU to have a more 'competitive, dynamic and knowledge-based economy', and to have modernised 'the European social model by investing in people and building an active welfare state' as means of achieving the EU's new strategic goal: that of 'creating the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

The next stage is for EU heads of government to consider the progress of the strategy at the next 'Spring Summit' of the European Council in March 2004. Among the issues they will be considering are policy sector Interim Reports on benchmarking and possible peer review of national systems - the so-called 'open method of coordination' instituted by the Lisbon European Council of March 2000.

The **five benchmarks** are:

1. The achievement of an EU average of no more than 10 per cent of early school leavers
2. An increase of at least 15 per cent in the total number of graduates in maths, science and technology in the EU and a decrease in the level of gender imbalance
3. A completion rate in upper secondary education of at least 85 per cent of 22 year olds in the EU
4. A decrease of at least 20 per cent on the year 2000 in the percentage of low-achieving 15 year olds in reading literacy in the EU

5. An EU average level of participation in lifelong learning of at least 12.5 per cent of the adult working age population (25-64 age group)

The Commission continues to press national governments to accept a further benchmark, which formed part of the Lisbon objectives - that of substantial annual increases in per capita investments in human resources.

But 'the Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and if necessary by supporting and supplementing their action'.

The Lisbon Process is the most ambitious example of putting that aspiration to the test, in so far as education is concerned. Heads of state and government meeting of the European Council, Lisbon March 2000, defined a new strategic goal for the EU with a target date of 2010 as making the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustaining economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'

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There are two main objectives (i) to prepare the transition to a competitive, dynamic and knowledge-based economy (ii) to modernise the European social model by investing in people and building an active welfare state.

The Lisbon Agenda has two major targets:

1. Preparing the transition to a competitive, dynamic and knowledge-based economy:
 - An information society for all
 - Establishing a European Area of Research and Development
 - Creating a friendly environment for starting up and developing innovative businesses especially small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs)
 - Creating efficient and integrated financial markets
 - Coordinating macro-economic policies
2. Modernising the European social model by investing in people and building an active welfare state:
 - Education and training for living and working in the knowledge society
 - More and better jobs for Europe: developing an active employment policy
 - Modernising social protection
 - Promoting social inclusion

The conclusions of the Lisbon European Council confirm that the move towards lifelong learning must accompany a successful transition to a knowledge-based economy and society. Therefore, Europe's education and training systems are at the heart of the coming changes.

A European area of lifelong learning

The Feira European Council in June 2000 asked the Member States, the Council and the Commission, within their areas of competence, to "identify coherent strategies and practical measures with a view to fostering lifelong learning for all". This mandate confirms lifelong learning as a key element of the strategy, devised at Lisbon, to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world.

Responses to the consultation on the Memorandum called for a broad **definition of lifelong learning** that is not limited to a purely economic outlook or just to learning for adults. In addition to the emphasis it places on learning from **pre-school to postretirement**, lifelong learning should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, nonformal and informal learning. The consultation also highlighted the objectives of learning, including active citizenship, personal fulfilment and social inclusion, as well as employment-related aspects. The principles which underpin lifelong learning and guide its effective implementation emphasise the centrality of the learner, the importance of equal opportunities and the quality and relevance of learning opportunities.

A comprehensive and coherent lifelong learning strategy for Europe should aim to:

- guarantee universal and continuing access to learning for **gaining and renewing the skills** needed for sustained participation in the knowledge society;
- visibly **raise levels of investment** in human resources in order to place priority on Europe's most important asset – its people;
- develop effective **teaching and learning methods** and contexts for the continuum of lifelong and lifewide learning;
- significantly improve the ways in which learning **participation and outcomes** are **understood and appreciated**, particularly non-formal and informal learning;
- ensure that everyone can easily access good quality **information and advice** about learning opportunities throughout Europe and throughout their lives;
- **provide lifelong learning opportunities as close to learners as possible**, in their own communities and supported through ICT-based facilities wherever appropriate.
- **to build an inclusive society which offers equal opportunities for access to quality** learning throughout life to all people, and in which education and training provision is based first and foremost on the needs and demands of individuals;
- **to adjust the ways in which education and training is provided**, and how paid working life is organised, so that people can participate in learning throughout their lives

and can plan for themselves how they combine learning, working and family life;

- **to achieve higher overall levels of education and qualification** in all sectors, to ensure high-quality provision of education and training, and at the same time to ensure that people's knowledge and skills match the changing demands of jobs and occupations, workplace organisation and working methods;
- **to encourage and equip people to participate more actively** once more in all spheres of modern public life, especially in social and political life at all levels of the community, including at European level.

An understanding of the needs for learning amongst citizens, communities, wider society and the labour market should be the basis of any strategy for lifelong learning.

Such an understanding must be grounded in evidence from the local level. This is a prerequisite for ensuring an effective learner centred approach and equality of opportunity. Work should focus on:

- Literacy, numeracy, **ICT** (information and communication technologies) and other basic skills needs: the foundation for further learning, which will often need to be updated throughout life. Citizens/groups most alienated from learning, whose needs and interests are varied, may require tailored measures;
- Addressing the impact of lifelong learning on learning facilitators such as teachers, trainers, adult educators and guidance workers. Strategies and partnerships must address their role and support their adaptation;
- The needs of employers in general, who employ a significant proportion of the EU's workforce, yet who often encounter difficulties in making finance or time available for training or in finding training which is relevant to their needs. Motivating employers is important in this respect;
- Understanding (potential) learners' interests, reflected in surveys, evaluations, feedback from guidance surveys and consultations, data on imbalances in learning participation (e.g. gender mix in ICT learning);
- Taking into account the implications of the knowledge-based society for the needs of learners (new basic skills, including entrepreneurship, science and technology), and labour markets (for example the importance of competence forecasting to avoid shortages, upskilling those inside the labour market to ensure they do not become excluded).

There should be a dual approach to access to learning: making what is already on offer more visible, flexible, integrated and effective, while also developing new learning processes, products and environments. Strategies must also address issues of equality of opportunity (e.g. gender equality) and of targeting specific groups, in order to ensure lifelong learning opportunities are genuinely available to all, especially those at particular risk of exclusion such as people on low income, disabled people, ethnic minorities and immigrants, early school leavers, lone parents, unemployed people, parents returning to the labour market, workers with low levels of education and training, people outside the labour market, senior citizens (including older workers), and ex-offenders. Such targeting should address the needs not only of people in

deprived urban areas, but also those in rural areas who may have particular learning needs. Key points include:

1. Removing social, geographical, psychological and other barriers, for example by promoting **ICT, workplace learning** and local learning centres to bring learning and learners together at times/paces and in places suited to people's other commitments;
2. Within the formal sector, adapting entry, progression and recognition requirements to take account of non-formal and informal learning;
3. Complementing mainstream provision with tailored measures, especially for basic skills, targeted at specific individual needs. Ensuring availability of specialist provision to meet any unmet demand, for example by encouraging higher education establishments to work with those at risk of exclusion;
4. Social partners should work together and with other actors to ensure the trend towards greater flexibility in the organisation of work is accompanied by adequate investment by employers in their workforce – a key dimension of quality in work;
5. Recognising information, guidance and counselling services as a key interface between learning needs and the learning on offer. They are also crucial in helping learners find their place in increasingly complex learning systems.

There are three basic categories of purposeful learning activity.

1. **Formal learning** takes place in education and training institutions, leading to recognised diplomas and qualifications.
2. **Non-formal learning** takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training and does not typically lead to formalised certificates. Non-formal learning may be provided in the workplace and through the activities of civil society organisations and groups (such as in youth organisations, trades unions and political parties). It can also be provided through organisations or services that have been set up to complement formal systems (such as arts, music and sports classes or private tutoring to prepare for examinations).
3. **Informal learning** is a natural accompaniment to everyday life. Unlike formal and nonformal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning, and so may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills.

Until now, formal learning has dominated policy thinking, shaping the ways in which education and training are provided and colouring people's understandings of what counts as learning. The continuum of lifelong learning brings non-formal and informal learning more fully into the picture. Non-formal learning, by definition, stands outside schools, colleges, training centres and universities. It is not usually seen as 'real'

learning, and nor do its outcomes have much currency value on the labour market. Non-formal learning is therefore typically undervalued.

But informal learning is likely to be missed out of the picture altogether, although it is the oldest form of learning and remains the mainstay of early childhood learning. The fact that microcomputer technology has established itself in homes before it has done so in schools underlines the importance of informal learning. Informal contexts provide an enormous learning reservoir and could be an important source of innovation for teaching and learning methods.

Conclusion

Lifelong learning is, however, about much more than economics. It also promotes the goals and ambitions of European countries to become more inclusive, tolerant and democratic. And it promises a Europe in which citizens have the opportunity and ability to realize their ambitions and to participate in building a better society. Indeed, a recent OECD report refers to the growing evidence that learning and investment in human capital is associated not just with increased GDP, but also with greater civic participation, higher reported well-being and lower criminality. Higher levels of education and continuous learning, when accessible to all, make an important contribution to reducing inequalities and preventing marginalisation.

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