



Life Long Education: A Conceptual Debate

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Abstract

This paper deals with the nature of a concept of lifelong education. Lifelong education can be provided through informal, formal and non-formal education processes. Hence, lifelong education can be defined as a process of both deliberate and unintentional opportunities influencing learning throughout one's life span. Dimensions of lifelong education have also been detailed along with its goals. Pre-requisites of lifelong education, concept of integration, flexibility and diversity and lifelong education as a master concept are also given due consideration.

Keywords: Education, Learning, Lifelong Education, Dimensions of Lifelong Education, Integration

Introduction

Education is processes, events, activities and conditions those assist and encourage learning. Education may be planned or random but it helps in learning. Thus education is a service. Lifelong education requires that someone i.e. government or other agencies who develop policies and devote resources to education; these cover a broad array of informal, non-formal and formal settings where deliberate choices are made.

Human beings consciously or unconsciously keep on learning and training themselves throughout their lives. This may be a result of the influence of the surroundings which mould their behaviour, their concept of life and the content of their knowledge.

In recent time scholars and planners put the education in a broader view by promoting the concept of lifelong education. Advocates of lifelong education view that education is a process that continues in one form or another throughout life. Its purposes and forms are to be adapted to the needs of individuals at different stages in their development (Rashid, 1993). Education is seen as an integral part of life and all the institutions of society with an educative potential are considered resources for learning. It is that educational process by which individuals become more competent in their knowledge and skills so that they gain more control over their environment.

Lifelong education is a blend of pedagogy and andragogy. It can be provided through various modes like distance learning, e-learning, continuing education or correspondence courses. The concept of lifelong education has been under the process of continuous change because of increased duration of formal education and insufficiency of skills attained in schooling for future career and success. Lifelong education was initially emerged as a blend of informal, formal and non-formal education with the aim of improvement in quality of life but now the concept covers all times and all places, starting from birth and ending at death.

Lifelong learning formally came into existence in 1970 after the advocacy of Council of Europe for Permanent Education, recurrent education from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and UNESCO Report of "Learning to Be". In the Faure Report of "Learning to Be" the term lifelong education was used instead of lifelong learning. It was in the 1990s when idea of lifelong learning again gained momentum and became global in its nature. It is a concept that claims it is never too late for learning. It is an attitude of openness to new ideas, decisions, skills and behaviours. One is provided with learning opportunities at all ages, all levels in various contexts.

Statement of the Problem

The study aimed at explaining and analyzing the concept of lifelong education.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

1. To discuss the broader perspective of education.
2. To conduct the desk review of the concept of lifelong education.
3. To elaborate the pre-requisites for lifelong education.

Methodology

The concept of lifelong education has implications for development of educational programmes, implementation and its evaluation. The study was descriptive in nature. Library documents were used as tools for collection of data. After going through these documents, a detailed presentation according to objectives has been being made.

Presentation

The ideas about lifelong education may sound like little more than enlightened common sense. First the concept of lifelong education contradicts the conventional wisdom where education is limited only to schools and colleges where children and young people are prepared for adulthood. A second profound implication is that the formal educational system must be reorganized so that it can be flexible enough to accommodate individual options and to prepare young people to continue their education as self-directed and competent adult learners.

The word life according to Galbraith (1992, p.3) "Conjures up definitions that range from political, religious, sociological, historical, anthropological and psychological perspectives". Understanding life involves determining how society measures it and views it in relationship to these various perspectives. Life is composed of the growth and development of human being that takes

places from birth to death” so lifelong refers to life time span. Lifelong education and lifelong learning are being used synonymously to mean and promote successful life.

Dave (1973, pp.14-25) has identified twenty characteristics of the concept of lifelong education in his book entitled “Lifelong Education and School Curriculum”. Some of these include: the three basic terms upon which the concept is based are “life”, “life-long” and “education”; education does not terminate at the end of formal schooling but is a lifelong process; lifelong education is not limited to adult education but it covers all stages of education; lifelong education includes both formal and non-formal patterns of education, planned as well as incidental learning; lifelong education seeks continuity and articulation along with vertical and longitudinal dimension along with integration at its horizontal and vertical dimensions at every stage in life with the universal flexible character to improve the quality of life.

The concept of lifelong education was narrow and limited in its infancy but recent works has broadened it to a multifaceted and broader one. Education is now seen both intrinsic and extrinsic. From this, expansion of cognition repertoire, increase in one’s skills and competencies continue throughout the life. In this regard, OECD Ministers argued lifelong learning might aim at better democracy, inclusive society and more rewarding life which has made the concept of lifelong not only interdisciplinary but at the same time, existence of lack of clarity and shared understanding of the concept is also there.

The Faure Report (1972) saw education not as means of promoting vocational competence and economic growth only but also as a means to expand individual freedom and enabling people to live fulfilled lives in a variety of roles. This Faure Report provided basis for the Delors Report of 1997: four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be changed (UTE, 2003). Delors championed “learning throughout life” as heart beat of the society.

In the European definition of lifelong education each action is connected with lifelong education aiming at improvement of one’s knowledge, skills and competencies with personal, civic and social perspectives (including employment aptitude). This definition includes all activities starting from early childhood to death: much more than basic skills i.e. acquisition of formal qualifications updating these to have renovation, advanced knowledge, activation of civil conscience, expansion of employment opportunities and social integration. To achieve this goal, formal, informal and independent training is suggested just to have knowledge based society. In general EU definition rests upon two groups of competencies (1) professional knowledge, skills and abilities (2) conveyable and adaptable skills.

In October 2000 EU agreed on the memorandum on lifelong education which led to initiate the coordinated strategies and practical steps for the creation of opportunities for everyone and by 2010, achievement of an average level of participation in lifelong education at least 12.5% of the population aged 25-64 years. Emphasis in this memorandum is on learning from pre-school to post retirement with the objectives of active citizenship, personal fulfillment and social inclusion as well as employment and related aspects (EU, 2001).

With the continuous expansion in knowledge and skills, the demand of learners remains in transition as of old fashioned education cannot cope with the change. Demand is on the updating of skills, knowledge throughout working lives. Another contributing factor is increasing mobility at international level, so traditional and open universities are offering such

courses which help to reach out other parts of world: ICT has a profound effect at lifelong education (McIntosh, 2005).

Lifelong education according to Zaki (1975, p.59) differs from ordinary institutionalized education as this is more flexible and extends the opportunities of education by means of reading, study and instruction. This flexibility is in terms of “Freedom of persuasion of courses of interest to themselves”. Learning may take place in homes or at study centers. Generally learning is a modular system of packages. Lifelong education is reminiscent of saying of Holy Prophet (PBUH) seek knowledge from cradle to grave.

Learning and Lifelong Education

Many authors around the world use learning and education interchangeably. Dave (1976, pp. 35-36) states that lifelong education seeks to view education in its totality. “... it is a process of accomplishing personal, social and professional development throughout the life span”. Therefore it is to be incorporated in every dimension of society. Wain (1987) supports this view by commenting “it is deeply rooted in the social circumstances which determine the motives of human action”. This can be a source of confusion. The notion of lifelong learning has little theoretical juice. Some advocates of lifelong learning specifically reject the use of ‘learning’ to label a psychological construct and use it as to describe behaviour that is very much like education. These can be seen as under:

Dimensions of Lifelong Education

The world known Faure Report made 21 major recommendations that pertained to four concepts – vertical integration, horizontal integration, democratization and the notion of the learning society.

Griffin (1998) outlines the dimensions of lifelong education as given in Figure 1:

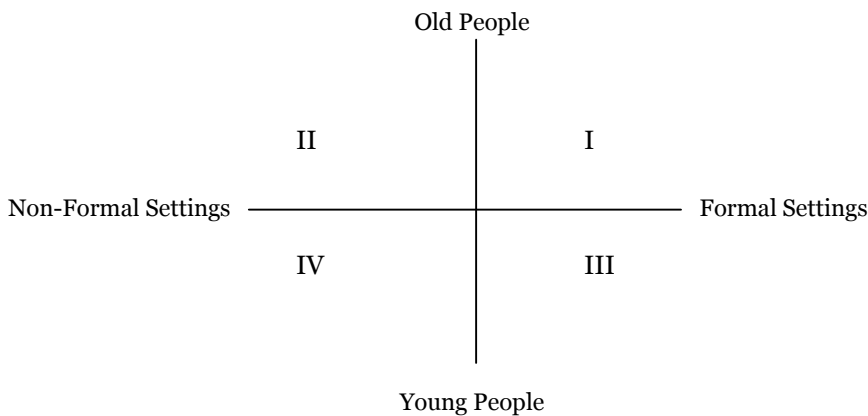


Figure-1: Dimensions of Lifelong Education.

The lifelong learning and learning society reflects welfare policy model. It is public domain where government is responsible to bring positive changes into the conditions of social democratic society.

Educational systems assign an undue emphasis to the education of young people in formal settings (quadrant III). In a learning society, there would be a more equal distribution of resources and emphasis on each quadrant. Hence, there would be as much emphasis on education of young people in non-formal

(Quadrant IV) as in formal settings (Quadrant III). There would be a emphasis on the education of older people (adults) in formal (Quadrant I) as well and non-formal settings (Quadrant II) as well. Each quadrant is of an equal size. This is because in a learning society there is the consideration for lifelong education.

Vertical Integration

The vertical dimension refers to the life-span aspect of lifelong education – the idea that education should occur throughout one’s life. There are profound psychosocial and structural barriers that affect the ability of people to opt in and out of education throughout their lives. In a vertically integrated system, structural barriers can be removed by adopting appropriate legislation. But equal opportunity does not automatically provide for equal participation. For this reason, it is natural to think that only facilitating access will overcome the historic tendency for formal education to produce unequal power relations.

Horizontal Integration

Horizontal integration (or interaction) refers to the need to foster education in non-formal as well as formal settings. The advocates of lifelong education believed that it is intolerable to have a situation where education secured in formal settings results in better status than those that gained in non-formal, let alone informal settings where one secures few credentials and no status. If someone needs to learn how to run his computer or get along better with ones kids or spouse it does not matter if these things are learnt in school or in non-formal (out-of-school) or informal settings?

At present usually formal and non-formal settings are like two parallel railway lines. Formal settings have little to do with the non-formal. Hence, school teachers know little about educating children at their Scout or Guide group, at the summer camp, at or in other non-formal educational settings. There are many non-formal educational settings (such as in prisons) where the processes are as rigid as those found in formal settings like in universities.

Formal settings are those age-graded credential-awarding schools, colleges, universities and similar settings, usually under the control of the ministry of education. Non-formal are out-of-school educational settings such as community centers, mosques, prisons, workplaces, etc. The instructional processes employed in non-formal settings may be quite formal. Finally, people also learn in informal settings through exposure to media, through conversations, casual and incidental encounters in community settings, tradeshows or public awareness campaigns or interaction with individuals and the environment.

Cropley and Dave (1978) have classified integration into vertical and horizontal. Galbraith (1992a) suggests a third category: learning to learn, as an important dimension of lifelong education. The pre-requisite for any educated community or society is that its people acquire the skill to learn how to learn”. This dimension suggests that the educated person learns how to adapt and change.

Economic and social changes in Europe have given rise to a new approach towards the problem of qualification, education and social change which focuses on improvement of labour force competitiveness and national economy competitiveness by means of increased level of adaptation of people to the economic and social changes, encouragement of equality and participation in all forms of development.

Goals of Lifelong Education

An understanding of the goals of lifelong education is important. These are based on the ideas of "Learning to Be" and the "learning society". The "Learning to Be" incorporates the goals of learning to think, of becoming a productive citizen, of learning to act and react as a full member of society, but it comprises something greater and deeper than these. For "Learning to Be" involves a process of self-discovery and the achievement of an awareness of our capabilities - as well as own shortcomings.

Because life involves continuous processes of learning, adapting and discovering ignorance, so the process of "Learning to Be" is also a dynamic process. One should know more about oneself and one's world. The learning society in which learners participate is also a continuous dynamic. It does not have a finite bank of knowledge to pass on, it is a society whose stock of knowledge is continuously expanding, being evaluated and updated where the process of learning is as important as its product. An essential attribute, therefore, of an individual in a learning society is the quality of educability, which means to learn and to go on learning. The idea that individuals can go on learning, may choose their own paths to learning. They continually seek to gain more enlightenment and must do all this within a "learning society".

Pre-requisites for lifelong Education

These may be defined as opportunities, motivation and educability - a degree of effort being essential to both motivation and educability.

Opportunity will be differently interpreted and differently available. Its interpretation will depend on philosophies of life, which may vary greatly between societies. But it must remain an aim for every society to achieve as much democratization as possible; to offer increasingly greater opportunities for members to go on learning and to help ensure that such opportunities are shared more equally than they have been in the past. But human and economic resources within countries can determine the extent to which opportunities are available.

Societies can hardly do more than offer opportunities of lifelong education to those prepared to take them. It is certain that in many cases the effort required to take advantage of such opportunities in a developing country is far greater than it would be in a technologically developed society. The question of motivation is thus very critical, and motivation is likely to vary quite drastically between those who want to find "room at the top" and who are supported by their families and communities in this resolve, and those whose cultural patterns do not particularly favour self-improvement. A real danger therefore exists that a combination of the factors of opportunity and motivation may lead to widening rather than narrowing gaps in the society. Those who have opportunities may be also those who are motivated to seek more. Therefore need is to ask ourselves how the poorly motivated can be helped and how new patterns of education can be devised to avoid the widening of such gaps in the society. In this respect, the motivation of the "haves" in a society to improve the conditions of the "have notes" becomes important.

Issues arising from opportunity and motivation according to Hawes, (1975) are linked with aspects of educability. Clearly the idea of educability, embracing as it does the receptiveness, the open-mindedness and the health of mind and body to accept new ideas as well as a complex of skills and attitudes which are further than mere numeracy and literacy. But the latter remains of considerable importance since literacy provides a key to flexible learning and the ability to profit from self-instruction. There is a possibility that those who possess certain skills will be able to adapt and progress far quicker than others.

Integrations as dimension of lifelong education

Lifelong education implies two types of integration. It implies horizontal integration, that is a bringing together of all the types of education being provided within the society, in school and out of it so that they can support each other; and it also implies vertical integration, that is the articulation of various types of education made available to individuals throughout their lifetime. There is a need to integrate these aims so that all educational efforts are made complementary; and also integration' of means to maximize resources and to avoid costly and overlapping of efforts.

The task of achieving satisfactory horizontal and vertical integration is difficult but not impossible. In this respect the isolation of school from what goes on around it, from what has happened before and what will take place afterwards is particularly regrettable. Indeed the length of time that a child spends in formal school can cut him off from his community. In the light of this concept of integration, current attempts to delimit areas of formal, non-formal and informal education would seem inappropriate. Education can be viewed as a blend of opportunities from the most formal to the least formal depending on a number of variables such as how far it is planned, who provides it, where it is provided and the kind of reward system it offers.

The task of achieving integration involves both promoting a dialogue between all those agencies involved in setting goals and providing educational opportunities, and devising policy machinery to transform the results of such dialogues into action.

But the possibility of achieving integration rests on the willingness of human beings to accept it. Educational efforts' fruits, if more sharing of information and a greater degree of mutual understanding, are there. Lack of such understanding, distrust, or unwillingness to give up a little authority on the part of a few can effectively inhibit change.

It is equally important that the users of educational services should themselves be consulted especially. Integration of different forms of education cannot be achieved without bringing changes in the nature and structure of the institutions, which provide it.

Flexibility and Diversity

Another aspect of lifelong education is that of flexibility in the content of what is to be learned, what tools are used in the process of teaching and learning and how much the time is taken. Because, if the center of the process is individual and the individual's relationship to the "learning society", logically there may be many paths to learning which may be recognized as suitable and appropriate not because they have always been used or because everyone uses them but rather in respect of how far they lead the individual effectively to where he wants to go.

But these alternative paths also have obstacles; different values accord different contents and styles of learning e.g. inflexibility of administrative processes, the rigidity and centralization of the examination system.

Flexibility can be achieved through the use of new media, the loosening up of examination regulations, the provision of alternative structures of school and teacher preparation, and the replacement of rigid programmes e.g. Ivory Coast where television was used for children and adults. The provision of unstressed schools in Saudi Arabia, shorter alternatives to primary school courses for older/children in Iraq or alternative programmes of basic education in Brazil, the examination reform in Tanzania, Nai Roshni School of Pakistan. These all

prove that these goals are possible to achieve. But progress towards achieving them is slow because of many factors e.g. in the Ivory Coast parents reacted violently against widespread use of television in primary schools on the grounds that the regular teachers were not "teaching".

Conclusions

Lifelong education is form of education which covers whole of the individual life in one or other way. This concept has different characteristics and dimensions which reflect learning to be and learning society. While lifelong has prerequisites of opportunity, motivation and educability which all three are integrated in the concept making it flexible and diverse.

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