

# Students' Attitudes toward Lifelong Learning

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## Abstract

The modern man lives in modern times with rapid science and technology progress. Today we live in a modern society where that kind of progress contributes to faster obsolescence of previous knowledge and increasing quantity of new knowledge. That indicates a need for constant learning which will help every individual in every moment to achieve different and useful knowledge. This can be achieved by life-long education which will improve quality of living every individual, allowing development and progress in every stadium of life and in every life situation.

Thus, in this research, we wanted to find out what were the general students' attitudes toward lifelong learning and education and whether there is a difference of opinion depending on gender, year of study, academic success of students, as well as the education of their parents.

Keywords: lifelong learning and education; attitudes of students; research.

## Introduction

The man is born as a helpless creature that needs attention and care of the environment to survive in life. He, by nature and essence, is imperfect and unfinished creature and because of that he can develop only by a constant and permanent learning in all life situations and ages. In other hand, humans have a great potentials and opportunities for growth and development. It's in the human nature to explore, to constantly look up for new things, to explore the unexplored and the unknown, having the constant desire to learn in order to develop. The main purpose of human existence is the realization of its potentials and opportunities and successfully respond to the demands of the environment. In order to achieve these goals of humanity, a stimulative environment is required, an environment that does not impede the satisfaction of its natural needs.

On the other hand, contemporary human beings live in a time of great changes. The 21st century is a century of rapid development of science and technology, which implies significant changes in the society and culture of life in general. Many changes occur as a result of information society, economic restructuring and organizational reform. These changes have their impact on every segment of human lives. The amount of new knowledge enlarges constantly, and existing knowledge is left behind with a great speed.

These social changes set new requirements in front of the contemporary human, requiring a constant development, improvement, empowerment, which leads to the need of finding more efficient ways of learning and transmitting knowledge. This new knowledge, new manners of learning, new teaching technologies will allow, not only a better adjustment on requirements of the new time and technologies, but also a higher level of development and use of the achievements of the modern time and technologies. Upon this, the knowledge is recognized as the key for success in the 21st century. It becomes one of the most valuable and important resources of any society and the basic assumption of overall development in post-industrial stage.

Education is undoubtedly important for the development of the society in all periods of its existence. The changes that occur in the society impose the need of changes in the educational system. In order to meet and answer all requirements of the modern society, education must change constantly, considering the fact that the knowledge must be permanently updated and innovated.

Educational reforms include changes in the structure of education, the functioning and effectiveness of the educational process, changes in aims and methods of education, implementation of new teaching technologies and new manners of knowledge acquisition. Traditional schools and educational systems are quite inefficient, the old educational systems educate average individuals, not allowing them to develop according to their abilities. The contemporary educational system must be adapted to social changes and it should allow the individuals to meet successfully the needs and requirements of modern living. The main idea is that the contemporary educational system should allow the people regardless of their age, gender and occupational status to adjust to the new, different and useful knowledge that will allow them to respond to all requirements and needs of the modern time using different forms of learning, new information and self – learning as a life – long process.

The global changes in education include a new concept such as a lifelong learning. Through lifelong education, people develop skills for job creation and thus increase the ability of individuals to understand their own and others' cultures. It will contribute to a better integration of the individual in the social, cultural, spiritual and political life and encourage the use of human potential as one of the conditions for development of the society.

Lifelong learning is a term which is often used in the everyday speech. Often, this term is associated with education and learning of adults, usually speaking of them as equivalents, which is wrong opinion. The term lifelong education or lifelong learning appeared in England in the twenties of the previous century. The concept of lifelong learning is that education is encouraged by the idea of education of adults in developed industrial countries.

Some authors define lifelong education as "learning which requires education to be viewed in its totality". It covers the formal, nonformal and informal form of education and tries to integrate all structures and stages of education. It is characterized by flexibility in terms of time, space, content, method of learning [1]. The experienced learning is included later in the concept of lifelong learning. "Lifelong learning encompasses deliberate and unintentional (accidental)"[5].

The term lifelong learning occurs later and has the same meaning as lifelong education. But the concept of learning is broader than the concept of education, because learning can be intentional or unintentional, while education is a deliberate learning, and does not include unintentional and experienced learning.

Key implications of the concept of lifelong education or learning, is changing the understanding of education as schooling and the abandonment of the traditional belief that education is intended only for children and youth, not adults. Under the traditional understanding of life, the life cycle is divided into two periods: the period of childhood and youth when we study and the period of maturity where the stage of work belongs. Lifelong learning has expanded the concept of education of the youth (and adults) to informal and informal education of adults, including experienced learning of young people and adults.

Lifelong learning is defined as an activity of learning throughout life to enhance the knowledge, skills and abilities within the personal, civic, social and professional perspectives [4]. Lifelong learning is a continuous process that encourages and motivates individuals to search for new knowledge, skills, ideas that can be applied to new situations and circumstances.

There are many reasons why we must adopt lifelong learning as an educational goal. These reasons include:

- the need to meet the expanding educational needs and expectations of larger numbers of students from increasingly diverse backgrounds
- the emergence of new occupations and careers and the rapid transformation of others
- the explosion in knowledge and technology
- the shift to an information society
- economic restructuring, organizational reform and changes in the workplace and career patterns
- financial stringencies and the need to find more effective ways of learning and teaching within constrained resources.

## Methodology

Considering the importance of life long education and learning in contemporary conditions, especially of the perspective of teachers, the aim of this paper is to determine the opinions of the students from undergraduate studies at the Faculty of Education Sciences - future teachers, regarding the concept of lifelong learning and lifelong education, as well as to determine the differences in their opinions depending on their gender, year of study, academic success and education of their parents, etc.

The main hypothesis is that students who are preparing for future teachers in general have positive attitudes toward the concept of lifelong learning and lifelong education and we expect differences in their opinions regarding their gender, year of study, academic success and education of their parents.

The research was realized using customized version of the questionnaire used in a larger study conducted by Klapan et al. (2009). The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first section contains general information on students – future teachers (gender, year of study, academic success, and level of education of their parents). The second part contains questions that represent their opinions towards lifelong learning and lifelong education. Respondents' opinions are determined using a five degree scale.

The survey was conducted in the academic year of 2011/12 which included 73 respondents, 20 male and 53 female students from undergraduate studies at the Faculty of Educational Sciences in Stip, Republic of Macedonia, who are preparing for future teachers.

The obtained data were analyzed using descriptive statistics parameters, while differences between respondent opinions were determined using t-test and analysis of variance. All obtained data were processed using the statistical program SPSS 19.

## Results and Discussion

### 1.1. Students' opinions

Student's opinions regarding the importance and meaning of lifelong learning and lifelong education were analyzed using basic statistic parameters. Results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Arithmetic means and standard deviations of the **student's opinions**

	Items	M	SD
1	Lifelong education is becoming a necessity	4,05	,998
2	I want to use my spare time or additional education	3,56	1,000
3	I will not have any form of further education	2,18	,977
4	After employment I will not have time for further education	2,44	1,067
5	I will continue with self-education	4,15	,967
6	Continuing education improves quality of life in general	4,34	,916
7	I think that lifelong learning is intended primarily for those who have not been particularly successful in the primary or secondary education	2,00	1,067
8	I do not think that lifelong learning is intended only for the young	1,67	,728
9	I think that lifelong learning is intended only for middle-aged people	1,75	,830
10	Lifelong learning is important	4,25	,925
11	I support the form of lifelong learning that combines personal development of individuals, provides employment and encourages active citizenship and social cohesion	4,16	,866
12	Lifelong learning simultaneously supports economic development and community development	3,88	,927
13	Lifelong learning is for the benefit of the individual and the community	4,12	,999
14	Lifelong learning helps people to better cope with social changes and requirements of the labor market	4,04	,807

15	I support the form of lifelong learning which primarily emphasis on personal development of the individual, not on the economic development	3,56	1,027
16	Lifelong learning primarily enables people to progress in work	4,12	,798
17	Individuals who pursue lifelong learning are individuals who undertake responsibility for their lives because they want to live fulfilled and quality life	3,92	,983
18	The rapid development of technology and daily increasing knowledge necessarily implies the need for individuals which will learn all life	4,12	,957
19	Our society is "a society that teaches"	3,70	1,151

M= arithmetic means, SD= standard deviations

The results from the analyses of values of arithmetic means point out that in general, students have high and positive opinion about lifelong learning, considering it as important (4,25), necessity in contemporary society (4,05), manner for efficient adaptation of social changes and requirements of the labor market (4,04). According to students' opinions, lifelong learning and education give opportunity for improvement of the quality of life (4,34), give people an opportunity for progress in their work (4,12) and provide employment and development according to personal interests and abilities as well as encourage social cohesion (4,16). Most of the interviewed students agree that lifelong learning is a benefit for both individuals and community (4.12) and declare that they will continue with self-education (4.15) (Table 1).

### 1.2 Differences in attitudes

Other important issue in this research was determination of differences in student's opinion toward the concept of lifelong learning and education, over the set of following variables (gender, year of study, academic success and education of their parents). The significance of the obtained differences was tested using t-test and F-test. Obtained results are presented in Table 2. These results point out that there were no significant differences among students regarding the chosen variables. Statistically significant differences at 0.05 level of significance are observed separately in some statements. Thus, the differences observed in relation to gender in the first, seventh and ninth statement, where the means of females are larger than those of males, led to the conclusion that women believe that lifelong learning becomes a necessity for all and not only those who were successful during their compulsory education.

Table 2: Differences between student's opinions obtained using T-test and F-test research variables

	Gender		Year of study		Academic success		Education of parents	
	t	p	F	p	t	p	t	p
1	-2,433	,018*	0,29	0,75	-1,22	0,228	0,55	0,581
2	-0,677	,501	1,67	0,197	-1,04	0,304	1,78	0,079
3	0,083	,934	1,10	0,339	2,02	0,047*	-0,07	0,946
4	0,324	,747	1,48	0,234	2,11	0,039*	0,05	0,961
5	0,649	,518	0,81	0,45	-1,74	0,086	-1,58	0,119
6	0,405	,687	3,36	0,04*	-1,89	0,064	-1,37	0,177
7	2,249	,028*	0,72	0,489	2,23	0,029*	-1,47	0,147
8	1,508	,136	0,58	0,564	2,50	0,015*	-0,67	0,502
9	2,497	,015*	0,54	0,584	1,88	0,064	-2,30	0,024*
10	-1,006	,318	0,96	0,389	-2,02	0,048*	0,61	0,546
11	-1,283	,204	1,95	0,151	-2,62	0,011*	-0,46	0,647
12	-1,123	,265	1,72	0,186	-2,54	0,013*	0,39	0,697
13	-1,808	,075	0,62	0,542	-1,81	0,074	1,46	0,149
14	-0,682	,498	0,39	0,677	-1,59	0,116	0,59	0,554
15	-0,469	,641	0,76	0,471	-0,44	0,66	-0,05	0,959
16	-0,889	,377	1,08	0,344	0,67	0,506	1,17	0,248
17	-1,560	,123	0,11	0,901	-1,25	0,214	-0,19	0,85

18	-1,797	,077	0,41	0,667	-2,56	0,013*	0,16	0,875
19	-0,447	,656	0,62	0,542	0,37	0,712	0,82	0,413

\*p< 0.05

\*\*p<0.01

Differences in terms of year of study of students are noticed only in terms of statement: *Continuous education improves quality of life in general*, which shows that students who are at the beginning of their studies increasingly support this view (4.64), unlike the students at the end of their studies (4.03). These results suggest on a trend of decrease of faith that continuous education leads to improvement of the quality of life.

Some major differences were observed between students with different academic success. The differences are statistically significant at a level of 0.05. Generally observed, the students who have higher academic success (with an average success in studies above 8.5) have more positive opinion regarded the need for lifelong education, unlike the others (with an average success in studies below 8.5). This in one hand can represent student's points of view and believe that better education leads toward successful life and career, while in the other hand suggests on students determination and orientation toward high achievements realized with personal efforts, that puts education at the first place. They are determined to continue their education. Even if they get employed they will continue their education. At the same time, consider that such education is not meant only for young and middle-aged, but that it is necessary at all. Consider the rapid development of technique and daily increasing knowledge is a need for individual daily builds and with education will contribute to the economy and society.

In terms of whether the education of parents affects the attitudes of students for lifelong education, some major differences between respondents were noted. The only difference is the statement: *I believe that lifelong learning is intended only for the middle-aged people*. Students whose parents have education below university level consider that lifelong education is not intended only for the middle-aged people but it should apply to all age categories.

## Conclusion

The results obtained in the survey point to the conclusion that students from undergraduate studies preparing for future teachers do not distinguish themselves in terms of their attitudes towards lifelong learning in terms of set variables (sex, year of study, academic achievement and education of their parents). Some minor differences are obtained in separate statements upon all sets of variables. These differences are noted as greater believe of female examiners that lifelong learning is necessity for all people, in all age periods, not depending from their academic success; trend of decrease of faith that continuous education leads to improvement of the quality of life noted for examiners at the final years of study compared with the students that are at the beginning of their studies as well as differences regarded to academic success and the education of parents of examined students in a sense of positive attitude and importance toward lifelong learning of students with higher academic success and students whose parents have education under university.

In general, obtained result confirms our assumption that students highly value lifelong education. Students believe that lifelong learning becomes a necessity of today's living, helping people to progress in work, and also improves the quality of life. It becomes a necessity because the rapid development of science and technology and the daily increasing knowledge impose the need of continuing education in order to be updated with news of modern living.

The fact is that formal education is not capable to offer the young people an overall and comprehensive set of knowledge. The educational system must be changed constantly, because knowledge itself is being constantly changed and updated, so the very transfer of knowledge means more learning. Thus, it covers the entire life of the individual and, at the same time, the whole society and its educational, social and economic components. Due to the challenges offered by the modern, dynamic society, the lifelong education tends to transform it into a learning society.

The society and educational system should take these positive attitudes of the students' need for lifelong education in order to create favorable conditions (primarily material and even personnel, its greater availability), and creating quality programs for education and lifelong learning, in and outside of the institutions.

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