



LIFELONG LEARNING AND MULTIDISCIPLINE SKILL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT:

Recent changes in socio-cultural patterns and standards coupled with global dynamics call for lifelong learning approaches for survival in the twenty first century. Critical issues in the world today have broadened the practice of lifelong learning in all disciplines as adaptive strategy to global endeavors. The concept of lifelong learning although emanated from adult education; its practice is multidisciplinary. Thus, learning to know, to do, to be and live together is not only limited to adult education, but to all other disciplines; occasioning the need to understand lifelong learning from a multidisciplinary perspective. This chapter sought to explore lifelong learning perspectives, practices, opportunities and challenges from multiple disciplines. A total of 34 staff (lecturers and administrative staff) and students from higher education institutions (HEIs) in varied disciplines constituted the population of the study. The study employed purposive and convenient sampling approaches to select the sample for in-depth interviews. Inductive content and thematic analysis were employed for analyzing and presenting the results. It emerged that staff and students of HEIs perceive lifelong learning as a personal learning initiative that require institutional efforts to expedite learning processes and requisite learning contents for meaningful lives. It further emerged that although practiced similarly, lifelong learning is discretely and unconsciously practice in addressing emerging issues/challenges in multi-disciplines of HEIs. This study concludes with suggestion for an expansion of the meaning and scope of lifelong learning beyond educational borders. It recommends that HEIs adopt flexible and innovative pedagogical approaches to sharpen faculty and students' skills for self-directed learning initiatives, particularly in this era of globalization and rapid transformation.

KEYWORDS:

LIFELONG LEARNING, MULTI-DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE, SELF-DIRECTED, LEARNING, 21ST CENTURY, OPPORTUNITIES.

INTRODUCTION:

Unprecedented advances in knowledge and global trends in socio-cultural practices in the 21st century have created lifelong learning opportunities across different fields. The point is that as individual is faced with changes/challenges; different avenues are explored and adapted. Consciously or unconsciously, lifelong learning approaches are used in such encounters, irrespective of the disciplines involved. For instance, the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in recent times led to emergence of new technologies and approaches that helped the world to recover from the shocks. Individuals and institution had to devise new strategies to learn to know, to do, to be and to live to adapt to the rapid changes caused by the pandemic. For these reasons, educational institutions particularly, higher education institutions (HEIs) devised varied teaching and learning approaches to continuously promote education while reducing the spread of the virus. This led to the advancement of remote teaching and learning techniques such as online, hybrid and distance education programmes across all disciplines.

That notwithstanding, workplaces are also undergoing dramatic change with many people, especially young adults changing jobs more frequently due to the unstable and unpredictable nature of work today. Lifelong

learning which aims not to only develop skilled and flexible workforce but also to enable people to realise more of their individual potential; and to improve societal awareness and understanding of various critical issues in public policy through learning is relevant in the field of work too. It may be intriguing to know how lifelong learning needs have been infused into the world of work and other endeavours of life.

It is evident that lifelong learning opportunities evolved in every aspect of the global economy (Yang, 2015; Palepu, 2001). Nonetheless, conscious efforts have not been made in creating mechanism for integrating its approaches and learning needs into different sectors of the economy to help address relevant plight of global population, particularly among disadvantaged groups. Brown (2018) advocates for the provision of lifelong learning ladder for the less privilege. Apart from this, lifelong learning needs could be integrated into educational policies of the world, especially among developing nations to broaden lifelong learning scope and approaches. This will help to integrate multidisciplinary approaches, opportunities and perspectives together with distinct measures to emerging challenges of specific disciplines into lifelong learning perspectives. It is

therefore prudent to understand lifelong learning from a multidisciplinary perspective.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The world is undergoing transformations with its corresponding challenges in the 21st century. Digitalisation and the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation on people and the economy are some associated challenges.

Learning opportunities throughout one's lifetime are essential for countries to compete in the global knowledge economy. The World Bank (2003) as a result emphasises ideas and expertise as sources of economic growth and development as well as the use of emerging technologies. Individuals require new knowledge, analytical and problem-solving skills together with team building strategies to enable them meet the demands of the changing economy.

Creating lifetime learning opportunities for all in every aspect of the economy is crucial for this course. Lifelong learning approaches and opportunities equip individuals and position them to adapt to advancing economies from personal to institutional stance. Different countries have as a result adopted varied mechanisms to integrate lifelong learning policies into the educational and economic sectors. In 2007, the European Union, for instance, launched the Lifelong Learning Programme to regularise learning agendas with job trainings for knowledge based-economy. Similarly, the Korean Ministry of Education in 2017 launched the 4th National Lifelong Learning Promotion Plan for the period of 2018-2022 following a successful implementation of the first three plans, which led to the establishment of lifelong learning promotion system and needs mostly in the informal sector. Additionally, many African countries like Kenya, Namibia and Tanzania have also formulated and implemented national policies on Open and Distance Learning (ODL) options.

They have established multi-purpose community learning centres and integrating lifelong learning elements into curriculums. Even though evidence of lifelong learning opportunities is created in the economies of the world, a greater percentage of it are capitalised within the informal and non-formal sectors with limited evidence in the formal sector, especially within HEIs.

HEIs are platforms for equipping individuals with requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes for career development and advancement needed for economic growth. Deliberate efforts are to be made by integrating lifelong learning approaches and opportunities in all disciplines for a sustainable future. It is intriguing to understand how lifelong learning is perceived and practiced among students and staff of HEIs as well as how lifelong learning needs and elements are integrated into curriculum and career plans of HEIs.

These and other interesting questions sparked the interest for exploring lifelong learning perspectives, practices, opportunities and challenges from multiple disciplines.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Meaning and Perception of Lifelong Learning

The European Union (EU) perceives lifelong learning as "all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective" (Carlsen et al., 2016). This implies that learning is a continuous process, which takes place within or outside an educational setting by all persons and institutions to meet life endeavours. Nonetheless, the meaning and practice of the concept of lifelong learning keeps advancing to meet emerging trends and standards.

Lifelong learning was initially conceptualised in the 1970s by three international bodies, namely, the Council of Europe, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as a 'transformative and emancipatory force' within the society. Learning around this period was meant to conscientize individuals to take actions for themselves and to relief them from oppressors. The concept in the 21st century has however shifted from the place and time to acquire knowledge and skills to the place to apply educational outcomes of knowledge, skills and attitudes to address personal, societal and global issues to make the world a better place for living.

The impact of globalisation and artificial intelligence these days require individuals to learn throughout life to meet and adapt to emerging patterns and trends. Additionally, the nature and expectation of work today require innovative and strategic ideas and skills to meet the technological age.

Individuals therefore need to identify and nurture their potentials for this course. Continuous learning in this regard provides these opportunities together with others and equips people for addressing real life problems. Buza, Buza and Tabaku, (2010) explains lifelong learning as "development of individuals through a continuously learning process which empowers them to acquire the knowledge, values, skills, and ready to apply them with confidence, creativity and optimism in all roles, circumstances, and conditions" (p. 44). Implicitly, lifelong learning opportunities must be created for all globally. It must be emphasised that learning continues throughout life.

Educational institutions, particularly HEIs and the corporate world need to champion the agenda for the creation of lifelong learning opportunities due to the critical roles played by students, faculty and staff as stewards of learning in the society. The perception of these groups on the practice and scope of lifelong learning is required to shape and establish these learning opportunities. Life according to Buza, Buza and Tabaku (2010), is a process of discovery and learning helps to understand the purpose of life as well as discovering the capacities needed for meaningful lives. Educational institution must define and refine strategies to make

learning a continuous activity throughout life. This, however, does not imply that learning should be confined to only 'bits of information' in formal settings, but rather go beyond formally designated institutions.

In a study on the perception of nurses on lifelong learning, nurses were found to perceive the concept as a "necessity of constant change and development" and as a process of learning in every stage of life consciously or unconsciously. The nurses also confirmed that lifelong learning is only possible when people learn how to learn. This implies that learning is self-initiated and self-enhanced. Even though it could be institutionally or externally promoted, it should be emphasised that the onus lies on the individual to learn and apply for positive transformation.

Studies on perception on lifelong learning mostly used students, teachers and workers to understand the concept. Quantitative methods have largely been used, thereby, creating a methodological gap for this study.

LIFELONG LEARNING PRACTICES/OPPORTUNITIES

Rapid changes in the world today call for continuous learning to keep up with time. Brown (2018) argues that work today is unstable and unpredictable, making lifelong learning a necessity in the 21st century. Learning opportunities are required to increase the learning abilities of all persons in the society, especially among institutions of higher education.

Mlambo, Silén and McGrath, (2021) in a metasynthesis of qualitative research identified that although professional development is a lifelong learning opportunity, they explained that it could only become attainable when organisations continuously fund and make it accessible to employees.

Institutions are therefore required to continuously fund professional development and make such learning opportunities accessible to staff/students of their intuitions. By so doing, staff and students would be equipped to current trends in their fields to boost their productivity and learning initiatives. In addition to this, institutions are obliged to enhance lifelong learning opportunities while individuals are also responsible to determine their personal career development.

The goals of lifelong learning are not only meant to develop skilful workforce, but also to increase individual learning potentials and awareness of critical issues in the world for innovative solutions for the rapidly changing economy and systems. It is advocated that lifelong learning ladder is created for the less privilege in the society for inclusive learning opportunities. One major problem is that the practice of lifelong learning remains uncoordinated and discrete, especially among disciplines of HEIs. Even though the concept emerged from adult education, its practices are multi-disciplinary, and must be practiced as such. Learning these days is highly influenced by technology and global standards. In effect, learning approaches in the 21st century must endeavour to integrate individual learning initiatives and institutional efforts like pedagogical approaches and systems to

promote lifelong learning entirely beyond institutional walls to community levels. Disciplines of HEIs need to promote collaborative and interdisciplinary learning in HEIs.

CHALLENGES AND LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Transformative agendas couple with globalisation and technological initiatives for global advances characterise the twenty first century. This and others have necessitated learning throughout life for adaption to existing and emerging trends. Learning to learn in this era remains one of the greatest initiatives to survive in the 21st century. Nonetheless, learning initiatives are curtailed by a number of challenges among which is institutionally centred.

Institutions are identified to be central to lifelong learning in Africa. In spite of this, most of these institutions encounter barriers from administrative, structural adjustment and environmental factors which tend to affect lifelong learning effectiveness and opportunities. Educational institutions of most developing countries, including Ghana, are still tied to colonial systems with little modification to meet local needs and trends. Apart from global agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs), attention has been diverted to meeting agreed standards and policies, to the neglect of pressing local issues.

In line with this, Palepu (2001) emphasised the need for institutional redefinition or reinvention through evaluation of environmental and general acceptance of new or changed concepts. In addition to this, HEIs needs to broaden access to lifelong learning to diverse students as indicated by Yang, Schneller and Roche (2015) when they stressed that HEIs should go beyond professional to personal development and cultural enrichment opportunities, from what they offer to students to continuous training of teachers, research into lifelong learning and provision of community learning opportunities.

Invariably, the creation of learning opportunities formally and informally is controlled by HEIs.

Other outlined challenges of lifelong learning in among advanced countries is reported to be failure of institutions to identify lifelong learning needs for efficient design of requisite programmes for it. Nonetheless, some countries have employed solutions to such challenges. Sung et al. (2022) identify lifelong learning opportunities in HEIs in Singapore to be in three macro-level policies. These include "smart Nation Policy" launched in 2014 to promote technology in the economy. The "skill Future Policy" is another lifelong learning opportunity on workforce training. The third opportunity also has to do with diversification of higher education provision from lower level intake to increase and diversity of learners including adult learners. Higher Education institutions in Ghana also require lifelong learning opportunities to advance.

The European Union in 2007 launched a Lifelong Learning

Programme as a means to promote learning with job training. This programme also aimed at ensuring integrated interdisciplinary approach and link between lifelong learning and educational systems. Similarly, in Korea, an institute of Lifelong Learning Education was founded and this led to the creation of lifelong learning cities, activation of Academic Credit Bank System for supplementing qualification and the enrolment into quality universities through the Korean Massive Open Online Course with the establishment of a lifelong learning portal. These initiatives according to James (2020) raised lifelong learning from 26.4% to 35.8% in 2014 and 2017 respectively.

METHODS

STUDY DESIGN AND SETTING

The study adopted the qualitative research design in exploring lifelong learning perspectives, practices, opportunities and challenges from multiple disciplines in HEIs. This design enabled the researchers to understand and describe lifelong learning perspectives from multiple disciplines of HEIs in [Ghana] (Cresswell and Poth, 2018). The Study was conducted in three Ghanaian universities; namely, University of Ghana, University of Environment and Sustainable Development and the Kings University College.

The University of Ghana (UG) is the nations' premier public University located in Accra while that of Environment and Sustainable Development (UESD) is one of the newly established public university in the country located at Somanyain the Eastern Region. The Kings University College (KUC) is also a private university located in Accra and affiliated to the University of Cape Coast. These three Universities were selected mainly because of their areas of concentration and length of existence to ascertain varied responses from multi-disciplines use of lifelong learning approaches.

The University of Ghana is mainly into Social Sciences while the others are into the natural and applied sciences and Business Administration respectively.

POPULATION, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The population for the study included students and staff within the social sciences (in education from the UG, School of Continuing and Distance Education and Business Administration from the Kings Business School of the KUC) and the applied sciences from the School of Natural and Applied Sciences within the UESD. Since the concept of lifelong learning emerged from the discipline of education, the authors chose these other disciplines to better understand the scope of practice and opportunities together with challenges pertaining to learning in those other disciplines differed, and so expand the concept to include multi-disciplinary practices.

Based on consent and voluntary participation, sample of 34 participants were purposively selected for the study. This sample size was used because the researchers were convinced that it could inform their understanding of the

research problem and phenomenon under study; how lifelong learning is perceived and practiced among students and staff of HEIs.

Out of this sample used, 30% of them were from the UG (discipline of education), 25% within the applied science from the UESD with the remaining 45% from business discipline, KUC. Again, 45% of the participants were students with 20% being academic staff while 24% were administrative staff.

In all, 56% were females while their male counterparts constituted 44%. As far as their ages were concerned, 59% of them were young adults (18-30), 35% in the middle adulthood stage with only 7% in their late adulthood stage.

INSTRUMENT DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

A semi structured interview schedule was designed for data collection. The instrument was in two sections; the first solicited information about participant's biographical data with the second part asking them to describe their understanding, practices, challenges, way forward and opportunities for lifelong learning in their disciplines.

Data collection was conducted using online google forms and telephone interview. The link to the questions was shared with students and staff who consented to the study to provide their responses. Having gone through their responses a telephone interview was conducted with three participants (student, academic and administrative staff) respectively, who had earlier agreed for clarification when the need arises. This approach provided means for probing further and validating earlier responses. Online data collection was used to help create non-threatening, but comfortable environment for participants and avoid the panic of Covid-19 infections from face- to-face contacts

DATA ANALYSIS

The data for this study were analysed using inductive content and thematic analysis. Those collected online (google form) were analysed using inductive content analysis approaches. This was done by studying and familiarising with the data to determine the unit of analysis. The data was then organised through open coding, creating categories and abstraction to address the phenomenon under study and research questions.

Data from the interviews on the other hand were thematically analysed using the steps outlined by Clarke and Braun (2013). This was accomplished by becoming acquainted with the recorded data, transcribing, and generating relevant data features that corresponded to the research questions as codes in order to search for appropriate themes that corresponded to earlier categories/themes. The researchers then compared the generated themes to the coded extract and the entire data set to ensure that the themes accurately captured the entire data pattern. The themes were defined and named in accordance with the research questions. It was accomplished by combining the analysed data with specific data extracts that addresses the research questions

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study followed research ethics principles by obtaining informed consent from participants. Only participants who agreed to participate voluntarily in the study were permitted to respond to the instrument. The instrument was pilot tested for revision and/or removal of ambiguous questions for validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Lifelong learning is generally perceived to be learning throughout life (from birth to death). The results show that lifelong learning is understood to take place throughout life irrespective of participants' academic disciplines (education, business or natural and applied sciences). The purpose of learning, however, differs among participants. While some perceived lifelong learning for personal development, others understood it to be for employable skills while some also perceive it for behavioural changes and coping strategies to new situations. Evidence of this is presented in the data excerpt as follows:

"Lifelong learning is a continuous learning for personal development... (Academic staff response)

"Lifelong learning is an opportunity offered to an individual throughout his/her life time to acquire new knowledge." (Student response)

"Learning from new experiences and applying to future situations." (Academic staff response)

"... an opportunity created for everybody to continue his or her education in requisite programmes." (Administrative staff response)

Implicitly, participants understanding of lifelong learning are influenced by their status and roles. While students perceive it as opportunity for knowledge enhancement, staffs recognises it as opportunity for new experiences and personal development. The different explanation from the category of participants however collectively reflects the concept of lifelong learning by Buza, Buza and Tabaku, (2010) when they defined lifelong learning as "development of individuals through a continuously learning process which empowers them for relevant knowledge, values, skills, and ready for application for all roles and situations of life."

Apart from this, the results also highlight the sources of lifelong learning.

Participants generally believe lifelong learning as opportunity mainly created by institutions for individual's benefits. Even though lifelong learning is established in literature (Palepu, 2001 and Yang, et al. 2015) as an individual learning efforts derived from institutional opportunities participants' overemphasis the role of institutions while limiting individual's initiatives in the learning process. Lifelong learning is a personal motive and initiative but modelled out by institutions and the society in general. Individuals continue to learn or strive to learn to adjust to changing life situations or for improvement but what they learn

could be either positive or negative. The onus therefore lies on institutions (educational and corporate) to play key roles in modelling out the required learning for positive impact on people's life, society and the world at large either through formal, non-formal and informal processes to expedite individual learning initiatives.

Lifelong learning is therefore perceived as learning throughout lifetime through personal and institutional efforts for knowledge, skill and attitudinal enhancement together with professional development.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Lifelong learning is perceived as learning in a lifetime through personal and institutional efforts for knowledge, skills and attitudinal enhancement together with professional development.

2. Lifelong learning opportunities are created in HEIs from routine activities of students and staff.

3. Lifelong learning is institutionally enhanced through professional development and personal initiatives in HEIs.

4. Staff and students of HEIs employ personal learning initiatives to institutionally enhanced learning approaches, which they integrate holistically for effective adaptation to new situations in their professions and disciplines.

5. The result however shows that HEs mostly provide content specific training, which curtails innovative and critical skills of learners' abilities to apply to new situations. Mentorship and coaching are identified as major challenges in HEIs in Ghana.

6. Staff and students of HEIs normally encounter lifelong learning challenges relating to environmental, content specific and situational problems.

7. Institutionally enhanced factors are required for addressing lifelong learning challenges in HEIs in Ghana.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusively, staff and students of HEIs perceive lifelong learning as a lifetime learning opportunity within and outside formal educational institutions. In addition to this, they also perceive lifelong learning to be a personal initiative that requires institutional efforts to expedite learning processes and requisite learning contents needed for meaningful lives, career progressions and a sustainable world at large. In effect, even although lifelong learning is practiced multi- disciplinary, it is discretely done. It is not fully embedded and articulated into HEIs curriculum and pedagogical approaches to stimulate learning throughout life. In essence, individual initiatives coupled with institutional efforts and opportunities are required for lifelong learning among staff and students of HEIs and communities at large.

THE STUDY THEREFORE RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING:

- Conceptualisation of lifelong learning beyond educational borders to include emerging scopes, standards and practices from multi-disciplinary perspective.

- Adoption of flexible and innovative pedagogical approaches to sharpen staff and students' skills for self-directed learning initiatives.
- Integration of mentorship and coaching in curriculum and pedagogical approaches to stimulate experiential learning in HEIs.
- Promotion of teamwork and peer learning in HEIs.
- The researchers suggest that further studies could be conducted on the institutional roles for promoting lifelong learning opportunities, especially to young adults.

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