

EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE IN SHAPING CONTINUING EDUCATION POLICY

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Summary

This study analyses the theoretical and methodological foundations of lifelong learning policy in European Union countries and summarises the leading approaches to organising lifelong learning in the context of society's digital transformation. The content and essence of the concept of lifelong learning as a key factor in the development of human capital, enhancing the competitiveness of the economy and ensuring the social integration of citizens are explored. The relevance of the study stems from the need to modernise national education systems in the context of globalisation challenges, dynamic changes in the labour market and the growing role of knowledge as a strategic resource for development. Of particular importance is the study of European experience in shaping lifelong learning policy with a view to adapting it to the Ukrainian educational landscape. The aim of this article is to examine the characteristics of the formulation and implementation of lifelong learning policy in EU countries. The study found that lifelong learning policy in the EU is based on the principles of accessibility, flexibility, inclusivity and competence-based orientation. It is implemented through the development of a digital learning environment, the introduction of innovative pedagogical approaches, support for non-formal education and the creation of conditions for individual learning pathways.

Key words: continuing education, lifelong learning, education policy, digitalisation of education, digital technologies.

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1. Introduction

The leading conceptual framework for the organisation and development of education systems in the second half of the 20th century and the early 21st century was the idea of continuing education, which evolved into the modern paradigm of lifelong learning. Its emergence was driven by profound socio-economic, technological and cultural changes, which defined new demands on the individual as a subject of professional activity and social relations. In the current context of rapid scientific and technological progress, digitalisation and globalisation, the traditional model of «completed» education has proved insufficiently effective, highlighting the need to establish a flexible, open and dynamic system of continuous learning. The concept of lifelong learning is based on the idea that a person's learning is not limited by specific age or institutional boundaries, but continues throughout their entire life (*Demianiuk, 2025*). In this context, education is seen not as a one-off stage of preparation for professional activity, but as a continuous process of updating knowledge, developing competencies and personal self-improvement. This approach is driven by both objective factors – the rapid updating of knowledge

and the emergence of new professions and technologies – and subjective factors, linked to the individual's desire for self-realisation, the fulfilment of their potential and the achievement of life goals.

2. The conceptual and categorical framework of lifelong learning

In academic discourse, the concept of 'lifelong learning' is regarded as an integrative category that brings together various forms, levels and types of educational activity. It encompasses formal, non-formal and informal education, providing opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills in a variety of educational settings and social contexts. Formal education takes place in institutionalised settings (schools, universities), non-formal education within the framework of courses, training sessions and professional development programmes, and informal education through everyday activities, self-education and social interaction.

An important component of the conceptual and categorical framework is the distinction between the concepts of 'lifelong learning' and 'lifewide learning'. Whilst the former focuses on the temporal dimension of the educational process, the latter emphasises its spatial multidimensionality, which involves the integration of learning into various spheres of human activity: professional, social and cultural. Together, these approaches form a holistic vision of continuous education as a way of life for the individual.

The concept of lifelong learning involves the rational distribution of periods of study and work throughout a person's life, achieved by dividing education into basic (primary) and post-basic (further) education. Basic education ensures the development of fundamental knowledge and key competences, whilst post-basic education is aimed at updating, deepening and adapting them to the changing conditions of professional activity. This approach facilitates the formation of a flexible educational pathway, enabling individuals to respond promptly to the challenges of the modern labour market.

A key aspect of lifelong learning is its focus on a competence-based approach, which involves not only the acquisition of knowledge and skills but also the ability to apply them effectively in practice. In this context, categories such as «key competences», «professional mobility», «self-education» and «self-development» become key. The development of these characteristics ensures an individual's ability to adapt in a dynamic social environment.

The particular focus on the phenomenon of lifelong learning stems from the contradictory trends in contemporary development: on the one hand, there is a rapid renewal of technologies and knowledge, leading to their swift obsolescence; on the other, the role of human capital as a key resource for society is growing. In such conditions, a person who does not update their knowledge risks losing their professional competitiveness and social adaptability. This necessitates a shift away from the traditional model of 'final education' towards a model of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is also regarded as an important tool for ensuring social justice and equal opportunities. It creates conditions for access to educational resources for various sections of the population, promotes social integration and improves quality of life. In this context, the creation of an educational environment that provides opportunities for the continuous updating of knowledge, the development of creative potential and personal fulfilment takes on particular significance (Kovalova, 2023).

To summarise the above, it can be argued that lifelong learning is not merely an educational concept, but also a socio-cultural phenomenon that defines the contemporary humanistic paradigm of education. It is geared towards shaping the individual as an active agent of their

own development, capable of independent thought, critical analysis and creative activity. This paradigm envisages the integration of education into all spheres of life, ensuring the harmonious development of the individual and their effective participation in public life.

Continuity of education is regarded in the educational sphere as a fundamental, guiding principle, which envisages the development in a person of 'the ability to live actively, act, work, develop the highest possible level of their professional abilities, achieve self-fulfilment and progressively renew their life in dynamically changing «socio-economic conditions»' (Systoieva, 2008). I. Ziaziun emphasises that «..the most important objective of creating a system of lifelong adult education is, firstly, the creative activity of the specialist, the ability to flexibly reorient it in accordance with changes in the system of social and cultural institutions of modern society, oriented towards human values; secondly, the development of a person's personal qualities, which determine not only their purely professional characteristics, but also their style of thinking, level of culture and intellectual development» (Ziaziun, 2001).

Continuing teacher education is understood as a holistic, dynamic process that involves the ongoing professional and personal development of teachers, the pursuit of their individual educational pathways, and the achievement of effective professional fulfilment. It encompasses the expansion of opportunities to participate in a variety of educational programmes, including both traditional forms of learning in educational institutions and alternative formats aimed at developing career potential, personal growth and the fulfilment of individual educational interests. A key characteristic of continuing teacher education is its flexibility, which is reflected in the variety of forms, content and educational environments that meet the needs and capabilities of learners. Important principles include the flexibility and accessibility of education in terms of time and location, enabling the combination of professional work with study. Furthermore, continuing teacher education involves broadening the teacher's professional profile through the acquisition of knowledge in related fields of pedagogical activity, building on their foundational training, as well as the development of additional competencies, including non-pedagogical ones. This need may be driven both by the objective challenges of modern society and by an individual's personal professional and life circumstances (Anishchenko, Padalka, 2010).

3. The legal framework for lifelong learning policies in Ukraine and the EU

The national system of lifelong learning in Ukraine is viewed as a coherent set of institutional, organisational and regulatory mechanisms designed to create the conditions for learning and the all-round development of the individual throughout their life. Its formation is a long-term evolutionary process and reflects a gradual rethinking of the role of education as a key factor in the socio-economic development of the state and the improvement of human capital.

The regulatory and legal framework for lifelong learning policy in Ukraine is laid down in a series of strategic documents that define the main directions for the development of the education system. In particular, the Law of Ukraine 'On Education' (2017) enshrines the principle of lifelong learning as one of the fundamental principles, emphasising the need to create a flexible education system that ensures access to various forms of learning for all sections of the population. The State National Programme 'Education' ('Ukraine of the 21st Century'), the 'Concept of Civic Education' (2000), the 'National Doctrine for the Development of Education' (2002), the National Strategy for the Development of Education for 2012–2021, as well as updated strategic documents, in particular the Concept for the Development of Education until 2025. The current stage of development of lifelong learning policy in Ukraine is characterised

by a focus on European standards and integration into the European Education Area (Levchenko, 2012). In this context, key regulatory frameworks include the National Qualifications Framework, harmonised with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), as well as mechanisms for recognising the outcomes of non-formal and informal education. Of particular importance is the introduction of a competence-based approach, which meets the current demands of the labour market and contributes to increasing the professional mobility of citizens.

At European Union level, lifelong learning policy is shaped on the basis of strategic documents. The Hamburg Declaration (Germany, 1997) outlined the key principles for the development of lifelong learning for adults and set out recommendations for national governments regarding the recognition of adult education as a priority area of public policy. These provisions were further developed at the European Summit in Lisbon (2000), where it was emphasised that the transition to a knowledge society must be accompanied by the provision of opportunities for lifelong learning. Subsequent European strategic documents emphasise the need to adapt education systems to the challenges of the 21st century. The author N. Nychkalo asserts that lifelong learning is defined as one of the key instruments for the development of civil society, the enhancement of social cohesion and the level of employment (Nychkalo, 2001). It must go beyond the traditional approach, which focuses solely on formal education, and include a broader range of opportunities, including upskilling, retraining and professional development for the adult population. Particular attention is paid to creating conditions for open access to educational resources for all categories of citizens. In this context, lifelong learning is viewed not only as a means of professional growth, but also as a tool for personal development, self-fulfilment and the satisfaction of an individual's cognitive and cultural needs. Also of significance are the EU Recommendations on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018), which set out a list of basic skills and competences necessary for successful social and professional integration. EU policy emphasises access to education, inclusivity, the digitalisation of the learning process and the development of innovative forms of learning. The latest trends in the regulatory framework for lifelong learning are linked to the digital transformation of society. In this context, initiatives such as the development of digital competences (DigComp), the adoption of open educational resources, support for online learning, and the creation of a single European educational area are of particular importance. In Ukraine, these processes are reflected in the implementation of digital educational platforms, the development of distance learning and the updating of the regulatory framework to address contemporary challenges, including martial law.

Furthermore, an important area for improving the regulatory framework is the development of partnerships between the state, educational institutions, business and civil society. This contributes to the formation of a flexible system of lifelong learning capable of responding promptly to changes in the socio-economic environment and the needs of the labour market.

4. Digitalisation and innovation in lifelong learning

The digitalisation of lifelong learning in the EU is viewed as a comprehensive process encompassing both the technological modernisation of the educational environment and the transformation of pedagogical approaches. On the one hand, a digital educational environment is being developed, comprising electronic platforms, online courses, open educational resources, digital libraries and interactive services. On the other hand, a profound modernisation of the educational process is taking place, aimed at preparing individuals for life and professional activity in the digital economy.

In leading EU countries, the digitalisation of education is underpinned by clearly defined national strategies. In Finland, for example, an open education model is being actively implemented, providing access to online courses and programmes for adults regardless of age or social status. Significant attention is paid to the development of digital skills through the integration of ICT at all levels of education. In Germany, the ‘DigitalPakt Schule’ programme is being implemented, aimed at equipping educational institutions with modern digital infrastructure and enhancing the digital competence of teachers and learners. In Estonia, which is considered one of the leaders in digital transformation, an effective e-learning system has been established, integrating learning platforms, digital resources and assessment tools. The Estonian experience demonstrates the potential for the full digitalisation of the educational process, including distance and blended learning. In France and Spain, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are being actively developed, providing access to high-quality education for broad sections of the population. An important element of digitalisation is the development of citizens’ digital competences, as defined within the European DigComp framework. It outlines the key skills required for the effective use of digital technologies in professional and everyday life. The implementation of this framework contributes to the development of digital literacy, critical thinking and information literacy, which are essential for successful integration into modern society. Innovations in lifelong learning in EU countries are not limited to technological changes but also encompass new pedagogical approaches. In particular, competence-based, activity-based, person-centred and andragogical approaches are actively applied. The competence-based approach ensures the development of the ability to apply knowledge in practical activities, which meets the needs of the modern labour market. The andragogical approach, focused on adult learners, involves taking into account their experience, motivation and needs, transforming the role of the teacher into that of a facilitator of the educational process.

The development of flexible learning pathways, which allow learning to be combined with professional activities, is of particular importance. In EU countries, modular learning programmes, micro-credentials, individual learning accounts and systems for recognising the outcomes of non-formal and informal education are being actively introduced. This helps to increase citizens’ professional mobility and ensures their competitiveness in the labour market. Furthermore, the digitalisation of education contributes to the creation of what is known as a cyber-physical educational space, in which virtual and real learning environments are integrated. The use of video conferencing platforms (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet), educational social networks (Edmodo, Moodle, Google Classroom) and digital resources creates the conditions for effective communication and collaboration between participants in the educational process, regardless of their location.

To summarise the above, digitalisation and innovation in lifelong learning within the European Union are key factors in the modernisation of education systems and the promotion of sustainable development. They contribute to increasing access to education, the development of new competences, the development of human capital, and society’s adaptation to the challenges of the digital age. European experience in this field serves as an important benchmark for improving national education policies, particularly in the context of integration into the European Education Area.

5. Conclusions

Drawing on European experience in shaping lifelong learning policy, it is worth noting that it serves as a key instrument for developing human capital and ensuring the competitiveness of nations in a globalised world. In European Union countries, lifelong learning policy is implemented on the principles of systematicity, inclusivity, flexibility and a focus on the needs of the individual and the labour market. Supranational EU strategies and regulatory documents play a significant role in this process, ensuring the coherence of educational reforms, the development of key competences, and the integration of national education systems. It has been demonstrated that the effectiveness of lifelong learning policy depends to a large extent on the implementation of innovative approaches, the digitalisation of the educational environment, and the development of partnerships between the state, educational institutions and employers. Mechanisms for the recognition of non-formal and informal education, as well as the development of individual learning pathways, are of particular importance. European experience demonstrates the need to transition from the traditional model of education to an open, dynamic system focused on the continuous development of the individual. Its implementation in Ukraine will contribute to the modernisation of national education policy, the improvement of educational quality and integration into the European Education Area.

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