

GLOBAL PRACTICES IN LIFELONG LEARNING AND THEIR ADAPTATION TO THE UKRAINIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Summary

This study analyses definitions of lifelong learning, examines the theoretical foundations of the concept of continuous education, and explores the specific features of its implementation within the international educational landscape. It is noted that lifelong learning is one of the key factors in the development of human capital, ensuring individual competitiveness and the sustainable socio-economic development of the state in the context of globalisation, digitalisation and rapid changes in the labour market. The relevance of the study is confirmed by the need to modernise the Ukrainian education system in line with European approaches to ensuring accessible and high-quality education for citizens of all age groups. The paper analyses global practices in implementing the concept of lifelong learning using the example of European countries, in particular the specific features of the regulatory framework for adult education, the development of digital learning, micro-qualifications and the recognition of the outcomes of non-formal and informal education. It has been established that the effectiveness of continuing education systems is ensured through a combination of state support, flexible educational pathways, the use of digital technologies, and close interaction between educational institutions and the labour market. The prospects for adapting global experience to the Ukrainian education system are substantiated, including the development of adult education, the digitalisation of the educational environment, the introduction of micro-qualifications, the recognition of non-formal learning outcomes, and the development of critical thinking. It has been concluded that the implementation of best international practices will help to improve the quality of education, enhance the professional mobility of the population, and facilitate Ukraine's integration into the European educational area.

Key words: lifelong learning; continuing education; adult education; global educational practices; the digitalisation of education; the educational process.

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1. Introduction

The current stage of global society's development is characterised by profound transformative processes spanning the economic, social, technological and educational spheres. Globalisation, digitalisation, the rapid development of information and communication technologies, the automation of production processes, the spread of artificial intelligence and the constant updating of professional competencies are shaping new demands on individuals as agents of professional activity and social interaction. In these circumstances, education ceases to be a time-limited stage of life and becomes a continuous process of personal and professional development. This is precisely why the concept of lifelong learning is now regarded as one of the key conditions for ensuring individual competitiveness, sustainable social development and economic growth of nations.

The processes of globalisation, the development of the information society, increased life expectancy, the refinement of economic development models, and the emergence of new professions and technologies necessitate the constant updating of knowledge, skills and abilities, as well as the enhancement of citizens' social and professional mobility (*Lukianova, 2022*). Changes that previously took place over decades can now occur within a few years or even months. As a result, specialists in various fields are forced to constantly improve their own competencies, master new technologies and adapt to the changing conditions of the labour market. Under these circumstances, the traditional model of education, which focuses on acquiring knowledge primarily at a young age, no longer meets the needs of modern society.

Over the past few decades, the issue of organising adult education has become one of the key priorities of educational policy in the world's leading nations. Lifelong learning is regarded not only as a tool for professional development, but also as a vital factor in social integration, civic engagement, cultural development and improving the quality of life for the population. International documents from UNESCO, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Commission and the Council of Europe emphasise the need to create conditions for citizens to access quality education at all stages of life, regardless of age, professional status or place of residence. The concept of lifelong learning emerged as a response to the challenges of post-industrial society and has gradually become the foundation of contemporary education policy in many countries. A synthesis of the main approaches to organising continuous learning, their evolution and transformation under the influence of socio-economic changes has enabled the European community to formulate a set of principles and mechanisms for implementing the Lifelong Learning policy. These principles include ensuring access to education, flexibility of educational pathways, personalised learning, recognition of the outcomes of formal, non-formal and informal learning, the development of digital competences, and support for citizens' professional development throughout their lives.

The concept of lifelong learning has become particularly relevant in the countries of the European Union, where it has become an integral part of the strategy for building a knowledge society. Countries such as Finland, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, France and Sweden have established well-developed systems to support adult education, including networks of professional development centres, open universities, professional development programmes, digital learning platforms and mechanisms for recognising prior learning. The implementation of these approaches contributes to increasing employment rates, developing an innovative economy and strengthening social cohesion. Modern digital technologies play a significant role in the development of lifelong learning. The proliferation of online education, massive open online courses (MOOCs), adaptive learning platforms, digital learning resources and blended

learning technologies has significantly expanded access to education for various sections of the population. Thanks to digital tools, learning has become more flexible, personalised and accessible, which is particularly important for adult learners who combine their studies with professional activities and family responsibilities.

For Ukraine, the issue of developing a system of lifelong learning is of paramount importance in the context of European integration processes, the digital transformation of society, and the need for post-war national recovery (*Anishchenko, 2023*). The modern labour market requires professionals who are able to adapt quickly to new working conditions, continuously update their professional skills, and make effective use of digital technologies. At the same time, Ukraine's integration into the European Education Area entails harmonising national education policy with European approaches to ensuring access to lifelong learning and the development of human capital. In this context, studying and synthesising global experience in implementing the concept of lifelong learning takes on particular significance. An analysis of successful practices in leading countries allows us to identify the most effective models for organising lifelong learning, assess the possibilities for adapting them to Ukrainian conditions, and develop recommendations for modernising the national education system. Drawing on international experience can help improve the quality of education, foster professional mobility among the population, cultivate a culture of lifelong learning, and strengthen Ukraine's competitiveness in the global educational landscape.

2. An analysis of global practices in the implementation of lifelong learning

The issue of lifelong learning has long been a focus of attention for academics around the world. A significant contribution to the development of the theory and practice of lifelong learning has been made by Ukrainian researchers, including V. Andrushchenko, V. Kremen, L. Lukyanova, N. Nychkalo, L. Ohienko and L. Tymchuk, as well as foreign scholars such as P. Alheit, J. Kidd, P. Legrand, Z. Nolda, W. Hilton and others. The fundamental ideas of the concept of continuous education were formulated in the works of J. Dewey, P. Freire and Z. Bauman, who emphasised the need to create conditions for the continuous development of the individual, the formation of their ability to adapt to social changes and to independently acquire new knowledge throughout their lives.

Scientific research indicates that there is no single universal definition of the concept of 'lifelong learning'. Over thirty interpretations of this concept are used in the international scientific literature. The English researcher P. Sutton explains this diversity by the peculiarities of the translation of the term in the documents of international organisations, in particular UNESCO and the OECD. In global practice, the terms 'lifelong education', 'lifelong learning' and 'recurrent education' are widely used, each emphasising different aspects of the continuous educational process. Despite certain differences in interpretation, they are all united by the common idea of providing opportunities for learning at every stage of a person's life.

UNESCO's work plays a key role in the development of the concept of lifelong learning. The Fourth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education emphasises that education is a fundamental human right, an important public good and an effective tool for ensuring social justice, sustainable development and economic prosperity. The document highlights that modern society faces a range of global challenges, including rising social inequality, demographic changes, climate threats and technological transformations. In these circumstances, lifelong learning becomes a prerequisite for the population to adapt to new realities and for ensuring the competitiveness of nations in the global environment. Global practices in implementing

the concept of lifelong learning demonstrate a significant variety of organisational models and tools. One of the most successful examples is Finland, where lifelong learning is integrated into the national system for human capital development. The country has an extensive network of adult education centres, open universities and community-based educational organisations. Particular attention is paid to ensuring access to education for all sections of the population, regardless of age, professional status or place of residence. A significant proportion of programmes are delivered in distance and blended formats using modern digital technologies.

The experience of Germany is also noteworthy, where the lifelong learning system is closely linked to the needs of the labour market. The dual education system forms the basis for the professional development of the workforce, combining theoretical training with practical work experience in companies. Adult vocational education centres play an important role, offering retraining, upskilling and digital skills development programmes. Thanks to this approach, workers can respond quickly to changes in the economy and master new professional fields.

In Denmark, the concept of folk high schools has become widespread; their activities are aimed at the personal development of citizens, fostering civic responsibility and supporting active public participation in social life. The Danish model demonstrates that lifelong learning can be directed not only towards professional development but also towards the development of social, cultural and civic competences. An important direction in the development of continuing education worldwide is the use of digital technologies. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), e-learning platforms and distance learning systems have significantly expanded public access to educational resources. Leading universities worldwide offer open courses via platforms such as Coursera, edX, FutureLearn and Udemy, enabling people to acquire new knowledge regardless of where they live. The spread of digital educational technologies promotes personalised learning, flexible planning of educational pathways and increased motivation for professional development.

In Spain, the development of adult education has taken place gradually through the refinement of general education legislation. Unlike many European countries, Spain does not have a separate law dedicated exclusively to adult education. Matters relating to lifelong learning are regulated by a body of legislation covering various components of the education system. An important milestone in the development of this sector was the General Law on Education of 1970, which set out the main directions for the provision of basic, vocational and continuing education to the adult population. Further improvements to state policy were linked to the adoption in 1990 of the Law on the General Structure of the Education System (LOGSE), which for the first time enshrined the concept of 'adult education' in law. The document introduced a new vision of the role of lifelong learning, defining continuity as one of the fundamental principles of the entire education system. A key feature of the Spanish model was the legal guarantee of access to education for every citizen, regardless of their age, social status or prior educational experience.

Canada serves as a prime example of a strategic approach to the development of lifelong learning. A key milestone in the modernisation of the national education system was the adoption in 2008 of the National Education Strategy, 'Educated Canada 2020' (*Learn Canada, 2020*). The document was developed by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, and formed the basis for a unified vision of lifelong learning across all provinces and territories. The strategy's primary objective is to ensure high-quality lifelong learning for all citizens by creating an accessible, integrated and flexible education system. The Canadian model focuses on creating conditions under which adults can obtain the necessary education or vocational training at any stage of their lives, in line with their personal or professional needs. Particular emphasis is placed on ensuring equal access to educational opportunities, developing professional competencies and supporting the competitiveness of the population in a knowledge-based economy.

Greece is characterised by one of the most systematic models of regulatory support for lifelong learning. The development of a modern system of continuing education in the country took place through the consistent adoption of legislative acts aimed at creating a comprehensive state policy in the field of adult education. An important step was the adoption of Law 3369/2005, which, for the first time, comprehensively regulated the issue of lifelong learning and defined it as a continuous process of acquiring and improving knowledge, skills, abilities and professional competences throughout one's life. The legislation also provided for the establishment of a National Committee for Lifelong Learning, responsible for monitoring the educational needs of the population, coordinating the activities of educational institutions, and assessing the quality of educational services. The further development of the Greek system of continuing education is linked to the adoption in 2010 of the Law on the Development of Lifelong Learning, which initiated a comprehensive modernisation of the state system of adult education. The document laid the foundation for the development of a national Lifelong Learning strategy and the creation of a national qualifications framework, ensuring the transparency of educational outcomes and the possibility of comparing them with European standards. Another significant achievement was the adoption in 2013 of the Law on the Activities of the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Career Guidance. For the first time, this law recognised at a legislative level the value of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, and established mechanisms for their official validation. This approach is in line with current European trends in the development of education and contributes to expanding opportunities for the professional and personal development of citizens.

To summarise, an analysis of the experiences of Spain, Canada, Germany and Greece reveals a variety of models for implementing lifelong learning policies. At the same time, they share a focus on ensuring access to education for all sections of the population, developing flexible educational pathways, supporting citizens' professional development, and recognising continuous learning as a strategic factor in social development. These practices can serve as a guide for further improving the lifelong learning system in Ukraine and harmonising it with the European Education Area.

In many countries, particular attention is paid to the development of micro-qualifications and digital certificates. This approach allows for the rapid validation of acquired competences and enables a response to the current needs of employers. Micro-qualifications facilitate the creation of flexible learning pathways and allow citizens to gradually accumulate professional competences throughout their lives. An analysis of global experience shows that the successful implementation of the concept of lifelong learning is based on several key principles: accessibility of education, flexibility of educational programmes, the use of digital technologies, the integration of formal, non-formal and informal education, as well as close cooperation between educational institutions and employers. An important factor in effectiveness is state support for adult education programmes and the creation of incentives for citizens to participate in continuous learning.

From the above, we can conclude that global practices in the implementation of lifelong learning demonstrate significant potential for developing human capital, enhancing economic competitiveness and ensuring social stability. The experience of leading countries confirms that continuous education is not only a tool for professional development but also a key prerequisite for building a knowledge society and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Studying and adapting these practices creates the necessary conditions for modernising the Ukrainian education system and establishing an effective national model of lifelong learning.

3. Prospects for adapting international best practice in lifelong learning to the Ukrainian education system

An analysis of international experience (*Sutton, 1994; Grotlüschen, Belzer, Ertner, Yasukawa, 2024*) shows that the successful functioning of a system of lifelong learning is ensured through comprehensive regulatory and legal frameworks, the coordination of activities among educational institutions, and cooperation between the state, employers and educational institutions. For Ukraine, a key task is to further improve the legislative framework for adult education, expand opportunities for non-formal and informal education, and establish effective mechanisms for recognising learning outcomes acquired outside the formal education system.

A promising direction for adapting international experience is the introduction of flexible learning pathways and the development of a system of micro-qualifications. In European Union countries, short-term educational programmes, certificate courses and digital educational modules are actively used, enabling professional competences to be rapidly updated in line with labour market needs. For Ukraine, the introduction of such mechanisms is particularly relevant in the context of rapid technological change and the need for professional retraining of a significant proportion of the population.

The digitalisation of the educational environment is a key factor in the development of lifelong learning (*Stoliaryk, Subashkevych, 2026*). International experience demonstrates the effectiveness of using distance learning platforms, massive open online courses, virtual learning environments and digital tools for assessing learning outcomes. The development of digital infrastructure in Ukraine creates favourable conditions for expanding citizens' access to educational resources regardless of their place of residence, age or professional activity. This is particularly relevant in the context of martial law and post-war recovery, when distance learning technologies ensure the continuity of the educational process.

When adapting international experience, particular attention should be paid to the development of critical and creative thinking among adult learners. Leading international researchers regard the development of these qualities as one of the key outcomes of lifelong learning. In modern society, a person must not only possess a certain amount of knowledge, but also be able to analyse information, assess its reliability, make informed decisions and act effectively in conditions of uncertainty. That is why adult education should be aimed at developing the ability to think independently, analyse critically and creatively solve professional and life challenges. Contemporary theories of adult education emphasise that adults are active participants in the learning process, capable of self-directed learning, critical reflection on experience and continuous personal development. The potential for the development of an adult's thinking is linked to qualitative changes in cognitive structures that arise during the process of continuous learning. The development of creative and critical thinking contributes to the all-round development of the individual, enhances their adaptability to social changes and creates the conditions for successful professional self-realisation. The combination of group learning with independent educational activities is of particular importance for the development of such competencies. Global experience shows that the most effective educational models are those that combine group interaction, project-based activities, professional discussions and self-directed learning. This approach fosters the development of critical thinking, the ability to defend one's own position with sound reasoning, and a constructive openness to alternative viewpoints. A key feature of modern lifelong learning is the shift from the traditional model of knowledge transfer to a model of open educational dialogue. In leading countries around the world, learning is increasingly focused on research, critical analysis of information, solving practical problems and developing individual educational strategies. Education is viewed not as the mechanical absorption of

information, but as a process of selecting and synthesising knowledge, creatively reinterpreting it and applying it in real-life situations. An important prospect for the Ukrainian education system is also the development of partnerships between educational institutions, employers, local authorities and civil society organisations. Such cooperation allows for a more effective consideration of labour market needs, ensures the relevance of educational programmes and creates conditions for citizens' lifelong professional development.

4. Conclusions

The study has shown that the concept of lifelong learning is one of the key areas of development for modern education systems and an important prerequisite for the formation of a knowledge society. An analysis of global practices has revealed that leading nations view continuous education as a strategic tool for developing human capital, enhancing economic competitiveness and ensuring social cohesion. It has been established that the effectiveness of lifelong learning policy implementation is ensured by the accessibility of educational services, the flexibility of educational pathways, the development of digital technologies, the integration of formal, non-formal and informal education, as well as active collaboration between educational institutions and employers. An analysis of the experience of Spain, Canada, Greece and other countries has identified the main mechanisms for supporting continuous learning, among which systems for the recognition of prior learning, the development of micro-qualifications, digital educational platforms and vocational retraining programmes for the adult population are of particular importance. It is argued that promising areas for Ukraine to adapt international experience include improving the regulatory and legal framework for adult education, developing a digital educational environment, fostering a culture of lifelong learning, and implementing practices to develop critical and creative thinking. The implementation of these approaches will contribute to the modernisation of the Ukrainian education system, the improvement of human capital, and Ukraine's successful integration into the European education area.

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