A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS AND QUALITY OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, TRAINING AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Kamelia Nusheva[1], Boryana Yankova-Hadzhieva[2], & Denitsa Dimitrova[1]
[1]Chief Assist. Prof. Dr., ULSIT(Bulgaria)
[2]Assoc. Prof. Dr., ULSIT (Bulgaria)

Abstract

The new information society implies a revolutionary change in the features and possibilities of the educational system. There is a need for learning, the characteristics of which will be activity, productivity, and awareness. This determines qualitative changes both in the attitude towards students and in the educational content and its priorities, the design and technology of education, the educational environment and the role of the teacher in it. The new educational paradigm, the result of the development of education in the conditions of the information society, in the pedagogical aspect is personally oriented and respects the rights of the person and in particular the child, in the didactic aspect it is oriented towards key competences in which transversal skills and metacognition have a dominant role, in a psychological aspect develops thinking and its qualities. This publication aims to present a scientific research project whose main goal is to create a new theoretical model for researching the effectiveness of lifelong learning (LLL) strategies by studying, analysing and evaluating the Lifelong Learning process globally and in Bulgaria in particular, especially when it comes to inclusive education. Testing of the theoretical model through a sociological survey and focus group research will be organized to propose a pilot model for assessing the effectiveness and maturity of the LLL. The methodology applied in the study includes searching and analysing factual information, study of models and good practices and case-studies. This paper was developed within the framework of a scientific research project "A model for evaluating the effectiveness and quality of inclusive education, training and lifelong learning" with contract № КП-06-Н80/1, funded by National science fund of Bulgaria.

Keywords: Inclusive education, lifelong learning, effectiveness and quality, vocational education and training.

1. Introduction

A new approach to the problems of qualification, education and training is required, dictated by the scale of education and training of the economic and social changes taking place in Europe. An adequate response to the rapid development of the knowledge-based economy and demographic pressure is needed. The main goal is to improve the competitiveness of the workforce and, accordingly, the competitiveness of the national economy by increasing people's adaptability to economic and social changes, promoting equality and participation in all forms of professional and personal development. New technologies enable the creation of a virtual educational environment and the implementation of new approaches to interactive communication. The project advocates the thesis that the partnership between the business world and the various degrees and sectors of education, training and scientific research will help to more precisely direct efforts towards the formation of appropriate knowledge, skills and competences that the labour market requires, and to stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship in all forms of learning.

The new information society implies a revolutionary change in the features and possibilities of the educational system. There is a need for learning, the characteristics of which will be activity, productivity, and awareness. This determines qualitative changes both in the attitude towards students and in the educational content and its priorities, the design and technology of education, the educational environment and the role of the teacher in it.

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Changing the educational paradigm changes the entire system of education. Formal education is unable to satisfy people's needs for permanent qualification and retraining. In a knowledge society, there is no such thing as "completed education". A network of educational activities appears that are not regulated by laws, rules and regulations, but are regulated by the interests and needs of the participants in them, take place inside or outside educational institutions and end with the achievement of a very specific goal. This type of educational activities fills the content of the concept of non-formal education. There is also knowledge that one acquires daily and independently, outside of any system of organized teaching. This system of education is called non-formal education, informal education, independent learning (Vasileva et al., 2019).

2. Relevance of the topic / about the project

The opportunities for acquiring knowledge in the information society are growing rapidly, and this puts individual countries and the member states of the European Union the task of solving the problem of validating the knowledge acquired through various forms, by finding compliance with the levels in the European Qualifications Framework and those developed on it base national frameworks.

The educated person today lives in the global world and must be prepared for it. He must learn to live in a world whose symbol is globalization, with its political, economic and social consequences. As a result of this reality, the educated person is faced with new and unknown challenges – of intensifying international and national competition, of the struggle between the global and the local, of preserving one's own culture and respecting the culture of other nations. The world is turning into a global village, and man into a citizen of the world in terms of thinking, worldview and information. In this aspect, the problem of globalization of education systems does not mean uniformity, or at least uniformity in everything, globalization in education systems means standardization. The European Union demonstrated a clear understanding of the need to apply the competence approach in teaching and learning.

The main recommendation is an orientation from learning to learning outcomes. This conceptual change is a consequence of the development of modern society, which is characterized by the rapidity of changes, as well as the unpredictability of these changes. In this dynamic and complex world, the requirements for young people are aimed at forming creative skills, developing critical thinking, adaptability skills based on competences in various fields. The new image of the personality to satisfy the needs of today's and future society requires fundamental changes in curricula and programs.

Fostering lifelong learning is key to the success or failure of innovative companies. Successful investments in education and training programs encourage partnerships between different companies, and the role of the state as a regulator of this type of partnerships is still strong and thus limits the natural business interests of the partners. It is important to identify the various factors that drive lifelong learning in individual companies, and these generally remain only partially understood. The focus of lifelong learning needs to be on increasing the profitability and competitiveness of the business (Yankova et al., 2017). The cognitive skills of the population are a key element in knowledge-based economies, which is why the European Union emphasizes the development of a skilled workforce. Unlike commonly applied forms of assessment, which are very general and measurable at a certain point in time, individual cognitive skills have a differentiated nature and respond with varied manifestation according to the demands of the labor market, which is precisely why modern knowledge-based economies highly reward the acquisition of cognitive skills.

Lifelong learning should improve the career development of workers, increase flexibility and strengthen the competitive position of the enterprise. Best practices and stronger policies must be used responsibly to sustain and strengthen value creation. The impact that investments in human resources have on the productivity and growth of enterprises is the main focus. It should be borne in mind that employees and organizational capacity for continuous learning remain largely invisible and cannot be fully accounted for in enterprise balance sheets. A strong incentive to increase the provision of increasingly complex services, knowledge and innovation is the use of best practices in the field of human resources. High performance work and training systems cover employment protection actions. An organizational environment of employee trust is created, which strengthens their commitment to the respective enterprise. Confidence in new forms of LLL is growing and this is fueling interest in creating new learning content. The bottom line is that social networks are giving way to resourceful new forms of e-LLL (Vasileva et al., 2020).

The best way to establish the effectiveness of training is by collecting data based on measurements. Sometimes it is not how the learning takes place, but what is taught that matters for effectiveness. Therefore, the following factors should be looked at and measured: lack of incentives to implement training,

implementation of an incentive system, unclear job functions, explanation of job functions, inadequacy of feedback, offering adequate feedback, lack of access to and reliability of the resources needed to perform the task: providing access to reliable resources, lack of knowledge, low physical and mental capacity. Highly effective organizations continuously evaluate their activities to determine performance and competency gaps and their alignment with corporate and/or departmental goals.

The Business Maturity in LLL is designed specifically for business organizations or units within such organizations that focus on lifelong learning, continuing education and professional development, as well as corporate training departments or degree programs. The overall score will help the business determine its overall maturity, and the scores for each area will help the business identify which ones need the most attention and work to move to the next stage of maturity.

In the society of knowledge, the economy does not develop on the basis of mechanical technique, but on the basis of knowledge, research, innovation in thinking and production. Technology and information, which are the intellectual product of knowledge, are the basis of profit. In a society where education is a key resource, it is necessary to change the educational paradigm, as well as the very concept of an educated person. There is a need for learning, the characteristics of which will be activity, productivity, awareness. The new educational paradigm, reflected to the greatest extent in Lifelong Learning (LLL), in the pedagogical aspect is person-oriented and respects the rights of the individual, in the didactic aspect it is oriented towards key competences in which transversal skills and metacognition have a dominant role, in a psychological aspect, it develops thinking and its qualities. The goal, sub-goals and tasks of the current project will explore the knowledge achieved in this area, as well as the measurable and achieved impact on the subjects, objects and environment in LLL, which will contribute to improving the interaction and feedback between business, the non-governmental sector and government institutions in the field of LLL.

3. Project objectives and hypotheses

The main goal of the project is to create a new theoretical model for studying the effectiveness of lifelong learning, by studying, analyzing and evaluating the lifelong learning process globally and in Bulgaria in particular, through the sociological research and focus group research. Through reviews and analyzes of LLL globally, indicators laid down in various documents regarding the achievement of LLL effectiveness will be examined. Special attention will be paid to research in the field of innovative educational practices and European cultural and educational policies, and especially to existing models for the assessment, certification and validation of LLL. These models will be explored in terms of evaluating and measuring their effectiveness in relation to society, the individual and economic conditions. In order to fulfill the set goals, the project will rely on the current trends in the management of the information and communication infrastructure and organizational culture of lifelong learning and in the approaches of learning and transmission of knowledge between generations. As an essential part of achieving the goal of the project is the research of positive models of LLL that offer prediction of the effectiveness of their implementation based on profitable innovative tools for impact.

Our hypothesis is that the existing models for evaluating the effectiveness and maturity of the LLL reflect social and political tasks and do not sufficiently take into account the individual needs of the trainees, as well as do not motivate units and enterprises to use innovative development tools and indicators. Therefore, we expect that in the implementation of the project goal, this hypothesis will be investigated, and as a result of the fulfillment of our goal, the shortcomings of the evaluation of efficiency and maturity at the moment will be overcome and models will be created that can be applied with ease and predict specific results necessary for the anticipatory development of LLL in relation to societal and individual expectations and needs. In order to fulfill the set goals, the project will rely on the current trends in the approaches to the management of the information and communication infrastructure and the organizational culture of lifelong learning and in the approaches to learning and transmission of knowledge between generations. During the implementation of the project, the following principles will be followed: Study of models and good practices in the researched area; Research and analysis of lifelong learning strategies and policies; Study of the organizational processes at the LLL; Research and study of strategies and policies of the companies investing in LLL; Study of the need for business strategies of companies with the subject of activity of LLL; Analysis and research of national and globalization processes from the point of view of human rights and personality. Study of the conditions for creating a theoretical model that would contribute to the improvement of the main building factors of the cultural-educational areas of the social sciences and civic education.; Confirmation of a new vision for an interactive educational environment in the field of lifelong learning; Creation of a basis for the development of national frameworks in accordance with the levels in the European qualification framework for a way out of the problem with the validation of

knowledge acquired through different forms; Increase interest, awareness and access of potential users to an interactive educational environment for lifelong learning.

4. Methods, research equipment and techniques

The main research approach for the implementation of the research project implies the application of the principles of the Unified Methodology for Conducting Functional Analysis in the State Administration (EMPFADA). In the course of the research, it is precisely adapted and includes the following methods: on the principles and methods of construction and modeling, a reference model will be developed for the organization and functions of lifelong learning systems, and the proposed concepts, policies will be formulated, proven and defended and strategies for sustainable development of the lifelong learning system, based on the use of good practices and positive experience of EU member states and world leaders in the sector; the research techniques used include analysis of the legal framework, review of documents and structuring of statistical and other information, interviews, surveys, observations, expert assessments, etc. Empirical sociological research is planned as a reliable and secure source for complete and up-to-date social information about social reality. Empirical methods and approaches used will be based on the professional experience, organizational-management qualification and scientific-research competence of the members of the project team with a view to successfully proving the originally formulated scientific hypothesis. The system analysis will allow revealing the state of the information and communication environment in the field of lifelong learning, thereby identifying the key factors determining the development of the information and communication culture of all participants in the organizational-management and production-consumer processes. The functional approach will assist in determining the interrelationships, interdependencies between the individual structural elements of the lifelong learning, culture and education systems in Bulgaria and their impact on socio-economic, cultural and social development.

5. Lifelong learning business maturity stages

Conditionally, 4 stages can be distinguished, which always precede the reaching of full maturity of companies specializing in lifelong learning, continuing education and/or professional development. This maturity is reached by fully mastering these 4 stages:

- **Stage 1: Static:**

Leadership: lacks clear vision or accountability, focus on individual processes.
Strategy: Poorly articulated, unclear goals and metrics.
Capacity: Lack of resources, unclearly defined processes.
Portfolio: "We've always done it this way", the offers are informative.
Marketing: Invalidated understanding of market, competition or audience, limited, haphazard communication channels, no specific metrics.

- **Stage 2: Reactive**

Leadership: Poorly presented vision, accountability for current performance, no clarity on how it can be sustained or improved.
Strategy: Exists, but not differentiated, not widely shared, and not tracked and measured
Capacity: Resources meet current needs but are insufficient for growth. Processes are implied but poorly documented.
Portfolio: Efforts have been made to assess training needs but these are minor, offers are somewhat performance-based, there are rudiments of impact assessment reflected beyond the documentary requirements.
Marketing: Immature on the market. Offers submitted via a specific communication channel and their results are not tracked.

- **Stage 3: Proactive**

Leadership: The vision is driven by a cross-functional team, a shared understanding of sustaining and developing achievements.
Strategy: Widely segmented and served differentiated, has traceability through metrics
Capacity: Resource meets current and evolving needs, key processes are documented, there is investment in staff and volunteer development.
Portfolio: Has a good knowledge of learning needs, of lifelong learning theory, but insufficient practical experience of applying the knowledge assessed to work, reflected beyond the documentary requirements.
Marketing: Periodic efforts to assess the market and competition, efforts to develop segments and priorities aligned with the audience, use of multiple communication channels with appropriate measurement and opportunity to improve results. The beginnings of branding of lifelong learning.

- **Stage 4: Innovative**

Leadership: Shared vision from top management, clear accountability and responsibility, through next and interim plans, a culture of continuous learning.

Strategy: Provides a clear positioning that is shared and taken across the organization, continuously actively trackable metrics.

Capacity: Resources meet current needs and support innovation, processes are well defined and consistently used, and there is significant investment in staff and volunteer development.

Portfolio: Clear understanding of training needs as well as practical, excluded application of theory, effective alignment with training needs and strategies in delivery, assessment to assess focus on change.

Marketing: Validate understanding of market and competition, implementation of segmented priority offering, strategic use of multiple communication channels, presence of a strong brand for lifelong learning.

The assessment of the achieved level based on the description of these 4 stages serves to create a business model for lifelong learning. At each stage, maturity is measured against the characteristics and performance in 5 areas that have been found to be critical to the success of the learning and the educational companies themselves.

Achievements in the five key areas are:

• Leadership: How clear is the business's vision for training and education? How is the achievement of a shared and sustainable vision measured over time? Is there a culture of learning in the organization and its audience?

• Strategy: How clear is the formulated strategy? Has it been communicated to the entire organization? Are there clear metrics established and trackable to align the organization to the strategy according to the recorded data?

• Capacity: Does the organization have sufficient capacity in terms of human resources and technology to achieve an effective vision and strategy?

• Portfolio: Are the content, methodology and terms well aligned. Are training needs well researched? Is there an assessment of the effectiveness of the training across levels and over time?

• Marketing: Is there a valid understanding of the overall market and competitive environment? Are you consistently using appropriate marketing methodologies and monitoring whether it is effective? The four profiles on your side offer an overall picture of the business at each stage of maturity and a description of the degree of manifestation in the five areas. In reality, most businesses perform better in some areas and worse in others. Part of the business model is an evaluation methodology that the firm can use to analyze performance in each of the five areas.

6. Conclusion

The business model can be used by market-oriented training firms to assess their performance in the five areas that are key to overall performance and success. The Maturity Assessment Model is designed specifically for business organizations or units within such organizations that focus on lifelong learning, continuing education and professional development, as well as corporate learning departments or degree programs. The assessment will provide a score for each of the five areas as well as an overall rating. The overall score will help the business determine its overall maturity, and the scores for each area will help the business identify which ones need the most attention and work to move to the next stage of maturity.

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