

INTEGRATING LIFELONG LEARNING INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

Larisa ŞAVGA¹, Oxana LIVIŢCHI²

^{1,2}Trade Cooperative University of Moldova (REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA)

Abstract

Current European policies and trends in education demonstrate the importance of implementing the concept of lifelong learning and its impact on economic development, society and every individual. The revitalization of lifelong learning requires rethinking how this concept can lead to overcoming existing constraints and dysfunctions and become viable and vital.

The article provides an overview of European policies and trends in the field of lifelong learning highlights the priority actions required at the institutional level for the development of LLL activities and services within universities. Recognizing the importance of LLL, Moldovan universities have committed themselves to promoting and implementing this concept within the framework of the international project „TOWARDS EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY LIFELONG LEARNING MODEL IN MOLDOVA” - COMPASS, No. 597889-EPP-1-2018-1-MD-EPPKA2 - CBHE-SP, funded by the European Union under the ERASMUS+ program. Its implementation will facilitate the boosting of lifelong learning. The integration of this goal into its institutional policy, the development of the LLL strategy, the consolidation of learning and vocational training structures will contribute to the stability of the balance between the needs of the labour market, the capacities of education and training providers and the needs of people and society.

Keywords: education, lifelong learning, educational consortium, objectives, benefits

1 INTRODUCTION

We live in an ever-changing world that warns of new challenges to ensure the sustainable development of mankind. The changes in society and the economy as a complex system determine the need to create a different paradigm of education, both at the institutional and individual level. Education does not stop when you get a degree and a job. Changes in the modern socio-economic system and society at the current stage require an approach to education from the standpoint of the demands of the future. For these reasons, we consider it necessary to adapt education to the requirements and demands of the labour market by opening up traditional formal education and, at the same time, transferring it to other educational areas - non-formal and informal education. In the opinion of the researchers, which we support, lifelong learning offers ample opportunities to better meet the skills needs of economies and individuals [1]. Thus, we believe that, in order to support competitiveness in the context of a global economy and technology-based knowledge, people need to constantly update their knowledge and skills as individuals, citizens and employees.

Lifelong learning (LLL) is an ongoing process that includes uninterrupted learning anytime, anywhere. LLL is a system of classical and modern educational goals, methods and techniques, capable of developing educability itself, a continuous educational openness in accordance with the working and living conditions of society as a whole and of each person and citizen. Taking into account professional mobility, skills and competences, current and future preferences and

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0. International License

aspirations, it is educational and research institutions, including those of higher education, that can ensure the continuous development of professional competences. At the same time, in order to increase the coherence and efficiency of the instructive-educational process, it is even more necessary to observe one of the fundamental principles of education, namely the principle of permanent education.

2 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to analyse the development of the concept of LLL in higher education institutions, through which they seek to ensure the continuity of lifelong learning. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set: to study the strategic framework of the European and international policies, actions and activities related to lifelong learning; to highlight the need to rethink educational values taking into account the challenges of society and the labour market; to identify optimal solutions for the institutional integration of LLL based on a comparative analysis of the experience of various higher education institutions in Europe.

To conduct this study and to substantiate the research results and conclusions, various research methods were used, such as documentation, comparative analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, and scientific abstraction. Information support is made up of various bibliographic sources with links to the theory and practice of lifelong learning, as well as the experience of institutional integration of lifelong learning.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Long-term challenges such as demographic trends, rapid technological progress, adapting to the demands of the digital age, and developing competitiveness in a globalized and knowledge-based economy require a rethinking of the concept of lifelong learning at all levels of education, from institutional to national ones. In particular, changes in professional profiles and requirements reinforce the need to expand opportunities for continuing education. In order to meet the new requirements and provide society with qualified human potential, educational and professional training institutions, through the proposed study programs, can achieve lifelong learning and improve the relevance of education and professional training systems for the labour market.

Participation in education, training and lifelong learning plays a decisive role in building a country with a sustainable and competitive economy, since they, on the one hand, are key factors for growth, jobs and employment, social cohesion and, on the other hand, contribute to the development and harnessing human potential [9].

A number of initiatives and actions in this area have shown important results, marked by improving the quality and efficiency of education and professional training processes, reducing the skills shortages in the labour market, promoting equity and social cohesion, stimulating creativity and inventiveness, entrepreneurial spirit, increasing the responsibility of people, etc. [1].

The Strategic Framework for Education and Training (ET2020) has set the main objectives at European level:

- achieving the goals of the Lifelong Learning Program and the Mobility Program
- improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0. International License

- stimulating creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurial spirit, at all levels of education and training.

Therefore, recognizing the major significance of the development of a new educational paradigm, the modern European path of education is focused on the learning society, based on the acquisition of new knowledge and lifelong learning.

In the Republic of Moldova, lifelong learning is regulated by such legislative-normative acts as the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, the Labour Code, the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova, the National Qualifications Framework, the Classifier of Occupations of the Republic of Moldova, the Regulation on Adult Continuing Education, External Evaluation Guidelines of Continuing Education Programmes, etc.

For example, the Education Code [4], Title VII “Lifelong Learning” regulates the general framework of lifelong learning (structure, forms, funding, certification of acquired knowledge and skills), ways of achieving learning and sources of funding in the contexts of formal, non-formal and informal education, etc. Thus, the Education Code distinctly defines the concept of lifelong learning as a process that “includes learning activities carried out by a person throughout life, with the aim of learning or developing skills from a personal, civic, social and professional point of view.”

In the context of formal education, Lifelong Learning is a structured institutionalized process based on a clear curriculum design; in the context of non-formal education it is integrated learning within planned activities, with learning objectives that do not follow an obvious curriculum; in the context of informal education, it is the result of daily activities related to work, family environment, free time and is not organized or structured in terms of goals, duration or support for learning.

In the context of formal education, the Education Code states that lifelong learning can take place in general education, vocational technical and higher education institutions, other institutions or organizations. Lifelong learning is funded from public and/or private sources, through public-private partnerships, through funding and co-financing by employers, non-governmental organizations, grants from international programs, and through the contribution of beneficiaries.

In the Republic of Moldova, the educational system is a priority area of public life, which determines the formation of the most important factor of the nation – the individual. As an integral part of the National Education System, the Trade Cooperative University of Moldova (TCUM) has carried out and continues to implement a number of activities aimed at bringing higher education in the economic, commercial, technological and law areas to the highest standards of professional performance. In order to integrate the university education process in the European and International systems, the activities of the university are focused on the following areas:

- rethinking the educational process in terms of designing competencies that have become a new reference system for the purposes of professional and personal training and linking the content of training programs to the needs of the labour market;
- rethinking educational technologies, using interactive methods of teaching, learning, assessment; development of e-learning;
- development of academic mobility programs;
- strengthening and developing partnerships with the business environment;

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0. International License

- diversification of continuing education programs in accordance with the requirements of the labour market.

To respond to modern challenges in the field of professional training and development, TCUM is actively promoting the concept of Lifelong Learning (LLL) at the institutional level, supporting and capitalizing on the policies adopted at the national level. TCUM's vision for LLL is inspired by European policy and is based on the community experience and labour market needs. To meet the challenges of the ever-changing environment, the university, with the support of European experts, has developed the Institutional Strategy for the Development of Lifelong Learning for 2021-2025 and the Action Plan for its implementation. One of the objectives of the Strategy provides for the diversification of professional training programs, the integration of programs at different levels of professional education.

The current practice in the Republic of Moldova shows that universities are usually focused on providing initial professional training programs (bachelor's, master's, doctoral studies) and continuing education programs, typical for the higher education segment. At the same time, professional education institutions are guided by programs of this level, not being interested in the possibilities and prospects for the integration of graduates into other programs that would shape their lifelong learning path. Accordingly, two important actors (higher education and vocational technical education) operating in the dimension of higher education promote segmented and isolated activities without effective cooperation, which can provide many opportunities, first of all, for the recipients of educational services when planning their professional career and its capitalization and, secondly, significant advantages for both categories of educational institutions in ensuring the continuity of educational content, joint work for the efficient use of resources.

An analysis of the current situation and the steps taken for the development of lifelong learning in the Republic of Moldova show that, although the concept of lifelong learning (LLL) is found and regulated in normative documents and national policies, its implementation and full consolidation in higher education institutions is difficult to achieve. In the context of providing LLL, universities are integrating in the realization of this desideratum with undergraduate programs (ISCED level 6); master's degree programs (ISCED level 7); doctoral studies (ISCED level 8), accredited or provisionally authorized by the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova based on the results of an assessment carried out by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research.

In the context of the above, we believe that one of the beneficial solutions for integrating lifelong learning in professional education in its entirety (higher education and vocational technical institutions) could be the creation of educational Consortia based on partnerships between educational institutions offering programs of study at different levels of professional education (ISCED levels 3-8).

A certain level of expertise in this regard already exists in the framework of co-operative education. At the initiative of the TCUM leadership, an Educational-Scientific Consortium of Consumer Cooperation was created, the first of this kind in the Republic of Moldova, which integrates different levels of professional education along the vertical of professional education: higher education (Trade Cooperative University of Moldova), vocational technical education (Cooperative College of Moldova, Centre of Excellence in Business Administration, Co-operative Vocational School of Soroca). Its mission is to strengthen the efforts and potential of educational institutions in the fulfilment of their missions; to strengthen their institutional capacities; to make efficient use of all resources (material, financial, human and infrastructure)

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0. International License

of the institutions of the cooperative educational system; to promote some kind of coherent policy in the field of educational and research-development-innovation activities. The association of the co-operative educational institutions in the Educational-Scientific Consortium was carried out in order to combine joint efforts in strengthening co-operative education, developing efficient educational and scientific activities in order to achieve a sustainable communication between higher education and vocational technical education.

Although, there is experience in creating consortia in higher education, which mainly refer to the reform of doctoral studies and the creation of joint doctoral schools, which are a form of horizontal integration (higher education institutions).

The innovative experience of TCUM is useful for the implementation of LLL; it allows setting up and creating Consortia and partnerships between educational institutions, thereby ensuring the continuity of professional training at different levels of professional education (ISCED 3-8). Among the advantages of establishing such structures we will list the following:

- achieving a strong link between higher education and vocational technical education,
- promoting coordinated policies in the field of educational activity and research-innovation-development, promotion of a unified concept of LLL,
- compatibilization of study programs,
- joint approval of study programs and their content,
- creation of joint chairs/departments,
- creation, if necessary, of joint administrative or academic services,
- strengthening institutional capacities,
- optimization of the use of institutional resources (material, financial, human and infrastructural),
- improving the quality of educational services, etc.

The partner institutions within the Educational-Scientific Consortium jointly use the material and technical infrastructure transferred by MOLDCOOP, the scientific, pedagogical and teaching staff, other resources (informational, financial, etc.). Continuity of studies is ensured, as a goal of lifelong learning, by promoting interdisciplinary cooperation, compatibility of curricula and educational content, mutual recognition of learning outcomes and their assessment in case of advancement to the next level of professional training.

To support the development and integration of the LLL concept in higher education, several universities from the Republic of Moldova participate in the implementation of the ERASMUS+ project “Towards European University Lifelong Learning Model in Moldova” (COMPASS), reference number 597889-EPP-1-2018-1-MD -EPPKA2-CBHE-SP. Thus, they contribute to the promotion and strengthening of the culture of lifelong learning in our country and the reinforcement of the national consensus of key actors in the issues of university development; development and promotion of an appropriate national legislative framework for lifelong learning in the Republic of Moldova; development of the integrative function of Moldovan universities through the introduction of university strategies for lifelong learning; increase of the institutional capacity of Moldovan universities for the effective implementation of reforms on lifelong learning.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0. International License

4 CONCLUSIONS

In the process of developing educational institutions, study programs, university curricula and their content, it is important to take into account the key trends and challenges of the time: globalization, economic and social changes, efficient resource management, new information technologies and innovations. We find that educational institutions, including higher education institutions, have demonstrated resilience to the challenges of society and changes in the socio-economic system.

Higher education institutions are increasingly becoming important players in the continuous growth and sustainable development of society. Therefore, the strengthening of links between education, research and the labour market is inevitably achieved by ensuring an on-going instructive-educational path, throughout life. This, in turn, will contribute to the on-going development of professional skills and will accelerate a better entry into the labour market.

The integration of LLL into higher education institutions will strengthen their institutional capacity to meet the increasingly complex and changing demands of a rapidly changing society and digital economy.

A useful experience in the implementation of lifelong learning is the establishment/creation of a Consortium and a sustainable partnership between educational institutions of different levels, which ensures the continuity of professional training, recognition of the results of previous learning, better professional integration, etc. The strengthening and development of the Consortium will contribute to improving the quality of the educational and research-innovation activity of educational institutions in various areas of initial professional training, namely: higher bachelor's degree and master's degree, doctoral studies; post-secondary and secondary vocational technical education, dual education, continuing education, as well as to providing the labour market with qualified personnel.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bolboceanu A., Cucer A., Pavlenko L. et al. Referințe epistemologice ale asistenței psihologice în contextual învățării pe tot parcursul vieții. Monografie realizată în cadrul Proiectului instituțional *Epistemologia și praxeologia asistenței psihologice a învățării pe tot parcursul vieții. / Epistemological References of Psychological Assistance in the Context of Lifelong Learning. Monograph developed within the Institutional Project “Epistemology and Praxeology of Psychological Assistance of Lifelong Learning.”* Chișinău: Institutul de Științe ale Educației, 2018. 190 p.
- [2] Cadrul de referință al curriculumului universitar / *Curriculum of the University Program*/ aut.: Nina Bîrnaz, Otilia Dandara, Viorica Goraș-Postică [et al.]; eds.: Vladimir Guțu; Min. Educației al Rep. Moldova. – Chișinău: CEP USM, 2015. – 128 p.
- [3] Către o Europă durabilă până în 2030. Uniunea Europeană, 2019./ *Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030. European Union, 2019.* 132 p. [online] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/rp_sustainable_europe_ro_v2_web.pdf
- [4] Codul Educației al Republicii Moldova nr. 152/ 17.07.2014. In: Monitorul Oficial al Republicii Moldova nr. 319-324 din 24.10.2014. / *Education Code of the Republic of Moldova no. 152 of 17.07.2014. In: Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova no. 319-324 of 24.10.2014.* Available: <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=355156>
- [5] Cooperarea pentru atingerea obiectivelor politicilor în domeniul educației (cadrul ET2020). / *Cooperation to Achieve Policy Objectives in the Field of Education (ET2020 Framework).* Available: https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-framework_en

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0. International License

- [6] International Standard Classification of Education, 2011, 88 p. Available: <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>
- [7] New Skills Agenda for Europe. European Commission. Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion. [online] <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223#vet>
- [8] UNESCO și Obiectivele de Dezvoltare Durabilă. / *UNESCO and Sustainable Development Goals*. Available: <https://en.unesco.org/sdgs>
- [9] ȘAVGA, L. Implementarea modelului european de învățare pe tot parcursul vieții în Republica Moldova. Revista științifică *Academos*. / *Implementation of the European Model of Lifelong Learning in the Republic of Moldova*. *Academos Scientific Journal*, 2020, 1(56), 122-129. ISSN 1857-0461
- [10] ȘAVGA, L., LIVIȚCHI, O. Lifelong Learning University Model – the pillar of strategic development of higher education institutions. *Journal of Research on Trade, Management and Economic Development*. 2021, issue 2 (vol. 16), pp. 54-65. ISSN 2345-1424 – print edition, ISSN 2345-1483 – online edition. [http://jrtmed.uccm.md/files/VOLUME%203%20ISSUE%201\(5\)/5.%](http://jrtmed.uccm.md/files/VOLUME%203%20ISSUE%201(5)/5.%)
- [11] ȘAVGA, L. Universitățile din Republica Moldova – pro învățare pe tot parcursul vieții în Republica Moldova. / *Universities in the Republic of Moldova - for Lifelong Learning in the Republic of Moldova*. In: *Dezvoltare economică și cercetare, conferință științifico-practică internațională on-line*. Chișinău: UCCM, 2021. 266-276. ISBN 978-9975-81-058-6
- [12] Tendințe internațional în domeniul învățării pe tot parcursul vieții. / *International Trends in Lifelong Learning*. Available: <http://carte.psihologie.md/tendintel%D0%B5-internationale-in-domeniul-invatariei-pe-totparcursul-vietii/>
- [13] Towards European University Lifelong Learning Model in Moldova - COMPASS. ERASMUS+ project. Available: <http://compass-project.md/DISCLAIMER>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article is being developed under of the ERASMUS+ project, entitled: TOWARDS EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY LIFELONG LEARNING MODEL IN MOLDOVA - COMPASS, Reference number: 597889-EPP-1-2018-1-MD-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP.

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission, within ERASMUS+ programme.

DISCLAIMER

The European Commission support for the production of this article does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.