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## **Life Long Learning And Life Long Skills: Paradigms For National Development**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines lifelong learning and lifelong skills as paradigms for national development in the 21st century. Guided by four research objectives, the investigation explores how these concepts have become crucial for individual and collective progress in an era of rapid technological advancement and global challenges. The research delves into how fostering a culture of lifelong learning can drive national development by creating a workforce that is resilient, innovative, and adaptable to change. It posits that the ability to continuously acquire knowledge and adapt skills is paramount for societal advancement. The study defines lifelong learning as a concept that extends beyond formal education, encompassing continuous self-directed learning throughout one's life. It examines how this approach cultivates critical thinking, adaptability, and problem-solving skills essential for navigating an increasingly complex world. Furthermore, the research investigates how promoting lifelong learning can help nations develop human capital capable of driving innovation, enhancing productivity, and addressing emerging societal needs. It explores lifelong skills, such as digital literacy, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence, as foundational elements for this ongoing learning process. In conclusion, the study argues that these transferable competencies enable individuals to thrive in diverse professional environments and contribute meaningfully to their communities. It suggests that embracing lifelong learning and skills development can lead to more resilient economies, engaged citizenry, and sustainable national growth.

**Keywords:** Lifelong learning, lifelong skills, national development, human capital, adaptability, digital literacy.

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## **Introduction**

As the world undergoes rapid technological, economic, and societal transformations, the ability to continually acquire new knowledge and skills has become essential for individuals to navigate this landscape of change successfully. The concept of lifelong learning has emerged as a critical paradigm for personal growth, workforce preparedness, and driving national development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptability, nations can cultivate a populace equipped with the lifelong skills necessary to thrive amid unprecedented disruption and complexity (Dunlap & Grabinger, 2023).

At its core, lifelong learning represents an ongoing, self-motivated pursuit of knowledge and competencies across the entire lifespan – encompassing formal educational endeavors as well as informal, self-directed experiences (Knowles, 2021). It reflects an understanding that the static skillsets imparted through traditional models of frontloaded education during youth are increasingly insufficient for long-term success. In an era of exponential change where specific vocational expertise can quickly become outdated, the ability to constantly upskill, reskill, and cross-skill is paramount (Wolters Kluwer, 2022).

At a societal level, lifelong learning fosters engaged citizenship by cultivating the inquiry skills, information literacy, and intellectual curiosity essential for effective civic participation (Coffield, 2020). As issues grow increasingly complex, multifaceted skillsets allow citizens to thoughtfully evaluate policy impacts, synthesize data from diverse sources, and engage in reasoned public discourse. These competencies undergird social cohesion and stability. Furthermore, lifelong learning behaviors transcend work and civics to imbue personal enrichment and well-being throughout all life stages, from nurturing creativity and cognitive vitality to strengthening social connections and relationships (Laal & Laal, 2012). The inherent drive to explore new horizons and concepts equips individuals with resilient mindsets to navigate transitions and lead purposeful, fulfilling lives.

From a national development standpoint, the economic and societal benefits of establishing a culture of lifelong learning across the populace are tangible. A citizenry conditioned as proactive, adaptable, cross-disciplinary learners provides the human capital engine required to spur innovation, sustain competitiveness amid disruptive forces, and maximize quality of life (Cipolla et al., 2022). While fostering lifelong learning behaviors in the populace can accelerate development, purposeful cultivation of vital lifelong skills through education systems serves as the catalyst for activating this growth engine. These transdisciplinary competencies transcend any single vocation to facilitate success across evolving career trajectories and life circumstances (Dunlap et al., 2018).

Critical lifelong skills include cognitive abilities like analytical thinking, problem-solving, and creative ideation – invaluable assets for navigating ambiguity and complexity. Digital/ICT literacies allow lifelong learners to leverage technological tools as force multipliers for self-directed exploration. Interpersonal skills like communication, collaboration, cultural intelligence, and leadership undergird fruitful teamwork. Personal skills such as self-regulation, growth mindset, and entrepreneurial drive cultivate resilience (World Economic Forum, 2020). By aligning educational models, curricula, and assessment methods to prioritize the development of these

cross-cutting abilities from an early age, nations can establish a strong foundation for nurturing lifelong learners. As content knowledge becomes increasingly transient, these durable lifelong skills represent the competitive core competencies powering agility, reinvention, and success in an era of exponential change.

Ultimately, lifelong learning is not merely an aspirational ideal, but rather a strategic national imperative for securing sustainable economic vitality and societal well-being amid the tectonic shifts reshaping the modern landscape (Sharpley, 2020). For any nation, instilling lifelong learning behaviors and equipping its populace with versatile lifelong skillsets represents an investment into future-proofing its human capital – the precious renewable resource propelling progress and development.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the well-established importance of lifelong learning and lifelong skills for individual and national success, widespread gaps exist in educational systems' ability to effectively cultivate these crucial competencies. Many traditional models remain rooted in outdated pedagogies focused on frontloaded knowledge acquisition rather than nurturing the dispositions necessary for continuous, self-directed learning across the lifespan. There is a pressing need to transform curricula, instructional approaches, and assessment frameworks to purposefully embed lifelong learning values like intellectual curiosity, growth mindsets, and adaptability as foundational elements from an early age. Without this fundamental reorientation, populations will lack resilience when inevitably confronted with pervasive workforce disruptions, skills obsolescence, and demands for perpetual upskilling.

Furthermore, insufficient prioritization of vital lifelong skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, digital literacies, collaboration, and self-regulation within educational experiences leaves graduates ill-equipped to navigate the ambiguity and complexity defining the modern era. These cross-cutting competencies, transcending any single discipline, represent the core human capital drivers of innovation, agility, and national economic competitiveness. Nations failing to transform their human capital development strategies towards systematic lifelong learning integration and lifelong skills cultivation will face significant competitive disadvantages. They risk developing workforces deficient in the exact future-focused abilities required to spark entrepreneurship, spur growth, and empower citizens to lead enriched, purposeful lives as societal change makers.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Concept of Life Long Skills**

Lifelong learning is the continuous, self-directed pursuit of knowledge and skills throughout an individual's life, enabling them to adapt, grow, and remain effective in an ever-changing world. It is an ongoing process that encourages individuals to learn beyond formal education and throughout their careers and personal lives. This concept is not limited to acquiring specific job skills, but also encompasses the broader development of cognitive, emotional, social, and self-regulation competencies that are essential for navigating life's complexities.

Lifelong skills refer to the diverse and versatile competencies that transcend any single discipline, job role or life stage. Rather than vocational specialties with limited

shelf lives, these cross-cutting abilities represent the core human capital tools for thriving amid constant change and complexity. Developing robust lifelong skills empowers individuals to adapt proactively, leverage existing knowledge to continually upskill, and navigate evolving career landscapes and societal shifts with agility. At their essence, lifelong skills equip people with the foundational cognitive, digital, interpersonal and self-regulation capabilities required for lifelong learning itself.

Strong interpersonal skills like communication, emotional intelligence, negotiation and multicultural fluency underpin productive teamwork – essential as problems grow increasingly multifaceted. Self-regulation competencies covering areas like growth mindset, entrepreneurialism and self-directed learning dispositions cultivate the resilience necessary for continuous reinvention (Van Laar, et al., 2017).

### **The Importance of Continuous Education**

In an era defined by rapid technological disruption and ever-evolving economic landscapes, continuous education has emerged as a critical imperative for individuals, organizations, and nations alike. The notion that formal education concludes upon earning an initial degree or vocational certification has become increasingly obsolete. Instead, a mindset of constant learning, upskilling, and reinvention must be embraced as core cultural values (Desjardins, 2017). Committing to continuous skills renewal through professional development, certification programs, online courses, and experiential learning opportunities allows workers to remain competitive and unlock new career trajectories as industries transform.

Continuous education is not a luxury, but rather an existential necessity for the modern age. Whether through academic programs, corporate training initiatives, online platforms, or public policy incentives – nurturing institutionalized continuous learning opportunities unlocks powerful individual, organizational, and societal benefits (Rubenson, 2011). It equips stakeholders at all levels with the agile mindsets, skills fluencies, and resilience vital for navigating relentless future changes and amplifying human potential.

### **Key Components of Life Long Learning**

Fostering a sustained culture of lifelong learning requires cultivating several interrelated components from educational systems and broader societal structures. These key elements provide the scaffolding to nurture the curiosity, growth mindsets, and self-directed learning skills vital for continuous knowledge acquisition (Laal, 2011). At the core, lifelong learning demands instilling metacognitive abilities like reflective thinking, self-regulation, and metacognitive strategies from an early age. These “learn how to learn” competencies build the foundational awareness and habits for independently setting goals, monitoring progress, and adapting approaches (Vinod, 2021).

Easy access to varied learning opportunities across the lifespan represents another pillar. From formal credential pathways and workplace training programs to public libraries, community centers, and online platforms – a vibrant learning ecosystem facilitates constant intellectual reinvention and renewal (Sharples, 2000). Incentive structures that valorize and motivate lifelong learning pursuits, such as tuition reimbursement, skill certification subsidies, and competency-based hiring practices,

create a supportive culture promoting these values (Knapper & Cropley, 2000). Curriculum reform embedding interdisciplinary skills like information literacy, problem-solving, and digital fluencies equips lifelong learners with vital toolkits.

Finally, personalized guidance through academic advising, career counseling, skills coaching, and mentorship provides the customized supportive pathways for individuals to navigate their journeys as self-directed lifelong learners (Bhojrab et al., 2010). Together, these components establish the fertile environment for lifelong learning to proliferate.

### **Developing Life Long Skills**

Developing vital lifelong skills must become a core priority woven throughout educational experiences from the earliest stages. Rather than an isolated course or afterthought, these cross-cutting competencies spanning cognitive, digital, interpersonal and self-regulation domains should be systematically cultivated through diverse instructional strategies. Project-based learning nurtures problem-solving, critical thinking and collaboration abilities. Maker-centered learning builds creativity and digital design skills. Socratic seminars hone communication and inquiry mindsets. Portfolio assessments exercise self-evaluation and goal-setting muscles.

Beyond pedagogy, establishing robust support structures like mentorship programs, skills coaching, interdisciplinary lesson design and authentic community/industry partnerships provide fertile grounds for lifelong skills to flourish. The aim is developing psychologically resilient, adaptable lifelong learners adept at knowledge navigation and reinvention across changing circumstances. Achieving this demands comprehensive transformation in how educational systems conceptualize their purpose – prioritizing the cultivation of human potential over mere content delivery.

### **The Role of Government and Policy in Promoting Life Long Learning**

Life long learning has emerged as a critical concept in the modern era, driven by the rapid pace of technological change, globalization, and the need for individuals to continuously adapt and acquire new skills. Governments and policymakers play a pivotal role in promoting and facilitating life long learning opportunities for their citizens. One of the primary roles of governments is to establish a robust educational framework that emphasizes the importance of continuous learning from an early age. This can be achieved through curriculum reforms that incorporate elements of self-directed learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Additionally, governments can invest in digital infrastructure and online learning platforms, ensuring equitable access to educational resources.

Furthermore, governments can implement policies that incentivize employers to provide training and professional development opportunities for their employees. This could involve tax incentives, subsidies, or partnerships with educational institutions to offer specialized training programs. Encouraging a culture of life long learning within the workplace can enhance productivity, innovation, and employee retention. Another crucial aspect is the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning experiences. Governments can establish frameworks for the accreditation and certification of skills acquired through diverse learning pathways, such as online courses, workshops, or on-the-job training. This not only promotes lifelong learning but also facilitates labor mobility and career advancement.

Moreover, governments can collaborate with stakeholders, including educational institutions, industry associations, and civil society organizations, to develop comprehensive strategies and initiatives that promote lifelong learning. This collaborative approach ensures that the needs of various sectors are addressed and that resources are effectively allocated. By embracing and promoting lifelong learning, governments can empower individuals to continuously adapt to changing job markets, foster a culture of innovation, and contribute to the overall economic and social development of their societies.

### **Economic Impacts of Life Long Learning**

Lifelong learning has significant economic implications, both at the individual and societal levels. For individuals, continuous learning and skill development can lead to increased employability, career advancement, and higher earning potential (OECD, 2019). As the job market evolves rapidly, those who embrace lifelong learning are better equipped to adapt to new job requirements and remain competitive. At the organizational level, companies that promote and invest in lifelong learning opportunities for their employees can benefit from a more skilled and productive workforce (Deloitte, 2017).

From a broader economic perspective, lifelong learning contributes to the development of a skilled and adaptable labor force, which is crucial for driving economic growth and competitiveness (World Bank, 2021). Economies with a well-educated and continuously upskilled workforce are better positioned to attract investment, foster innovation, and remain resilient in the face of technological disruptions and economic transitions. Moreover, lifelong learning can promote social mobility and reduce income inequality by providing opportunities for individuals to acquire new skills and qualifications, enabling them to access better-paying jobs and improve their socioeconomic status (UNESCO, 2015). This can, in turn, contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society, which is essential for sustainable economic development.

In summary, lifelong learning has far-reaching economic impacts, ranging from individual career advancement and earning potential to organizational competitiveness, labor force development, social mobility, and overall economic growth and resilience.

### **Lifelong Learning and Skills Development: Paradigms for National Development**

Lifelong learning and skills development are central to achieving sustainable national development. In an era of rapid technological advances, shifting global markets, and evolving societal demands, it is essential for nations to foster a culture of continuous learning. By equipping citizens with the skills necessary to adapt to change, lifelong learning can drive economic prosperity, reduce inequality, and promote social cohesion. The following paradigms offer strategic approaches to integrating lifelong learning and skills development into national development plans.

1. **Inclusive Education Systems:** Lifelong learning begins with inclusive education systems that provide foundational skills such as literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking. According to the OECD (2019), early and continuous access to quality education helps individuals develop essential cognitive skills

and fosters resilience throughout life. Educational systems should be designed to offer flexible learning pathways that cater to people of all ages, backgrounds, and stages of life. Ensuring that education is adaptable, accessible, and inclusive is critical for empowering individuals and fostering national development.

2. **Digital Literacy as a Core Competency:** In today's digital economy, digital literacy has become a core competency. As technology continues to reshape the labor market and daily life, citizens must be equipped with the skills to navigate and participate effectively in a digital world. UNESCO (2021) highlights the importance of digital literacy programs that provide individuals with the knowledge to use, evaluate, and create information across various digital platforms. National strategies should prioritize digital literacy from early education to adult learning to ensure that citizens can engage in the digital economy and take advantage of emerging technologies, driving national innovation and productivity.
3. **Fostering Critical and Creative Thinking:** The development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity is essential to meet the challenges of the modern world. As outlined by Van Laar et al. (2017), cognitive skills such as these allow individuals to assess situations, generate innovative solutions, and navigate uncertainty. These competencies are crucial for the workforce of the future, where adaptability and creative problem-solving will be in high demand. Educational programs should not only focus on technical skills but also promote critical thinking and creative ideation, preparing individuals to tackle complex, interdisciplinary challenges in a variety of contexts.
4. **Self-Directed and Lifelong Learning:** Promoting self-directed learning is key to fostering a culture of lifelong learning. As individuals take responsibility for their own learning journeys, they develop the resilience and adaptability required to thrive in a rapidly changing world (Guni Network, 2019). Governments should invest in accessible platforms, online courses, mentorship opportunities, and professional development programs that support ongoing skill acquisition. By empowering citizens to engage in lifelong learning, countries can cultivate a workforce that is agile, innovative, and capable of navigating diverse career trajectories.
5. **Strengthening Soft Skills for Collaboration:** In addition to technical competencies, soft skills such as communication, emotional intelligence, leadership, and teamwork are crucial for success in modern workplaces. These skills enable individuals to work effectively in diverse teams, manage conflict, and lead collaborative efforts in solving complex problems. As Van Laar et al. (2017) suggest, interpersonal skills are integral to building productive relationships and fostering organizational growth. National development plans should incorporate training programs that focus on developing these soft skills, as they are essential for both professional success and social cohesion in an increasingly globalized world.
6. **Aligning Education with Market Needs:** Aligning education and training systems with labor market needs is essential for reducing skill gaps and improving employability. Research by the World Economic Forum (2020)

shows that close collaboration between educational institutions, businesses, and government agencies can help ensure that skills development programs match the demands of evolving industries. This alignment is crucial in preparing a workforce that is ready to meet the challenges of emerging sectors, from renewable energy to artificial intelligence. Educational curricula should be regularly updated to reflect the latest industry trends, ensuring that students acquire relevant, future-proof skills.

7. **Creating Accessible Learning Opportunities:** For lifelong learning to be truly inclusive, education and training opportunities must be accessible to all individuals, regardless of socio-economic status, geographic location, or age. According to the European Commission (2020), equitable access to education is key to reducing inequality and promoting social mobility. Policies that support affordable learning options, flexible schedules, and financial incentives for continued education can ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to engage in lifelong learning. By making learning opportunities available to everyone, nations can create a more equitable and productive workforce.
8. **Public-Private Sector Collaboration:** Public-private sector collaboration plays a critical role in bridging the gap between education and the workforce. According to the World Bank (2019), partnerships between governments, businesses, and educational institutions can drive the development of practical skills through internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training. These collaborations provide real-world learning experiences that help individuals acquire the specific skills needed for success in the labor market. Governments should foster these partnerships by incentivizing businesses to participate in workforce development programs and ensuring that educational curricula align with industry needs.
9. **Promoting Social Mobility and Equity:** Lifelong learning has the potential to reduce social inequality by providing all individuals with the opportunity to develop the skills necessary for upward mobility. As highlighted by the OECD (2021), promoting equal access to quality education and training programs can help level the playing field for marginalized groups, including low-income individuals, rural communities, and minorities. By prioritizing inclusive policies, nations can ensure that everyone has the chance to improve their lives through education and skills development, ultimately contributing to a more equitable society.

### **Life Long Learning in the Digital Age**

In the digital age, lifelong learning has become increasingly vital for individuals to stay competitive and adaptable in a rapidly evolving job market. The proliferation of online learning platforms, massive open online courses (MOOCs), and digital educational resources has made it easier than ever to acquire new skills and knowledge throughout one's life (Gallagher & Garrett, 2021). Moreover, the digital transformation of industries has created a demand for continuous upskilling and reskilling to keep pace with technological advancements. Employers are recognizing the importance of fostering a culture of lifelong learning within their organizations, investing in employee training and development programs (Deloitte, 2019).

## Challenges and Barriers to Life Long Learning

Lifelong learning, while crucial in today's rapidly changing world, faces several challenges and barriers that need to be addressed. Here are some key challenges and barriers to lifelong learning:

**Accessibility and affordability:** Access to quality educational resources and training opportunities can be limited, especially for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds or those living in remote areas. The costs associated with formal education, online courses, or professional development programs can also be prohibitive for many (UNESCO, 2016).

**Time constraints:** Balancing work, family responsibilities, and other commitments can make it difficult for individuals to find the time and energy to engage in lifelong learning activities (Boeren, 2017).

**Lack of motivation and awareness:** Some individuals may not recognize the importance of lifelong learning or lack the motivation to invest in personal and professional development (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009).

**Technological barriers:** While digital technologies have opened new avenues for lifelong learning, the digital divide can exclude those without access to technology, reliable internet connectivity, or digital literacy skills (OECD, 2019).

**Inadequate employer support:** Despite the benefits of a skilled workforce, some employers may be hesitant to invest in employee training and development due to concerns about costs or employee turnover (European Commission, 2020).

**Recognition and validation:** The lack of standardized systems for recognizing and validating skills and competencies acquired through informal or non-formal learning can discourage individuals from pursuing such opportunities (UNESCO, 2012).

**Cultural and societal barriers:** In some contexts, cultural norms or societal expectations may create barriers for certain groups, such as women or older adults, to participate in lifelong learning activities (World Bank, 2021).

By addressing these challenges and barriers, policymakers, educational institutions, employers, and individuals can work together to create an environment that promotes and facilitates lifelong learning opportunities for all.

## Conclusion

Lifelong learning and the acquisition of lifelong skills are critical paradigms for driving national development in the modern era. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and skill development, nations can cultivate a resilient and adaptable workforce capable of navigating rapid technological change and economic transitions (OECD, 2019). This empowers individuals to thrive in evolving job markets, while also promoting innovation, productivity gains, and overall competitiveness at the national level (World Bank, 2021). Governments and stakeholders must prioritize lifelong learning and skill-building opportunities to unlock the full potential of their human capital, propelling sustainable economic growth, social progress, and national prosperity (Desjardins, 2017).

## Suggestions

This study proposes the following key recommendations:

1. Undertake comprehensive research and policy analysis to holistically understand the pivotal role lifelong learning plays in fostering sustainable national development across economic, social, and environmental spheres.
2. Foster collaboration between industry experts, employers, community representatives, and relevant stakeholders to identify the critical lifelong skills essential for personal and professional growth within the specific context of the nation.
3. Implement robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to systematically track and analyze the impact of lifelong learning initiatives.
4. Initiate a national-level review process that brings together policymakers, educators, and key stakeholders.

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