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## Conceptual Approach to the Content of Lifelong Learning Terms in Greece

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### **Abstract:**

*'Lifelong learning' is not a modern form of discourse. Its origins comes from classical Greece. However, today more than ever, it has become an urgent need, as a result of the rapid development of the social and professional circumstances. In these new conditions of high education and knowledge, every citizen must strengthen and improve himself, in order to satisfy his needs, his personal desires and increase his career prospects.*

*The kinds and types of education, that 'lifelong learning' includes, cover all human life and thus becomes one of the contributors to social integration. It contributes to the development of knowledge and skills that citizens need throughout their lives, so that they can respond smoothly on the changing social and labor demands. However, a question which arises is whether 'lifelong learning' is a political decision of improving human throughput or making a substantial contribution to fulfill the essential role of Education.*

**Keywords:** Education, learning, lifelong learning, lifelong sport

### **1. Introduction**

Solon, one of the seven wise men of ancient Greece, considered that man should always be taught and learn even when he grows up. His instigation<sup>1</sup> is clearly related to today's lifelong learning, that is to say the effort of the whole life of man to acquire knowledge, skills and abilities (Figel, 2007). With the same way of thought Plato too, characterizes the cultivated in the Republic as the people who are engaged in learning to the end of their life.<sup>2</sup> It seems, therefore, that the term lifelong learning is not a contemporary thought, but refers to a philosophical idea that education is considered a long-term process that begins from the birth of man and continues throughout his life (CEDEFOP, 1996). It is a learning process that recognizes that education is not limited institutionally and temporally. From the definition the life-long effort is stated, that means the continuous recruitment of knowledge without age restrictions.

The philosopher highlights the value of learning and the need for a sustained effort to engage in it as a lifelong (*διὰ βίου*) journey that one should always try for it.<sup>3</sup> It therefore appears that the value of lifelong learning has been recognized for centuries now, and that it is the means of educating people not only cognitively but also ethically.<sup>4</sup> Its offer is a process in which either education factors participate or not, it aims at the mental and mental cultivation of people to be able to coexist fairly with fellow humans and to feel useful.

Plato, when referring to education, he describes it as the first of the best goods, which everyone must seek without indifference.<sup>5</sup> However, the philosopher, like Aristotle, perceived also gymnastics as a means of education. Athletics is an important factor in strengthening health with pedagogical value, as it cultivates self-awareness and leads to reconciliation by promoting the innate sociality of the individual.

### **2. Lifelong Learning**

With the term "lifelong learning" all forms of learning activities in the endurance of human life are meant, which aim at acquiring or developing knowledge, skills and competences. The latter contribute to the formation of an integrated personality, to the integration and development of the individual, to social cohesion, to the development of the capacity for active participation in society and to social, economic and cultural development (Greek Law 3879/10).

Undoubtedly, the abilities for education are not limited to school, but are reinforced by many social institutions (Vergidis & Kokkos, 2011). Man, that is, after the baccalaureate or diploma participates in a series of learning activities

<sup>1</sup>Γηράσκω αείδιδα σκόμμενος (I'm getting older but I'm always being taught a lot (of things)).

<sup>2</sup>Plato, Republic, 519c. Εν παιδείᾳ ἐωμένους διατρίβειν διὰ τέλους.

<sup>3</sup>Plato, Laws, 644b. Αείτω ὅτ' αείδρα στέον διὰ βίου παντικατὰ δύναμιν.

<sup>4</sup>Plato, Laws, 643e. Παιδείαν τὴν δὲ πρὸς ἀρετὴν ἐκπαίδων παιδείαν.

<sup>5</sup>Plato, Laws, 644b. Πρῶτον τῶν καλλίστων αείτω ὅτ' αείδρα στέον διὰ βίου παντικατὰ δύναμιν.

throughout his life. The latter aim to improve not only knowledge, but also his skills and credentials at both personal, social and professional level ("Lifelong Learning – Definition", 2019). By learning, the spirit is nourished and this is revealed through knowledge. The last, in fact, constitutes the fundamental element that determines the completeness of man and specifies his spiritual nature. Besides, knowledge in human's life is the basic condition that implies his life so that his existence is not exhausted in his biological existence (Dellis, 2004). Through learning, human is evolved and through this he perceives and learns the reality (Markos, 2001), since out of its limits he is disoriented by his own beliefs and his selfishness (Dellis, 2004), interpreting the world with dogmatism and as he thinks, rather than based on true knowledge (Markos, 2001).

The person who lives and coexists just with his fellow humans chooses to follow life as existence, but the person who chooses how to walk into his life creates life. Therefore, lifespan is the way in which everyone will choose to enrich his life, while life is simply a physical property, a status of every living organism. On the contrary, life does not only have a temporal content, which denotes the duration of the biological substance of man. Besides, the use of the term in everyday speech carries a continuous energy that states the continuous, while the term life declares the instant. Life, therefore, is the quintessence of both the means and the way in which someone chooses to build his course, from his birth to death. It provides the opportunity for man to complete himself as being and stand out from the rest of the living beings.

Lifelong learning, therefore, does not aim only to improve the knowledge of those who participate in it. It aims at shaping personalities capable of their professional integration, but also in their development, resulting in social progress. It therefore aims to develop active citizenship in society and is therefore able to define the education policy of a state (GreekLaw 3879/10). Its realization, therefore, is based on nature and the needs of the human personality, however the social reasons for its cultivation are just as powerful as the personal ones (Yeaxlee in: Jarvis 2004). With the aim therefore of the above, it covers all kinds and types of education ("Lifelong Learning – Definition", 2019). This includes formal education, non-formal education and informal learning (Coombs in: Vergidis & Karalis, 2004).

### 2.1. Formal Education

With the term "formal education" attendance is meant at the three educational levels of the Greek "formal educational system" as it is typically called ("Typical education system – Definition", 2019). It includes Primary Education, namely Kindergarten and Primary School, Secondary School with High School and is completed with Tertiary Education through the University (Grammatikou, 2011). These are the institutions that have been institutionalized by the State and who have graduated and hierarchical distinction. Attendance starts from the first grade, as its name implies, Primary and continues to Tertiary depending on age and study criteria. The completion of Formal Education leads to the acquisition of certificates recognized at national level by the public authorities ("National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications & Vocational", 2019).

At this point, it should be made clear that under the definition of UNESCO and the categorization of the educational actors there are educational actors of Typical Education who although they are aimed at adults, they are acceded to Formal Education and not to Adult Education. That is, Typical Education is not only aimed at underage students, as it includes structures that target people over the age of eighteen without their training being part of adult education, such as Universities, Institutes of Vocational Training, but also to adults who attend specific structures such as the Hellenic Open University and the Second Chance Schools (Kokkos, 2005).

### 2.2. Non-formal Education

"Non-formal education" means attending any organized educational activity which is not included in the Formal (Grammatikou, 2011). It includes all structures targeting adults who have completed at least Secondary education<sup>6</sup> and wish to acquire an additional qualification in order to be assisted in finding a job or improving the quality of their work if they are employed professionally. For this reason, through non-formal education, recognized national certificates are provided as labor market supplies or as an opportunity for reintegration in it (GreekLaw 3879/10).

According to what is mentioned in the relevant legislation of Greece, non-formal education includes the initial vocational training, the continuing vocational training and the general adult education (GreekLaw 3879/10).

More specifically, the initial vocational training offers the basic professional knowledge, the abilities and skills in specialties and specializations. Its aim is to integrate or re-integrate man-power into the labor market, as well as his buoyancy and up growth at the professional and personal level (GreekLaw 3879/10).

The continuing vocational training is the training of man-power that complements, revitalizes or enhances the knowledge, skills and competences which were acquired by vocational education and initial vocational training or by professional experience. Its aim is the integration or the reintegration into the labor market, the work's assurance and the personal and professional development of workers (GreekLaw 3879/10).

Finally, the general adult education includes all organized learning activities which are aimed at adults and target at the enrichment of knowledge, at the development and improvement of adults' skills and competences. For this reason, the aim is to develop their personality and their status as active citizens, while, at the same time, through the learning activities, educational and social inequalities are intended to be reduced (GreekLaw 3879/10).

<sup>6</sup>Gymnasium and High School are included in Secondary education in Greece.

### 2.3. Informal Learning

"Informal learning" means learning that is acquired throughout a person's life, which is not offered by an institutionalized educational entity. That is, the knowledge beyond the organized educational framework of the Republic, which each person acquires through his everyday life. It is a lifelong process in which each person shapes knowledge and attitudes as values from his experience (Grammatikou, 2011). More specifically, it includes all the activities that take place throughout his whole life and lead him to any form of learning.

Informal learning involves a kind of self-education, that the person himself acts, who is sometimes aware and sometimes unwittingly becomes a partaker of it. However, the importance of self-education mainly changes into the latter case through actions in the context of leisure time and social activities. However, in the case of informal learning, man does not act on his own as the etymology of the term self-education implies. Every person acts within a social and ideological environment and is therefore in touch with other people and acquires knowledge and skills through his professional and cultural activities (GreekLaw 3879/10).

### 2.4. Lifelong Sport

Historically, *athletics* has been along with the *music* and *letters* (reading and writing) the touchstone of the education<sup>7</sup> of classical Greece.<sup>8</sup> However, what differentiates it from any form of education is that it is not an unconscious act, but a conscious preference, which as a free choice satisfies the needs of those who choose to act in it (Goulionis 2000). Athletics, with the values that govern it, has been acting over time as an element of aesthetic and moral education, being rightly one of the noble human activities (Gongaki, 2013). It constitutes every physical activity that both professional sport and age restriction lack. In this way the exercise acquires a universal character and is transformed into an exercise for all, lifelong.

Lifelong sport refers to the continuing athletic activity regardless of age. Its aim is the multi-faceted and harmonious development of the personality of the athletes and their health care ("Sport for All, Sport Tourism", 2019). It aspires at well-being, aiming at a dual balance between spirit and body, excluding the unilateral development of one at someone else's expense. It is an exercise for all that fits into everyday life and does not require prominence and measurable results. It contributes to the mental harmony and physical health of athletes, since it offers free access to all regardless of gender, age and physical standards. At the same time, the physical activities from an early age, exercise the individual's effectiveness and efficiency, strengthen him socially and reduce the various degenerative phenomena of sport (Nikitaras, 2003).

Lifelong sport is an activity aimed at everybody, which can be realized outside gyms, close to nature. It is an approach to the natural environment, which helps to improve the quality of life of the athletes, while at the same time enhancing the physical and mental balance of man.

Athletics is therefore a useful lifelong choice, since it is particularly necessary in adults' life to escape from the pressure of everyday life and work unilateralism. It includes physical activities, game and leisure activities. It is entertaining, spontaneous, and voluntary, without the rules of professional sport. It is offered to everyone and is appealing to children in the form of game (*παιδιάς*) and to adults with forms of unregulated sporting activities (Theodorakis, Jiamourtas, Natsis & Kosmidou, 2010). At the same time, it contributes to the process of learning through the development of skills, while through physical exercise it contributes to the development of interpersonal relationships and also to the recreation of the athletes, enjoying the positive meanings of pleasure (*ευχαρίστηση*) and euphoria (*ευφορία*) as diachronic elements of the ancient Greek adverb *εὖ* that govern the ideal exercise (*εὖ ἀσκεῖσθαι*) of the cultural activity of Greek thought (*ελληνικού σκέπτεσθαι*) (Gongaki, 2013).

## 3. The Concept of "Learning" as Opposed to "Education"

One of the first that highlighted the value of learning, and indeed as an innate tendency of people, was Aristotle.<sup>9</sup> The philosopher suggested that the desire of all people for knowledge is dictated by their very nature. There is therefore, a spontaneous physical connection between man and learning.

Exploring the nature of learning is not an easy process. It is a broad and complex field with many modern theories, different from each other, which try to illuminate the way we learn (Rogers, 1999). Regardless of the different approaches, it seems that learning is an element of human being as it helps the human to understand his environment and develop in it. However, the need for learning is occurred particularly in adulthood (Knox, 1977; Jarvis, 2004). It is a desire that starts with the willingly choice of adults to defray their needs in relation to the environment and the demands that arise.

Learning comes from all human activities, and in all cases we learn naturally. However, in some cases learning is conscious and starts from a person's choice of specific targeting. In this context, learning is carried out by an organized entity and now constitutes the education. Learning, therefore, is a wider concept than education, as not all forms of learning have an educational character (Kokkos, 2005b). The latter is the planned and the systematic learning (Kokkos, 2008), which includes organized educational processes, which come from an institutionalized entity with clear objectives and results (Bown, 2000). On the contrary, learning is an individual experience, which may be the result of educational processes, or may occur randomly through the activity of the individual in his social environment.

<sup>7</sup>Plato, Protagoras, 325c-326c.

<sup>8</sup>The importance of athletics is observed in all phases of Greek antiquity, archaic, pre-classical and classical. References to it and his educational value are found in Homer, Solon, Pindar, Socrates, Aristotle, and many others.

<sup>9</sup>Aristotle, Metaphysics A, 980a. Πάντες ἀνθρώποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει, (All people from their nature desire knowledge).

By explaining the above terms in the context of their ongoing offer, they change into "lifelong" values. The term "lifelong learning" therefore refers to all types of education, formal, non-formal and informal, while at the same time refers to a philosophical concept, according to which education is considered as a long-term process starting at birth and lasts throughout life (CEDEFOP, 1996). On the other hand, the term 'lifelong learning' is defined as every learning activity undertaken throughout life to improve knowledge, skills and resources, in the context of a personal and social view related to the employment (European Commission, 2001).

#### 4. "Adulthood" as a Precondition for Lifelong Learning

The expression "lifelong" has a time-related character. It means the lasting and lifelong pursuit of the term it defines. This orientation has the character of overcoming space-time constraints. However, the expression "lifelong" means something more. It's got the importance of the way and expresses the way in which the values of education are executed in every aspect of human life. In this way, the learning process is reflected in the everyday experience and lifelong education is established in the activities of society (Nikitara, 2001).

"Adult education" is an extensive field of theoretical search and practical application that refers to systematic and organized adult learning. It is therefore considered to be integrated in 'lifelong learning' and 'lifelong education' as a subset of them ('National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications & Vocational', 2019). The first is considered a wider term than education, as it includes all forms of learning, without exception, covering all phases of human life (Kokkos, 2005). On the other hand, the term 'lifelong learning' refers to organized educational activities.

More specifically, 'lifelong education' is considered to be a long-term process beginning at the birth of a person and continuing throughout his whole life. The main axis of differentiation between 'adult education' and 'lifelong learning' is the criterion of 'adulthood'. The concept is evident from the definitions of adults' education by both UNESCO<sup>10</sup> and OECD<sup>11</sup> too, and it briefly refers to the extent to which the individual recognizes in himself the elements of maturity and self-determination, while at the same time he is recognized by others in the same way (Jarvis in: Kokkos, 2005). However, according to OECD's definition, an adult differentiates not from the criterion of adulthood but from the distance that has got from the compulsory education (Kokkos, 2005).

A prerequisite for being an adult is to behave as an adult and to perceive himself as an adult (Knowles, 1998). Adulthood, that is, refers to the fact that the self-awareness of the persons themselves and the perception of others about them gives them the characteristics of adulthood within their society (Jarvis in: Hatzitheocharous, 2010). In this context, maturity, full development, sense of perspective and balance, as well as responsibility and the mood for self-determination (Rogers, 1999) are the basic prerequisites for adulthood (Kokkos, 2005).

#### 5. Ascertainments and Prospects

Lifelong learning ultimately constitutes a very important objective at a European level (Karponidi-Dimitriadi, 2013). It is a political priority, as it is clearly linked to employment, economic prosperity and the participation of the individual in society ('Greece, Lifelong Learning Strategy', 2019). At an era of constant change due to technological progress and cultural changes, the provision of recognized certificates contributes to development as it fulfills the social needs for education and training. However, these certificates appear to work more as practical supplies for the labor market and less as an opportunity for the development of the spirit.

Education is characterized by both romance and realism. Romantic because its pursuits are often utopian, and realistic because it has real interest in the needs of human life. However, education is the image of our society that reflects by exploiting in theory and practice the facts of our life and experience. However, this display lacks of the prospect of romance, and the differences and contrasts are risen between the provided age education and the real needs for the constitution of individual and social balance. In this reality lifelong learning is emerging as a symbol of humanitarian and ethical experience (Nikitara, 2001).

For this reason, the four main pillars of lifelong learning (Exhibition of the International Commission of UNESCO as far as education at 21st Century) need to be essentially the core of education close to the trainees (Kaltsouni, 2010). Lifelong learning that promotes: "I learn how to acquire knowledge by combining satisfactorily a widespread general education with the potential to deepen into some issues." "I learn to act in such a way, as to acquire not only vocational training but also more generally the ability to deal with different situations and to work harmoniously in groups". "I learn to cohabit, understanding the others and be aware of social interdependencies, respecting the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace" and "I learn to live in such a way that I develop my personality and can act with greater autonomy and more judgment and personal responsibility" (UNESCO in: Vergidis, Karalis & Koulauzidis, 2010). Therefore, education does not fulfill its purpose when it only cultivates cognitively and when it is age-bound. It needs to contribute to the development of individual lifelong abilities, by cultivating memory, logical judgment, the sense of beauty, the physical abilities of the individual and the ability to communicate, while sensing in learning.

Education, however, does not only contribute cognitively. Besides, the nature of man is twofold: soul and body. Therefore, the combination of a trained body and a trained mind could be linked to the relationship between sport and learning, in the context of lifelong sport. Athletics appears to be a means of education linked both to universal values and to the whole development of man. The purpose of athletics activity is not limited only to the strong and healthy body, but it

<sup>10</sup>UNESCO, 1976 in: Kokkos, 2005. "They compensate the initial education in schools or colleges and universities, as well as in apprenticeships and with the help of them people who are considered as adults by the society that they belong to."

<sup>11</sup>OECD, 1977 in Rogers, 1999: 55, "accomplished at any stage of human life, who has passed the age of compulsory education and his main activity is no longer education."

is also extended socially. The right thought, responsibility, discipline and decency are some of the components of athletics not in the individual but in society (Gongaki, 2013). However the 21st-century social concept that highlights importantly the systematic pursuit of performance seems to overcome lifelong sporting activity. Perhaps however, its role and value were more evident if through lifelong literacy would foster a social culture that would perceive sports as a lifelong necessity. This concern leaves open horizons of study, since its analysis cannot be rhetorical. The deepening of the subject also suggests the prospect of its future exploration.

In conclusion, the term 'lifelong learning' appears to be prevalent internationally, broader than 'lifelong learning', but also 'adult education'.<sup>12</sup> Its aim is to enable everyone to have access to opportunities and for this purpose, it provides basic and social skills. However, in order the members of a society to participate in any learning, a necessary prerequisite is that learning opportunities exist, and responsibility for their exploitation is left to the very people who seek it. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that there is a unilateral exploitation of 'lifelong learning' to upgrading the professional knowledge and skills of citizens at the expense of social cohesion, active participation and personal integration (Vergidis, Karalis & Koulauidis, 2010). Simultaneous and equal effort to achieve these goals through "lifelong learning" is the essential goal of education, which aims both at developing skills and cultivating the psychosomatic hypostasis of people.

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<sup>12</sup> Resolution of the European Commission (27/6/2002): "Lifelong learning should cover learning from pre-school to post-retirement age, as well as all the range of formal, non-formal and informal types of learning".

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