

## REASONS FOR STUDYING AND LIFELONG LEARNING, EDUCATIONAL SECTOR IN SLOVENIA

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### Abstract

**Background.** The size of the older population that needs additional training and education is increasing due to the increasing life expectancy at birth as well as some non-demographic factors, for example, the faster development of technology. One of the most important directives in the area of education within the European Union is the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, which states that all those living in Europe should have, without exception, equal opportunities that adapt to the demands of social and economic life, so they can actively participate in forging the future of Europe. Lifelong learning is a value which has become an important factor in setting the economic objectives of individual countries.

**Research aims.** The purpose of this small scale research is to determine the reasons for studying and reasons for continuous adult education in addition to what influences the success of individuals in education.

**Method.** We designed a questionnaire and we decide the sample institutions from education sector in Slovenia. In the research, we found that the majority of respondents believe that education leads to a better quality job position. They particularly see the reason for continuous adult education in a desire for additional knowledge.

**Key findings.** From the analysis carried out, we can see that those who have a higher level of education perceive adult training as a voluntary individual choice, a desire for knowledge, whilst those with a lower level of achieved education see training as a necessity to maintain employment. In addition we also found that individual commitment has the most influence on an individual's success in their achievements in training and education.

**Keywords:** Lifelong learning, Adult education, Reasons to study, Individual achievements in education, Slovenia

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

History has shown us that in the past the lower class population had restricted access to education. Such social control, has maintained social hierarchy. Peček and Lesar (2006, p.1) discuss, that within the first Austrian primary school legislation, the division of primary schools into three types (trivial schools, general schools and normal schools), made it very difficult for the lower classes to enrol in secondary schools and universities, and consequently climb up the social ladder. Enrolment in general secondary school was reserved for the elite. Knowledge of Latin was an additional stipulation to enrol in general secondary school; subsequently the higher

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class was protected from the mass ascension of the poor, up the social ladder.

After the Second World War, developed capitalist countries enjoyed an economic boom. Laval (2005, p.38) discussed:

The so-called “Fordism” era of capitalism ensured the establishment of a set of institutions and procedures for social security, which was based on recognising rights and statuses, which provided employees with relative stability, which did not only regulate consumption, evolution of wages and career, but also the way of life itself.

Laval (2005, 38) and Dermol et al. (2013), note that social welfare, security and equal opportunities are given a central role in education. In the post-war period, the principle of equal education opportunities became one of the more important political objectives – contemporary socio-economically developed countries have been built on this very principle.

One of the most important directives in the area of education within the European Union is the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, which states that all people in Europe should have, without exception, equal opportunities that adapt to the demands of social and economic life, so they can actively participate in forging the future of Europe. (Commission of the European Communities 2000, p.3). All people, in different stages of life should have equal opportunities to access quality learning (Commission of the European Communities 2000, p.5). In the past decade, higher education has been affected by a number of changes, including the higher rates of mass education, internationalisation, the growing importance of knowledge-based economies and increased global competition (Ocvirk & Trunk Širca, p.2012).

All of the aforementioned values: the principles of social welfare and security and the principle of equal opportunities have lost their meaning over time, due to a period of competitive individualism and market competition that occurred during the previous century, in the seventies. Consequently, a rapid increase in social disparity arose, a significantly lower standard of the less educated population, and an increase in the level of poverty (Brown in Kovač Šebart 2002, p.219). This undermined the principle of equal opportunities for education, whilst education became key for survival.

Rawls (1999, p.303) in his work *A Theory of Justice*, outlines the general concept for his theory: “Now the principle of fidelity is but a special case of the principle of fairness applied to the social practice of promising. The argument for this begins with the observation that promising is an action defined by a public system of rules.” Rawls values (1999), that all primary social goods – freedom and opportunity, income, wealth, basic self-respect – must be distributed equally, except if unequal distribution of some or all of these goods improves the position of the least privileged.



From the above, we can conclude that the unequal distribution of social goods in some cases is even justified, and thus Rawls' theory of justice can be questioned. Dragoš and Leskošek (2003, pp.31-32) warn that Rawls' theory of justice could qualify as fair, even in the most extreme social situations, where there are the most numerous layers of the poorest classes, where the degree of inequality is very high, where taxes on capital gains are the lowest, and the amount of social aid is only symbolic. Even such extreme conditions could be excused by claiming that inequality benefits the poorest; by maximising the wealth of the richest, minimally increases the state budget revenues from which social benefits, although minimal, are paid.

As is apparent from the WTO documents (2013), all people have equal opportunities to access education, which is often only superficial. The educational system is now so constituted that it no longer requires the external division of schools and through selection alone is able to maintain its existing relationship. We are still going to see that the children of poorer and less educated parents have fewer opportunities to achieve a high level of education and thus a better economic situation. Children of less educated parents enrol into a less demanding secondary education. The support of their social networks is weakening their decision to educate beyond what is expected of their class. On the other hand, middle-class parents encourage their children to enter education and want them to stay in the educational process for as long as possible.

The size of the older population that needs additional training and education is increasing due to the increasing life expectancy at birth as well as some non-demographic factors, for example, the faster development of technology. Trunk Širca et al. (2009) discussed that economic development requires the flexibility of individuals and the continuous upgrading of their skills and knowledge, which may otherwise quickly become outdated and insufficient.

The universal declaration of human rights provides that everyone has a right to education; however the achievement of this may be limited, for example by the age of the subject or the legislation on the length of free education in their country of residence. In Article 26 it states (United Nations, 1948):

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

In accordance with the Bologna process and the European Commission's Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (Commission of the European Communities, 2000) the implementation and utilisation of modules for life-



long learning and the validation of non-formal and informal learning on the level of higher education (Gomezelj Omerzel, Babnik, & Trunk Širca 2008) can effectively address the question of motivation to continue the educational process, and the lack of a sufficient level of formal education of older workers (Babnik & Trunk Širca, 2014).

More and more adults are being persuaded towards education, lifelong learning is becoming a value, which is becoming an important factor in setting economic objectives of individual countries. Are there really so many adults who are voluntarily enthusiastic about lifelong learning? Today's labour market is powerful, unforgiving and requires new knowledge, skills, and the directions of education. Often, education is no longer entered into voluntarily or under one's own steam, but more often represents a necessity to maintain employment. White (in Kodelja 2005, p.19) discusses the freedom of the decision of an adult to be educated or not. He emphasises that this is a forced decision and links the decision on education to survival on the labour market. Fiedel (in Kodelja 2005, p.19) also connects motivation for learning with the fear of unemployment and draws attention to the possibility of unfair exclusion: "Because countries are not obligated to fund adult education, adult learning can become a mechanism of social exclusion and control." Kodelja (2005, p.18) considers the fair organisation of education: "The regulation of education would be fairer if every individual had the same number of years of free education, which they could take advantage of at any time in their life." We also believe that this would mean that those, who in their youth, for different also objective reasons, prematurely ended/interrupted their education, can at any time use their remaining number of years of free education. Consequently, the country would be able to distribute financial aid for education more fairly.

Adult education can transfer itself in contrast to its primary function, since it would serve to reduce the initial social disparity and should act as a type of counterweight for young people with worse opportunities. Social inequality among people is further deepened. Recent research in the UK, suggests that employers allow higher education for more educated people than those with lower levels of education, at lower positions. Once again we are witnessing a paradox, even in adulthood those who are more educated and have a higher baseline of education, than those with elementary and vocational school.

At the level of the European Commission, the Memorandum of the EU on Lifelong Learning was passed, where two attributes of lifelong learning are highlighted (Commission of the European Communities 2000, p.6):

1. De-centralisation of education: the responsibility for education is transferred from state/national level to local/regional level and to



the individual, who would be able to autonomously decide for education.

2. De-formalisation of the teachers' role: "where we would find guides, mentors and mediators. Their role – and this is the key meaning – is to help and support participants who, where possible, manage their own learning" (Commission of the European Communities 2000, p.15). Therefore, the responsibility for content is moved to a local level and to civil society organisations.

The Commission of the European Communities (2000, p.6) in the Memorandum of Lifelong Learning emphasise that lifelong learning is very important for the future of Europe and how in the next ten years, the European Union should be an example for the rest of the world. Europe has to show the world that it is possible to achieve dynamic economic growth and strengthen social cohesion.

There are various concerns about this kind of approach to education, e.g. Mojškerč (2002, p.76) warns, that the utilitarian user attitude to education, declining educational standards, de-centralisation and de-formalisation, do not serve an individual's well-being and greater social justice as promised, but rather the interests of capital.

## METHOD

The purpose of this research is to determine the reasons why we decide to study (lifelong learning) and reasons for continuous adult education in addition to what influences the success of individuals in education.

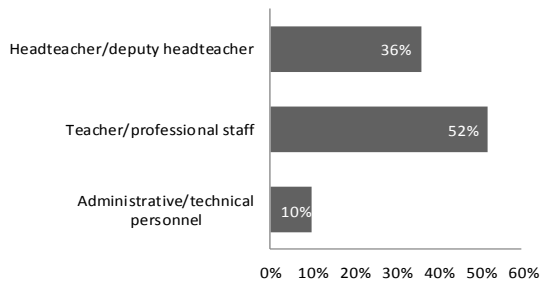
We designed a questionnaire for our research, which was then sent to institutions from the field of education in Slovenia (nurseries, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools and higher education institutions). Headteachers/deputy headteachers, teachers/professional staff and administrative/technical personnel, answered the questionnaires.

The questionnaire was prepared using Ika (an open source application which offers support for web service surveys), and was composed of 10 closed questions. The questionnaire was sent in December 2014 to all educational institutions (around 1000). We received 292 completed questionnaires from those asked, from which 184 were suitable for analysis. Hereinafter, the analysis and interpretation of responses are presented.

### Sample Characteristics

Of the 184 completed questionnaires, most respondents were teachers and professional staff, followed by management, with the least respondents being administrative/technical personnel, which is shown in detail in the figure 1.

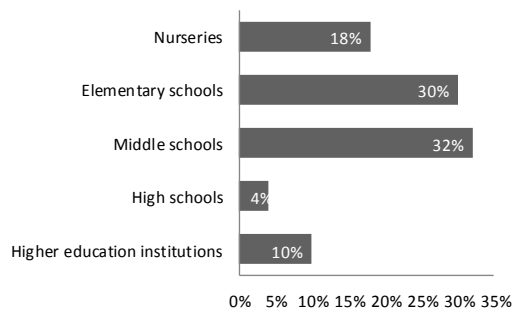




**Figure 1.** Respondents by Job Position (N 184)

Source: Own elaboration.

Of these, 34 (19%) were male and 149 (81%) female. On average, the respondents are aged 46, the youngest aged 25 and the oldest 64. Regarding the type of institution, a third was from elementary schools, a third from middle schools, and a third from other institutions, which is shown in detail in the figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Type of Institution (N 177)

Source: Own elaboration.

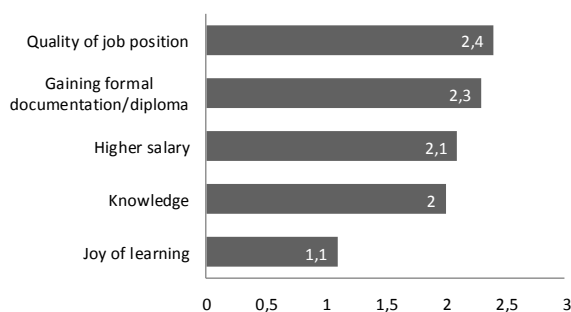
The majority of institutions were from central Slovenia 51 (29%), followed by institutions from the Savinja 27 (16%), Podravska 24 (13%), Pomurska 21 (12%) and Gorenjska 19 (11%) regions. In the remaining regions of Slovenia, less than 10% responded to the questionnaire.

## RESULTS

### Reasons for Deciding to Study

We asked for, what they believed today are the leading reasons for deciding to study. The reasons were ranked from 1 to 5, 1 being the least important reason and 5 being the most important reason.





**Figure 3.** Reasons for Deciding to Study (N 160)

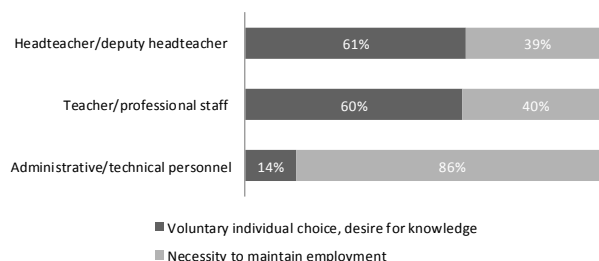
Source: Own elaboration.

It is clear from the figure 3 that the respondents believe that the leading reason for deciding to study today is the quality of job position (2.4), then gaining formal documentation/diploma (2.3), higher salary (2.1), followed by knowledge (2.0) and the joy of learning (1.1).

### Reasons for the Continuous Training of Adults

In the next question we asked for the leading reasons for the continuous training of adults. The respondents chose between two reasons: necessity to maintain employment or voluntary individual choice, desire for knowledge. The responses to the proposed reasons are rather equal, however the leading reason for the continuous training of adults is voluntary individual choice, desire for knowledge (92 responses/ 57%).

We were interested to see which reason the respondents chose with regards to their job position. From the figure 4 it is clear to see that the headteachers/deputy headteachers and teachers/professional staff are of the same opinion; that the leading reason is voluntary individual choice, desire for knowledge (60%), whilst administrative/technical personnel believe that the leading reason is necessity to maintain employment (86%).



**Figure 3.** Reasons for Continuous Training of Adults (by individual job position) (N 162)

Source: Own elaboration.

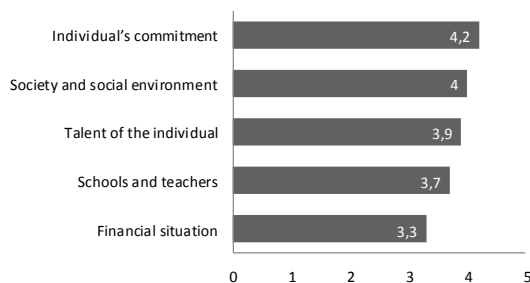


From the responses we can conclude that, those who have a higher level of education perceive adult training as a voluntary individual choice, desire for knowledge whilst those with a lower level of achieved education see training as a necessity to maintain employment.

### Factors for the Success of an Individual in Education

We asked the participants to rank to what extent they agree with the factors which influence on the success of an individual in education. 5 factors were available. The factors were ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being 'I don't agree', 5 being 'I strongly agree'.

From the figure below, it is clear that the respondents agreed mostly that the success of an individual in education is mostly influenced by an individual's commitment (4.0), followed by other (4.2), where they mostly stated: personal goals, promotion, motivation, connections and acquaintances; then society and social environment (4.0), talent of the individual (3.9), schools and teachers (3.7) and financial situation (3.3).



**Figure 4.** Factors for the Success of Individuals in Education (N 158)

Source: Own elaboration.

From the responses, we can conclude that the most important factor is how much effort an individual invests in education and how much commitment for knowledge they have. In the opinion of the respondents, the quality of education is in fourth place from which we can conclude that also the highest quality school, in the case of non-commitment of an individual, does not lead to the desired result.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

All people, in different stages of life should have equal opportunities to access quality learning. More and more adults are being persuaded towards education, lifelong learning is becoming a value, which is becoming an important factor in setting economic objectives of each country.





Lifelong learning can therefore also contribute to personal development and economic growth. It allows for personal fulfilment and influence on social development. However, it should not be forgotten that it could also be used as a strategy for exclusion and social control, as a mechanism that maintains and intensifies social inequality. Lifelong learning can open up a number of possibilities closely linked to socio-economic factors. It also often seems that the reason for active involvement in the lifelong learning process is a personal choice; however there are already tendencies to see our possibilities in life strongly outlined by complex social, structural and institutional factors (Barle Lakota & Sardoè 2015; Jošt 2012).

In the research, we found that the majority of respondents believe that education leads to a better quality job position. They particularly see the reason for continuous adult education in a desire for additional knowledge. From the analysis carried out, we can see that those who have a higher level of education perceive adult training as a voluntary individual choice, desire for knowledge, whilst those with a lower level of achieved education see training as a necessity to maintain employment. In addition we also found that individual commitment has the most influence on an individual's success in education.

We understand the current situation in Europe and especially in Slovenia, which refers to the number of unemployed graduates with higher education, to the over-educated and the fact that with (too high) numbers of graduates, comes devaluation of education.

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## POWODY UCZENIA SIĘ ORAZ UCZENIE SIĘ PRZEZ CAŁE ŻYCIE, SEKTOR EDUKACYJNY W SŁOWENII

### Abstrakt

**Tło badań.** Rozmiary starzejącego się społeczeństwa, które potrzebuje dodatkowego szkolenia oraz edukacji rosną w związku z wydłużającą się przeciętną długością życia oraz kilkoma niedemograficznymi czynnikami, na przykład, szybszym rozwojem technologii. Jedną z najważniejszych dyrektyw w obszarze edukacji w Unii Europejskiej jest Memorandum na temat uczenia się przez całe życie, które stwierdza, iż wszyscy ludzie mieszkający w Europie powinni mieć, bez wyjątku, równe możliwości, które dostosowują się do wymagań społecznego i gospodarczego życia, tak aby móc aktywnie uczestniczyć w kreowaniu przyszłości Europy. Uczenie się przez całe życie jest wartością, która stała się ważnym czynnikiem w określaniu celów gospodarczych poszczególnych krajów.

**Cel badań.** Celem niniejszego badania przeprowadzonego w mniejszej skali jest określenie powodów uczenia się oraz ustawicznej edukacji dorosłych jak również wskazanie czynników decydujących o sukcesie poszczególnych osób w edukacji.

**Metodyka.** Dane empiryczne zostały zgromadzone za pomocą kwestionariusza na próbie badawczej rekrutującej się z sektora edukacyjnego w Słowenii. Badanie pokazało, iż większość respondentów jest przekonana, że edukacja prowadzi do wyższej jakości na stanowiskach pracy. Szczególnie dostrzegają oni przyczynę ustawicznej edukacji dorosłych w chęci uzyskania dodatkowej wiedzy.

**Kluczowe wnioski.** Badania pokazały, iż ludzie z wyższym poziomem wykształcenia przestrzegają szkolenia dorosłych jako dobrowolny indywidualny wybór chęci zdobywania wiedzy, natomiast ludzie z niższym poziomem wykształcenia traktują szkolenia jako konieczność w utrzymaniu zatrudnienia. Dodatkowo, badania dowiodły, iż osobiste zaangażowanie ma największy wpływ na indywidualny sukces w osiągnięciach szkoleniowych i edukacyjnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** uczenie się przez całe życie, edukacja dorosłych, powody uczenia się, indywidualne osiągnięcia w edukacji, Słowenia

