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## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/18299

DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/18299>



### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### LIFELONG LEARNING AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS ON INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT PROCESSES

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#### Manuscript Info

##### Manuscript History

Received: 15 December 2023

Final Accepted: 18 January 2024

Published: February 2024

##### Key words:

Lifelong Learning, Social Inclusion,  
Individual Empowerment, Social  
Inequalities

#### Abstract

The area of lifelong learning is becoming increasingly important both collectively and individually and is a key success factor for personal and social development. Awareness of lifelong learning also strengthens the possibility of increasing personal income and at the same time enabling a better quality of life. All of this leads to an improvement not only on an individual level, but also for society as a whole. Although lack of equitable educational opportunities to individuals may result into social inequalities, which require targeted measures to deal with these issues. The main objective of this research is to explain the relationship between lifelong learning and social inclusion. By assessing educational access and opportunities, the study aims to examine the impacts of lifelong learning on individual empowerment processes, and thereby address social inequalities in educational opportunities. This research adopts a comprehensive study design, in which a detailed literature review analysis with case studies will be considered. Several academic books, peer-reviewed journals, and other formal publications will be used for literature review, while official reports may be used to derive case studies. The thematic coding and content analysis will be used to analyse key trends, insights, and challenges identified through gathered qualitative data. As a whole, lifelong learning can become a tool to promote social inclusion by offering equitable educational opportunities to all population groups. Barriers to educational opportunities, such as ineffective division of lifelong learning and traditional education, financial constraints, geographical barriers, and more focus on certain category of workers, must be addressed.

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#### Introduction:

In today's world, the development of global economy is inevitable without advanced knowledge and skills that play a critical role in enhancing competitiveness of a country. In order to become an economy backed up with knowledge and achievements, individuals must engage in lifelong learning. The term "lifelong learning" refers to a voluntary

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learning activities of an individual to improve its abilities, skills, and knowledge from an individual, societal, career, or municipal viewpoint (European Commission, 2001). In other words, lifelong learning is a process that transforms mind, body, and social experiences of an individual through formal education from any institution and informal learning environment, like at home, workplace, or in community. It empowers individuals by acquiring awareness, skills, values, and understanding about different areas that will be needed throughout their life, leading to playing a better role in the society (Kálmán & Thwe, 2023). Moreover, lifelong learning goes beyond traditional education, in which individuals are encouraged to keep on enhancing their expertise, which requires an equitable access to education, which comes under the concept of social inclusion. A variety of studies have been performed to examine the connection between lifelong learning and social inclusion. According to Greef, et al. (2012), lifelong learning not only helps an individual to secure an employment opportunity but also take active part in social and community networks. Moreover, Ceschi, et al. (2021) stated a positive impact of lifelong learning on individual empowerment and social integration by mentioning the importance of enhanced skills on employability that contributes to more inclusive society. While some scholars caution the complexity behind this relationship, due to multiple factors attached. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the intricate interplay between lifelong learning and social inclusion to determine how open access to educational opportunities can address social inequalities and accelerate individual empowerment.

This research delves into performing a comprehensive literature to assess the effects of lifelong learning on individual empowerment process by analysing educational access and opportunities. Moreover, the presence of social inequalities in educational opportunities will critically analysed in the context of lifelong learning. This study is mainly motivated by the imperative to address social inequalities in educational opportunities and the critical role of lifelong learning to promote social inclusion. Through both qualitative and quantitative analysis, the findings will be extracted to reach onto the conclusion.

### **Methods:**

In this research, the key relationship between lifelong learning and social inclusion will be explored. For this purpose, a research will perform based on an in-depth study design, encompassing a comprehensive literature review along with detailed case studies. For this research, it is important to understand the effects of lifelong learning on individual empowerment process to address social inequalities in educational opportunities, therefore, a broad range of scholarly articles, academic databases, and relevant publications will be considered to conduct an in-depth literature review analysis. According to Snyder (2019), literature review is an excellent way of synthesizing research findings, mainly to uncover the areas in which more research is required. Therefore, this study will follow an explanatory or inductive research design to assess the role of lifelong learning to promote social inclusion with the support of past studies done in the selected research area. Moreover, the case studies will be chosen from diverse settings, such as workplace environment, educational institutions, and community programs, in order to carry out a detailed research on the topic in various contexts. The element of diverse demographic backgrounds, such as educational levels, age, gender, and so on, will also be considered in the case studies, ensuring a detailed coverage of the topic.

In the case of literature review, the key source of resources and materials will involve policy documents, books, published research articles from peer-reviewed journals, and other renowned publications, in order to ensure the quality and authenticity of the past researches. While for the case studies, the 2 or 3 sample will be drawn from real-world cases, by using several sources, such as official government reports, NGOs reports (such as OECD, UNESCO, and others), CSR reports, and so on. International organization reports (such as WHO), books, and so on. It will help to consider dynamic cases that can clearly illustrate interplay between lifelong learning, social inclusion, and individual empowerment.

With regards to sampling method, this research will adopt a systematic approach for literature for identifying and including researches that fulfil pre-defined criteria, such as latest publications (last ten years), relevance to research objectives, and so on. While in case of case studies, a 2 or 3 sample of cases will be purposively selected aligned with research objectives by ensuring a diverse range of cases representing diverse demographics and learning settings.

In this research, the results will be measures and observed based on qualitative research method. The definition of lifelong learning and its relationship with social inclusion and individual empowerment will be determined through

the past studies, from which key findings, theories, and concepts will be derived. On the other hand, case studies analysis will be performed to assess the experience of lifelong learning on society and then impact on individuals.

Considering the qualitative research methodology, both thematic coding and content analysis will be considered to perform literature review and case studies analysis. The use of thematic approach will help to organize ideas based on the topic to present evolution, definition, trends, and gaps in the current study (Nowell, et al., 2017). In this research, the thematic approach will help to first understand the meaning of lifelong learning and its relationship with social inclusion, as well as its impact on addressing social inequalities and empowering individuals. Similarly, in the case studies, the thematic approach will be used to determine the relationship between lifelong learning and the importance of educational equality for empowering individuals. Moreover, visualization tools, like thematic maps or figures/tables can be used to visualise the past studies and case study findings in an appealing and concise manner.

### **Results / Literature Review:**

In recent decades, the field of lifelong learning has become increasingly important. The research in this thesis has shown that it can be a decisive success factor for both the individual and the collective sphere. But it is not limited to formal education systems but encompasses vocational learning. In other words, lifelong learning can be considered as a learning leading to self-development or self-actualisation (Selvi, 2009). It is mainly linked with the idea of individual achievement, including elements of skills and knowledge acquisition and of people who have passion to keep on learning and growing. Although it is difficult to reach onto exact definition due to being an unsettled concept. While Davies & Norman (1996) tried to define lifelong learning as the human potential growth with the help of continuous supportive process that empowers and stimulates an individual to get all understanding, skills, values, and knowledge through their lifetime, and then apply them with enjoyment, creativity, and confidence in all environment settings. Overall, the concept of lifelong learning gave birth to several principles, such as equality of opportunity, access to lifelong education, and the centrality of the learner with all types of learning experiences. But still our research showed that lifelong learning contains three elements that are embedded with each other, including long-term results of lifelong learning that helps in making a highly qualified labour force, personal development that leads to better life style, and lastly, the formation of more inclusive society.

Different studies demonstrated that lifelong learning encompasses the elements of self-directed learning, continuing education, and adult education, allowing individuals to reach on full potential and become empowered. While Lonela (2012) believed that lifelong learning not only plays a significant role in personal development but also societal growth, as it allows individuals to acquire useful skills that can increase their chances of employability. Therefore, individuals are more motivated to join lifelong learning programmes, such as a research performed by Rothas, et al. (2014), which demonstrated that lifelong learning may benefit more to unemployed people with lower education level, as they are highly motivated to participate in lifelong learning programmes to improve their work status and economic situation. Moreover, McGuinness (2011) underpinned the lifelong learning concept with the significance of information society to eliminate social division and enhance democratic engagement by providing an equal access to knowledge, creating and sustaining economic competitiveness due to talented workforce, and empowering individuals to make efficient use of information on daily basis. This clearly reflects the important role of lifelong learning in promoting social inclusion and individual empowerment process, which is the main objective of our research. It is clear that education benefits both individuals and the society, as individuals with higher educational opportunities will lead to higher income, better life style, and active participation in the society (Field, et al., 2007). This puts responsibility on every government to provide an equal access to educational opportunities to all individuals, so they can develop their skills and abilities irrespective of their circumstances and background, and become empower to work for the betterment of the society, which has reflected in our research. No doubt, educational opportunities can foster inclusive development, requiring certain measures on country-level to provide equal opportunities for empowering individuals to play their role in societal growth, overcome educational barriers and promote social inclusion.

Several studies have performed to examine the barriers hindering equitable access to lifelong learning and then its role in promoting social inequalities. One of key barrier is the ineffective division between lifelong learning and traditional education, as traditional education includes strict courses, compulsions, and so on that are set by institutions, while lifelong learning demands flexibility in teaching method, time, content, and so on that must be designed as per the need of individual. But as our research reflected that most of the lifelong learning programmes, mainly offered in higher education schools, are based on traditional system, which is the key role in discouraging

individuals to participate in it (Nesbit et.al., 2013). In addition, another barrier noted in our research, i.e. lack of financial resources, as the lifelong learning programmes are additional to formal education and often not supported by government, therefore, individuals are bound to register in private programmes, which are mostly expensive, so the individuals with low financial resources cannot get registered, leading to inequalities. Moreover, different respondents mentioned the geographical barriers, especially for individuals belong to rural or remote areas, as they do not get the facility of any lifelong learning programmers in nearest vicinity, leading to disparity at society. This represents social inequalities due to lack of educational opportunities to diverse population. Such as Jarvis (2007) highlighted that even at the current times of globalisation and the presence of knowledge economy, educational opportunities for lifelong learning are not evenly spread across all population. He argued that knowledge economy requires a certain category of workers that create a significant impact on the development of lifelong learning, such as currently, the need for individuals with high-tech expertise is high, therefore, all educational programmes are mostly related to technology, causing discouragement among people from other categories to participate in any lifelong learning experience.

As a whole, the concept of lifelong learning and social inclusion is deeply rooted in the historical evolution of educational paradigms and societal development. Different scholars mentioned the significance of lifelong learning, as the idea of learning as a long-term phenomenon has engraved in almost every culture and civilization of the world. For instance, during the renaissance, the humanistic movement emphasized on the importance of education, not only to gather information and skills, but to become a well-rounded person. Similarly, after industrial revolution at 19<sup>th</sup> century, a significant shift in educational demand was noted to cater the ever-changing economic settings (Beno, 2019). Moreover, the Civil Rights and Social Justice movements were started in 20<sup>th</sup> century that supported equal opportunities and rights for all people. These movements were mainly based on creating new educational policies, giving access to diverse population groups, and emphasizing inclusivity (Hanges, et al., 2013). Despite of all these efforts, there are still lack of studies that clearly stated the role of lifelong learning in promote social inclusion, therefore, our research aims to understand and assess this role, and provide recommendations to promote educational opportunities for everyone.

## **Conclusion:**

As a whole, lifelong learning has become a significant concept in today's world. It promotes human potential growth due to continuous supportive process to empower and stimulate an individual through learning different values, knowledge, skills, and information. Along with personal development, lifelong learning plays an important role in societal development. Lifelong learning helps individuals to learn new skills and expertise that can help them to get better jobs, increase their life style, and thus contribute to the society. This clearly reflects the importance of education for better society, but it requires equitable educational opportunities to all individuals, irrespective of diverse population groups. As individuals may face different barriers in equal access to lifelong learning that can lead to social inequalities, such as ineffective division of lifelong learning and traditional education, financial constraints, geographical barriers, and more focus on certain category of workers. Overall, the research found the positive relationship between lifelong learning and social inclusion that is deeply rooted in historical evolution of educational paradigms and societal development.

Owing to this, it is important to perform a comprehensive analysis on the role of lifelong learning on the individual empowerment, and how it can help to address social inequalities. This research area can help users to determine the importance of lifelong learning for individuals and initiate programmes, as it will not only promote personal development but also societal development. Despite of such importance, there is a significant lack of research in this area. Majority of the studies are only focused on the role and importance of lifelong learning for the society as a whole, without consider the diverse population groups and the constraints faced by them to get lifelong learning experience. Moreover, past studies do not encompass any suitable ways to promote educational opportunities to all individuals, irrespective of their age, gender, area, and so on. This reflects a significant research gaps in the current studies. In conclusion, lifelong learning can serve as a tool to promote social inclusion, but it requires some target measures to overcome barriers that hinder educational opportunities available for everyone. Therefore, this research focuses on performing an in-depth research analysis to assess the role of lifelong learning and to fill the gaps in the current studies. Moreover, th main objective of this research is to analyse the effects of lifelong learning on social inclusion as an effective tool along with developing recommendations to promote educational opportunities for diverse population groups.

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