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The importance of lifelong learning has been increasing

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Abstract

Lifelong learning is the lifewide, voluntary and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for not only personal but professional reasons as well. It does not only enhance social inclusion, active citizenship and individual development, but also increases competitiveness and employability. The importance of Lifelong Learning has been increasing for some important reasons. These are increasing of life expectancy, increasing the “old-age dependency” ratio, to desire for increasing the life quality, and trying to keep themselves in good physical and mental condition by humans. Due to these reasons, the importance of Lifelong Learning has been increasing.

1. Introduction

Chinese philosopher and politician Guanzi put emphasis on the importance of education by saying: “If you plan next year, raise corn, if you plan next decade, raise tree, if you plan the future life, educate human”.

Mankind has spent great effort to survive on earth since the beginning of life. He transferred his culture to next generations via informal education (Inside the family, master-apprentice relations etc.) in early ages, but after industrial revolution, he has transferred it via formal education in schools and later on via informal means, such as certificate programmes and courses after graduation.

Society structure has been changing in the 21th century due to technological revolution which has been lasted for two centuries. Especially, the revolutions, in last 50 years, facilitated mankind’s improvement incredibly (Demirel M., 2009).

The “Atomic Age” started with the use of nuclear weapons through the end of WWII and followed by “Space Age” started with mankind stepping on the Moon. Through the development of information technologies and the internet which started as a military project, Information Age was reached. Today, the most valuable source is “Information”.

The changes in social structure in relation with technological improvement showed us that classical education methods are not good enough anymore. Especially, the societies can adapt to globalization, the world without boundaries due to “learn how to learn” and “lifelong learning” systems easily and reach the level that they deserve.

The societies, mentioned above, not only maintain classical education methods but named graduation dates as “commencement” to put emphasis on the beginning of main fight. People study to improve themselves and try to double their capability in every four year to adapt themselves to the information age (Johnson, 2009).

The structure of job has been changing during the passing process from “industrial society” to the “information society”. The workers need to learn new things and improve themselves to have new skills. The global competition,

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fast changing, having differences, and flexible organization have become more important in information society. Some researchers say that industrial society created industrial agriculture. The functions of Industrial society have been transformed to “information jobs” due to the information society.

The qualifications of workers have been improved due to Information Technologies. High skill workers have become main aspect to sustain societies’ life.

Beside this, the technologies and products can become old fashion in a short time. The firms have been forced to create differences and innovate themselves to compete in global world (Bozkurt, 2005).

Alfred North Whitehead said (1931) that people cannot use what they learned in early age forever. This explanation may be considered as the first awareness of Lifelong Learning in society.

Especially, the main purpose of education is transferring global values to individuals. The education system in information society shouldn’t be limited to schools, never ends, even high educated people need to learn something more (Drucker, 1996).

The Lifelong Learning recognises that learning is not confined to childhood or the classroom, but takes place throughout life and in a variety of situations. During the last fifty years, constant scientific and technological innovation and changes have had a profound effect on learning needs and styles.

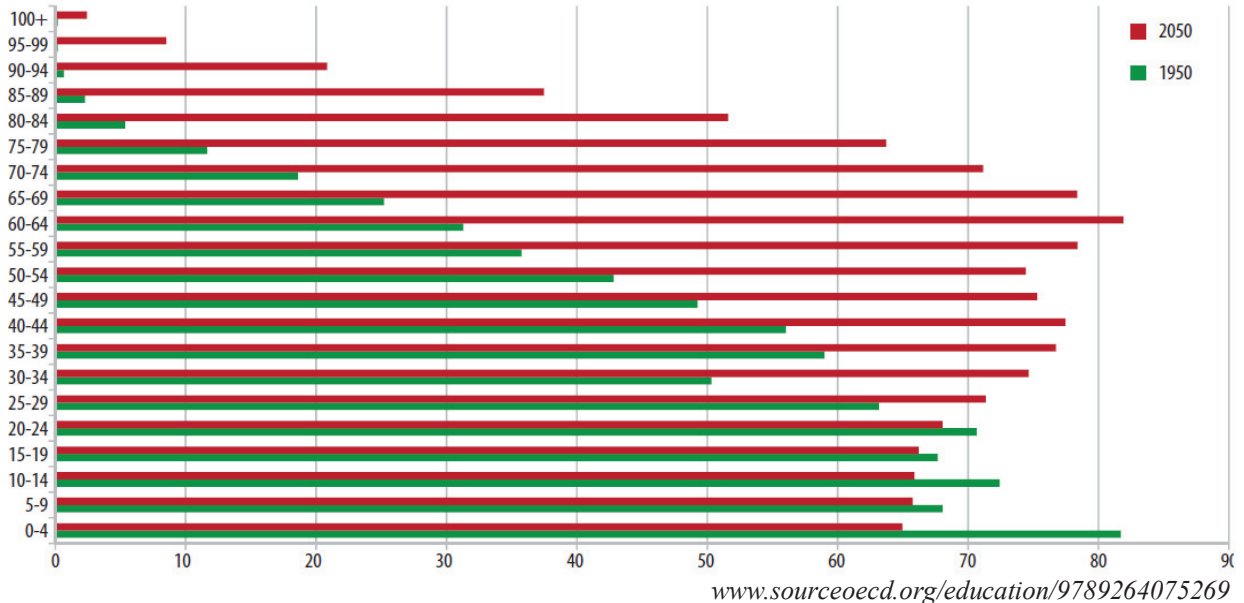
The meaning of Lifelong Learning includes a process from “cradle to grave” without constraining it to specific time periods, years, certain organizations or institutions (Colakoglu, 2002).

We may explain the importance of Lifelong Learning that has become indispensable part of individual’s and societies’ life in four areas.

The first one is related to the increase of life expectancy. We may see this on the figure 2.1 (OECD, 2010) below.

Figure 2.1. From “bottom-heavy” to “top-heavy” age structures

Age structure in more developed regions (in millions of people per age bracket), 1950 and 2050



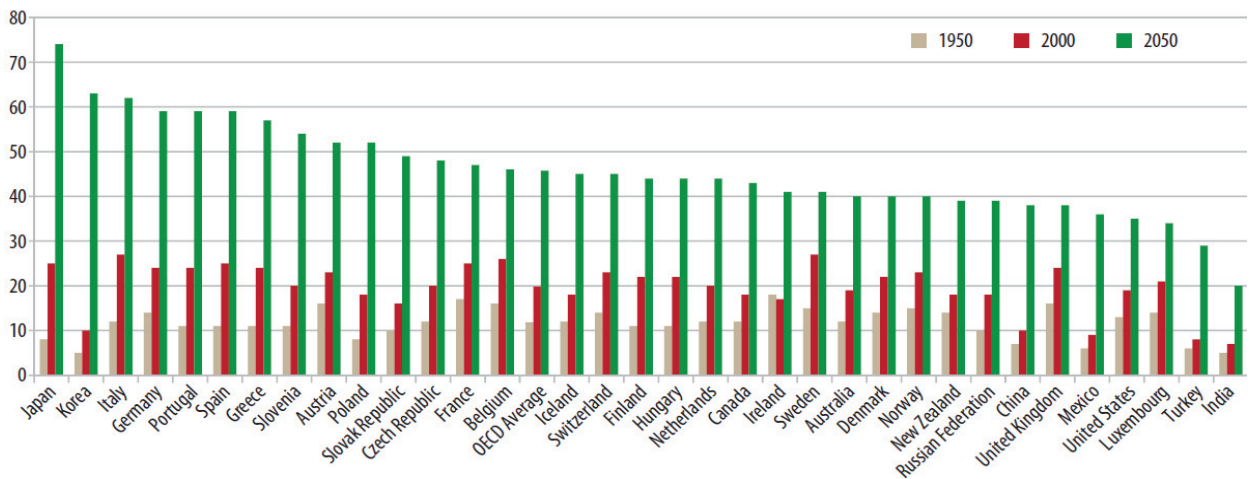
According to this data, life expectancy has been increasing up to 80-90 years old or more and the percentage of young generations has been decreasing day by day. The only way of keeping the quantity and quality of active labourship is to establish Lifelong Learning system today.

In the same context, retirement age has been increasing in all countries. In the future, retirement age may be increased up to 75-80 years old. If this happens, it will be impossible to work with the knowledge acquired from formal education period. Everyone will improve him/herself in his/her area and has to be specialist in other areas as well, to work as active workers for 50 or 55 years. This will become more important in this incredible fast changing world to provide secure future. Otherwise, it will be impossible to have confidence for the future life, especially for the retirement period.

The second reason is, as seen on the figures 2.1 and 2.2 (OECD, 2010), the ratio of old generation is getting higher and the ratio of young generation is getting lower.

We can see on the figure below that “old-age dependency” on active workers (15-60 years old) has been increasing in all countries.

Figure 2.2. The “old-age dependency ratio” set to double by 2050
Population aged 65 years and over per 100 persons aged 15-64 years, 1950, 2000 and 2050



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Because of the decrease on the ratio of young generations, their labourship will become very valuable. To complete some of the labourship of young generations, we will need to prepare some older generations. It is not possible to complete active working period, to maintain personnel capacity, and be specialist in one major field via basic formal education. Everyone must improve him/herself in more than one field. This means, we will need some more education for old generations to equip them some more skills and information. Lifelong Learning plays a great role in saving people from poverty by, for example, providing them with the right skills for the labour market.

The third reason is increasing life quality. One needs to learn and effectively use of technological development to increase the quality of life. If someone doesn't learn how to use ATM machine, online banking, online shopping, communication via internet, driving new technology cars, life may become very difficult.

Lifelong learning is a process in which individuals retain their development of knowledge, skills, and interests in their lives and opportunities of learning (Richardson, 1978).

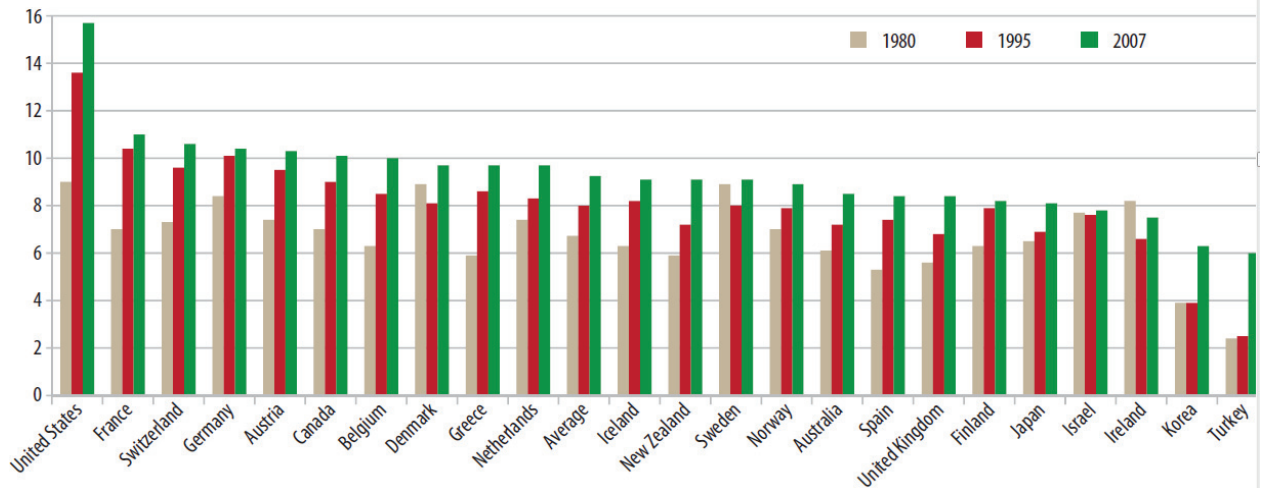
The fourth and last reason is a person desiring him/herself in good physical and mental condition.

Today's managers and workers must keep their mental health well along with their physical health like a model / sportsman's efforts to keep their physical condition in good state. One of the ways to be fit is feeling in secure for the future. Older people should take education and apply that in their life in order not to be unemployed and sustain healthy life. This will also reduce the government expenses for the social security system and gives a chance to use this money for other social systems, such as education, health, security, and others.

We should think about the role of Lifelong Learning in the overall goal of improving societal and individual well-being, to take-up of adult learning opportunities which are closely related to initial levels of educational

attainment, and reducing inequalities. We should think about making tertiary and adult education more equal. These efforts may give us a chance to invest money for economical purposes and some projects related to the improvement of welfare and health conditions of the society. In this way, many older people will be mentally and physically active for much longer. This will reduce the high cost health expenses of the countries as seen on the figure 2.3 (OECD, 2010) below.

Figure 2.3. Rising health expenditure
Total expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP, in 1980, 1995 and 2007



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2. Conclusion

As a conclusion, Lifelong Learning is based on some basic elements. These are continuity, creativity, and learning how to learn by themselves (Demirel O. 2005). We need some basic skills for Lifelong Learning. These are managing him/herself, communication, managing the people and him/herself, and adaptation capability to the changes and new things (Hart, 2006).

Lifelong Learning is the level that people have reached today through the experiences in the field of education. It is impossible to keep away from the today's changes and that is the first condition of improvement. As Darwin said "Today's living creatures are neither powerful nor clever of their kinds. Today's living creatures have been adapted themselves to the changes". One of the main purposes of education is to give global values to the students/learners, especially in this information age. The education in "Information Society" is not limited with schools and never ends until death.

States and societies must be part of active life to adapt themselves and educate their people according to the era's conditions for being the leader of the changes. We must take care of not only economic outcomes of Lifelong Learning system but the importance of its role to sustain and improve human's life quality.

The Lifelong Learning system, which has a cradle until death philosophy, provides us competition power to maintain our positions in society and in the world. Lifelong Learning has been considered as the real life like Ataturk's said "Main school is troop (Real life, active duty period)". It has been the hope and one of the important parts of the education and the economic systems in today's world.

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