

# UNIVERSITIES' ROLES IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' LIFE-LONG LEARNING CAPABILITY

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**Abstract:** *In the context of the 4.0 scientific and technological revolution and the development of the knowledge economy, globalization and international integration strongly affect the lives of people in all countries worldwide, and the treasure trove of information and knowledge of humanity is increasingly being nurtured and shared. This requires people to constantly learn and study throughout their lives to meet the job requirements in the current context. With the strong development of science and technology, lifelong learning has become an indispensable part of higher education. This is a favourable condition for developing lifelong learning goals for students. In reality, the role of universities in developing lifelong learning capabilities for students in the higher education system in Vietnam still lacks mechanisms and synchronization, as they are mainly built and used independently in each university; this lack of coordination and sharing leads to ineffective lifelong learning capabilities of students. As the backbone, the higher education system needs to deploy appropriate and practical solutions to pioneer in developing lifelong learning capabilities for students to build a learning society and lifelong learning.*

**Keywords:** *Role, university, capacity development, learning, lifelong learning.*

## **I. Introduction**

The scientific and technological revolution, along with the explosion of information and the emergence of new knowledge and technologies in the world, has created essential premises for the world's industrial economy to shift towards the knowledge economy. This clearly shows that the knowledge and skills that were previously acquired cannot be used throughout one's lifetime, and

previous education no longer meets new demands. Therefore, educating students to develop lifelong learning abilities to build a learning society is an urgent task and a strategic requirement, a basic and long-term mission of each university. Creating a learning society determines the success of the industrialization and modernization process of Vietnam's economic development into a knowledge-based economy.

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## II. Theoretical basis

### 2.1. *The concept of lifelong learning and the characteristics of lifelong learning*

#### 2.1.1. *Lifelong learning*

There are many different concepts of lifelong learning. This broad and complex concept is used in many fields, from education to society, economy, and culture. Some countries develop lifelong learning policies consistent with international organisations' definitions, such as UNESCO and OECD. In contrast, other countries only accept some of these definitions or develop their understanding of the concept [1].

According to UNESCO, lifelong learning "is not only diversifying learning places and methods, expanding access opportunities, but changing the subject of action from educators to learners. Its value is nothing more than an inspiration for a new idea about human society. Lifelong learning is a sustainable development, a latent germ from which a different society can sprout; a society that values learning for its utility and its own sake" [10]. Under this understanding, lifelong learning is considered a human experience, a model for developing human potential, which when realized can lead to a "new" society that has not yet been imagined, such as "smart cities," "smart society," and "digital economy."

According to the European Commission (OECD), lifelong learning includes all learning activities undertaken throughout life to enhance knowledge, skills, and abilities in personal, citizen, social or employment-related aspects [4]. The comprehensive definition of OECD includes all purposeful learning activities, from infancy to death, aimed at enhancing

knowledge and capabilities for individuals who desire to engage in learning activities [9]. In both definitions, the intention or purpose of learning is an important point that distinguishes these activities from non-learning activities, such as cultural or sports activities.

The interest in lifelong learning focuses on understanding lifelong learning from the perspective of time and space in human life [8]. The most common definition of lifelong learning regards it as a process that occurs throughout one's life through educational methods both inside and outside of schools, especially emphasizing self-learning. Such a simple and concise definition may still be lacking, not fully reflecting the core aspects of lifelong learning, such as the complexity of lifelong learning, and the development of potentialities in terms of character and abilities of lifelong learners.

Some universities focus on the continuing education aspect of lifelong learning, also known as adult education - education provided to adults after they have left the formal education system, including short-term or part-time courses. This contribution has been made previously as university educators have actively provided continuing education programs. However, visibility is an issue as formal education programs vastly overshadow these short-term courses/programs. In many cases, most continuing education is provided in a non-concentrated (departmentalized) manner, and the challenge, even at the university level, is to have a good overview. This is a significant disadvantage for professional learners, who must navigate their way through information-heavy websites to determine what they are interested in.

### 2.2.2. *Characteristics of lifelong learning*

Lifelong learning continuously updates and expands one's knowledge and skills throughout life. This process always continues because there is no limit to the knowledge and skills we can learn.

Continuity is one of the important characteristics of lifelong learning. This means that learning does not only occur in a specific stage but is a continuous learning process throughout life. Lifelong learning is a never-ending process, and learners always update their knowledge and develop new skills to meet the changing and developing needs of science, technology, and society.

**Positivity:** Lifelong learning requires a positive attitude and a commitment to constantly improving oneself. To carry out the process of lifelong learning, each individual needs a positive attitude and a commitment to education and development oneself. These are very important factors in overcoming difficulties and challenges in learning and improving one's knowledge and skills to achieve personal goals. A positive attitude helps learners to maintain motivation and enthusiasm in the learning process, overcome difficulties and challenges, maintain persistence and consistency, and achieve their goals.

**Innovation:** Lifelong learning requires adapting to changes and innovations in technology, science, and technology in the learning process to develop oneself. This is a very important factor in overcoming difficulties and challenges in learning and improving one's knowledge and skills.

In summary, lifelong learning helps us update new knowledge and skills

but also helps us develop ourselves and expand our vision in life. It is a necessary process to help us meet the requirements of a world that is constantly changing and evolving rapidly.

### 2.2.3. *Factors affecting lifelong learning capacity development for students*

**Students' learning needs:** Students' learning needs are one of the important factors that affect their lifelong learning capacity development. Students should be motivated and perseverance to learn and develop skills, as well as a clear goal to develop their career.

**Learning environment and support:** A good learning environment can provide favorable conditions for students to learn and develop lifelong learning skills. A good learning environment is a place where teachers, students, and support staff provide full learning support, quality learning materials, and infrastructure to meet students' lifelong learning needs.

**Teaching methods:** Different teaching methods can affect students' lifelong learning skill development. Effective teaching methods must meet students' lifelong learning needs and help them develop thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

**Faculty and academic advisors:** Quality faculty is an important factor that affects students' lifelong learning skill development. Teachers should have deep expertise, teaching experience, and good interaction with students to help them develop lifelong learning skills. Academic advisors can help students develop their lifelong learning capacity by providing support, advice, and guidance during their learning and personal development process.

### **III. Research Methodology**

#### ***3.1. Literature Review Method***

- By reading, researching, and studying literature collected from books, scientific articles, and research works at home and abroad on lifelong learning to clarify the understanding of universities' role in developing students' lifelong learning capabilities.

#### ***3.2. Analysis, Statistics, and Synthesis Method***

- In this article, the author used quantitative analysis methods based on survey questionnaires, statistics, and description combined with analysis and synthesis methods to provide insights and evaluations of universities' role in developing students' lifelong learning capabilities.

### **IV. Results and discussion**

#### ***4.1. The role of universities in developing lifelong learning capabilities for students***

Lifelong learning is a crucial goal and task for every student sitting on the university campus. With the development of science and technology, lifelong learning for students is more critical than ever. Universities must ensure that students have the necessary knowledge and skills to use throughout their lives. Lifelong learning promotes creativity and innovation while bringing positive cognitive benefits to participating students. The participation of current and former students is crucial in creating a community consciousness within and outside the university and in other fields. It is also essential for promoting the university's brand and for the sensitivity to cultural and organizational characteristics that future students are looking for. So, what can

universities do to build a lifelong learning culture - a culture that makes students and faculty feel a long-term connection to the university?

There are many reasons for the strong development of lifelong learning. For starters, we are experiencing a decline in knowledge, with 25% of what we know now being irrelevant in just two years [5]. We are living and working longer, meaning that "formal education" contributes to personal development, knowledge, and skills that end at age 20 and do not last throughout our careers. The fourth industrial revolution and future labour demand are pure jobs and the development of many different inter-industry fields. Technology and artificial intelligence are playing an essential role in addressing many of the social challenges we face. The current labour shortage in many areas, such as healthcare, elderly care, education, and transitioning to a new work environment, requires us to accumulate knowledge, skills, and abilities constantly. Moreover, digitalization is rapidly developing in almost every area of society. Recruitment trends are changing in some companies with the introduction of training and practice programs, where candidates must demonstrate their abilities rather than just their degrees as we become increasingly part of the dynamic workforce [7].

The core mission of education is to instil willpower and promote learning. Education should create self-directed learners with learning and self-learning skills. The university is a high-level learning organization essential to developing lifelong learning capabilities for students. The four competencies that universities excel in training adult learners are learning and self-learning

skills, proactive action-taking ability, information skills, and creativity [8].

Universities are essential factors in promoting lifelong learning for students. They have special conditions to develop skills and cultivate knowledge, as well as the ability to mobilize educational resources and provide learning opportunities for students. This affirms a fundamental change, from educating young students in secondary schools to encouraging learners from different backgrounds to participate in higher education at different ages and stages.

While higher education has great potential to promote lifelong learning, its practical contributions still need to be recognized. Many universities prioritize in-depth research and focus little on expanding access and participation in learning opportunities. A significant transformation from universities to lifelong learning organizations is required to achieve the vision expressed through the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, accurately presented in Goal 4.

A university is a place that provides students with the knowledge and professional skills foundation, helping them understand and master the knowledge and skills required in their field of study. University training programs often include basic and in-depth subjects that help students develop and enhance their knowledge and skills. In addition, universities also provide students with opportunities to access practical experiences and the latest learning materials, assisting students in grasping the latest trends in their field.

In addition to providing professional knowledge, universities also play an essential role in developing students'

soft skills. Extracurricular activities, research projects, and internship programs at universities provide students with opportunities to hone their communication, leadership, teamwork, and other skills, helping students develop comprehensively and become professionals.

Universities also play an essential role in providing resources and support for students in lifelong learning. Academic centres, libraries, academic advisors, and highly qualified faculty support students in developing lifelong learning skills. Additionally, international study and scholarship programs allow students to access different cultures and receive financial support for career development. Universities provide students with the necessary knowledge and professional skills to continue their education and career development in the future. These skills and expertise are fundamental to adapting to changes in various fields and new technologies. However, the development of lifelong learning skills depends mainly on the mindset and attitude of each individual and is not limited to the time spent studying at university. Furthermore, universities also play an essential role in promoting a lifelong learning spirit for students. Universities often provide innovative educational programs, encourage students to access new knowledge, and provide motivation to learn and develop.

To complete this study, the author surveyed 178 lecturers, administrators, and students from some universities in Hanoi about the role of universities in developing lifelong learning capabilities for students in universities. The Likert scale was used to measure the impact of the role of universities in developing

lifelong learning capabilities for students. The study surveyed the following main content:

- The concept of lifelong learning
- Strategies and policies for lifelong learning in universities.
- The role of universities in developing lifelong learning capabilities for students.
- Technology support in developing lifelong learning capabilities of students.
- Factors affecting the lifelong learning needs of students.

The survey results show that over 70% of teachers believe lifelong learning has various interpretations. However, all of these interpretations contain their main elements: the process of lifelong learning taking place through educational methods both inside and outside the classroom, particularly emphasizing self-learning. On the other hand, more than 80% of teachers believe that universities play an essential role in developing lifelong learning capabilities for students as they provide a knowledge and skill foundation. The results also show that 74% of teachers agree that lifelong learning is a research and teaching field to help students develop lifelong learning abilities. Regarding opinions on universities as leaders in lifelong learning strategies and policies and on universities establishing international partnerships and connections to exchange knowledge on lifelong learning, few teachers hold these views, with more interest from teachers and management staff at universities that provide distance learning. Universities focusing on regular training have not paid much attention to developing lifelong learning capabilities for regular students. Finally, the results show that over 80%

of teachers believe that the “structure” of universities needs to be changed and that IT experts should play an essential role in developing lifelong learning capabilities for students and solving any problems they may encounter. In general, 81.65% of teachers believe that developing lifelong learning capabilities for students is necessary to improve the overall quality of university education and the quality of human resources.

In summary, universities play an essential role in developing lifelong learning skills for students by providing them with specialized knowledge, skills and experiences, tools and resources for lifelong learning, promoting lifelong learning spirit, and training students on creative thinking and problem-solving.

#### ***4.2. Factors affecting lifelong learning capacity development for students***

The survey results on factors affecting lifelong learning capacity development for students showed that 85% of students need lifelong learning capacity development. This indicates that students are aware of the trend of social development in the context of the 4.0 revolution and the development of the knowledge economy. This is one of the critical factors affecting the development of students’ learning capacity. Students need motivation, perseverance to learn and develop skills, and a clear career development goal.

- Regarding the factor of the learning environment and learning support: The survey results showed that up to 74% of students believe that the learning environment is critical in developing lifelong learning capacity for students. A good learning environment will create

favourable conditions for students to learn and develop lifelong learning skills. A good learning environment includes full support from teachers, students, and learning support staff, quality learning materials, and facilities that meet the lifelong learning needs of students. In addition, education support from the university, such as counselling services, and personal and community learning support, can also affect students' lifelong learning skills development. Learning support must meet the learning needs of students, help them solve problems related to learning, and develop their lifelong learning skills.

- Regarding teaching methods, up to 82% of students surveyed said that different teaching methods could affect the development of lifelong learning skills for students. Effective teaching methods can create students' interest in learning and develop their thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, helping students enhance their lifelong learning capacity.

- Regarding the faculty and learning advisors, over 80% of students surveyed said that the faculty and learning advisors play an essential role in students' lifelong learning capacity development. The care and sharing of teachers and learning advisors help students overcome barriers and difficulties in learning. Therefore students feel motivated and necessary to develop lifelong learning capacity for themselves.

#### **V. Some solutions for developing lifelong learning capabilities of students in universities.**

To help students develop lifelong learning capabilities in universities, universities need to implement some meaningful solutions as follows:

*Firstly*, universities need to promote propaganda on lifelong learning and build a learning society so that people and communities can recognize the importance and urgency of updating, absorbing, and applying new knowledge to production and social activities to increase labour productivity, economic growth, poverty reduction, cultural development, and improve the quality of life. Communication must ensure practicality and effectiveness, attracting the attention and active participation of all levels, sectors, organizations, associations, and social forces. It encourages students to actively learn regularly, continuously, and lifelong, aiming to build a learning society.

*Secondly*, innovation in lifelong learning methods and forms continuous training programs: This is an essential solution to ensure that students can continue to develop their skills and knowledge after graduation. Universities can provide updated training programs for graduates or non-graduates to register for new courses to enhance their skills in their interested fields. Build a continuous training program system for graduates and update course programs in their professional areas. These programs can be provided online or in person. They provide highly applicable training programs that meet society's human resource development needs. Universities can collaborate with businesses and organizations to create the latest continuous training programs that meet the needs of the labour market. Ensure that ongoing training programs are designed to meet the needs of students and have high flexibility to fit their busy schedules. Universities can create online courses and free resources to ensure students can access classes flexibly and conveniently.

- Building a friendly learning environment for students

Building a friendly learning environment is essential to developing lifelong learning skills for university students. Creating a convenient learning environment will make students feel comfortable and focused and have better learning abilities. Universities can create a friendly learning environment by providing and ensuring students with adequate facilities such as classrooms, libraries, computer rooms, laboratories, seminars rooms, and other facilities that help students have a comfortable and complete learning space. The school must also provide learning support equipment such as computers, projectors, learning materials, books, online lectures, and other digital tools to help students learn more efficiently.

To build a friendly learning environment, the school must create a safe learning environment where students can focus on learning without being disrupted by surrounding factors. Students must also feel comfortable expressing their views, discussing, and sharing their opinions in class. The university needs to create social interaction activities to help students build relationships with each other. It may include gatherings, social events, sports, and volunteer activities.

They are regularly capturing feedback and contributions from students to improve management regulations. In addition, student organizations must deploy cultural, artistic, and healthy sports activities to attract many students to participate actively, aiming to train health, educate ethics, and high ideals for each student.

- It is necessary to expand

mechanisms regularly and methods of contacting and soliciting students' opinions on issues related to learning, such as curriculum frameworks, teaching quality, and evaluation of lecturers. In addition, the assessment, grading of training, as well as scholarship policies, rewards, and discipline for students in each semester, academic year, or the entire training process must ensure the principles of objectivity, fairness, and effectiveness, creating motivation to stimulate the learning enthusiasm among students.

- The university can provide students with soft skills training courses, including communication, time management, teamwork, self-management, and problem-solving skills. These are essential skills that students need to learn and develop on their own. Analyzing the skill needs of students: The university can analyze the skill needs of students by conducting surveys or interviewing students. It helps the university understand the soft skills students must develop for lifelong learning. Designing soft skills training programs: Based on the results of the analysis of the skill needs of students, the university can design relevant soft skills training programs. This program should include skills such as communication skills, time management skills, teamwork skills, self-management skills, and problem-solving skills. Applying active learning methods: The university can use active learning methods and create conditions for students to actively participate in soft skills training activities such as attending training sessions, mentoring programs, or participating in volunteer activities to help students develop their soft skills. Improving teaching methods: The university can improve teaching methods by using advanced technology and diverse

learning methods, providing conditions for students to learn more effectively. It also helps students develop lifelong learning skills and equips them with creative, self-learning, and problem-solving skills.

*Thirdly*, creating in-depth learning programs.

To create in-depth learning programs for students, the university must clearly define the training program's objectives. These objectives must be consistent with students' lifelong learning needs and meet the labour market's requirements. The university selects experts and professors with high professional qualifications to help design in-depth learning programs more effectively. Experienced lecturers understand teaching and acquire professional knowledge to help students learn more effectively. The content of the in-depth learning program needs to closely follow the objectives of the training program and be designed to be suitable for the level and cognitive abilities of the students. It must also be regularly updated to meet technological and labour market changes.

*Fourthly*, the faculty's development and the school infrastructure's enhancement are emphasized.

#### Faculty development

The faculty is one of the decisive factors in education development in scale and quality. According to the goal of developing the system of colleges, universities, and technical training centres in the country, the demand for strengthening faculty training is significant. There is a plan to implement training and improve professional qualifications regularly. Based on that, effective implementation of renewing human resources content

and training methods can be achieved. Each lecturer must self-study, accumulate knowledge, improve both the breadth and depth of their expertise and organize objective and scientific teaching methods. As for the faculties, there should be regular exchanges of expertise and scientific topic activities to improve the professional qualifications of lecturers of their faculties. Organizing scientific seminars and discussion sessions on enhancing lifelong learning capacity for students helps them learn methods and experiences that can be applied to their lifelong learning process.

#### - Enhancing school infrastructure

Infrastructure directly affects the quality of teaching and learning. Through infrastructure conditions, lecturers can innovate teaching methods and improve the quality of teaching and learning. Renovating, upgrading, and equipping modern technical tools to serve the teaching process is a pressing requirement. Modern and convenient infrastructure suitable for education facilitates the mastery of scientific knowledge and trains students in skills and effective methods to use those technical tools in professional research and development, enhancing the quality of their future work and ensuring the best infrastructure to serve lifelong learning activities for students, equipping additional reference materials for courses, adding more computers for students to access and search for study materials at the library. They are strengthening support for students' learning materials by continuing to develop the reading library system and an online library with rich and updated resources that are convenient and easily accessible to meet the lifelong learning needs of students.

## VI. Conclusion:

The development of lifelong learning capacity is significant for university students because it helps them learn independently, develop themselves, and improve their skills to meet the demands of future work and society. In the context of the 4.0 technology revolution, the role of universities in developing lifelong learning capacity for students, as well as using information technology and communication in learning, learning skills and self-learning, creative thinking and entrepreneurship, and the ability to adapt to a rapidly changing job world with many unprecedented types of work. Citizens are the core of society. Lifelong learners are the core of a “learning society”. The 21st century is witnessing the emergence of new social models such as “Industry 4.0”, “Digital Economy”, and “Smart City”, ... based on intelligent technologies that are the result of scientific and technological applications and innovation. To meet these requirements, synchronized solutions are needed to create opportunities, capabilities, and potential for each student to learn lifelong.

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