

THE EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTION FOR „LIFELONG LEARNING” IN BULGARIA

**Milena Koleva
Albena Tsoneva
Pencho Stoychev**

**Angel Anchev
Dragomir Vassilev
Grigor Boyadjiyski**

*Department of Chemistry and Ecology,
Technical University of Gabrovo
Gabrovo, Bulgaria*

Abstract

The Educational conception “Life long Learning”(LLL) opens opportunities in front of the particular person to live a dynamic and reasonable life, to develop a personal, professional carrier and good perspectives. The dynamics of the modern economy requires constant increase of the qualification of the people, acquiring new knowledge and skills in order for them to become more adaptable to the needs of the labour market.

This paper presents the current situation about Lifelong Learning conception in Bulgaria. The national strategy and policy to promote Lifelong Learning of scientific subjects are described.

Keywords: Lifelong Learning, scientific subjects, education in chemistry.

INTRODUCTION

In compliance with the Bologna Process priorities, Bulgaria is developing lifelong learning (LLL). In fact, Bulgaria has a long-standing tradition in organizing continuous training within the higher education system. A variety of educational forms has been offered to those wishing to continue their education, with accredited units for ongoing, continuous and post-graduate training operating at almost all higher education institutions.

Lifelong learning encompasses all formal and informal target oriented activities aiming at improvement of individual knowledge, skills and competencies both regarded in terms of professional and general interest; personal and social objectives. It is carried out in the following forms:

- Formal education and /or training – it is carried out within the structure of the educational system or at Vocational Training Centres. It leads to the acquisition of a degree of education and or degree of professional qualification;
- Informal training – It is, as with formal

education, target oriented and organized (courses, private lessons, workshops, on site training) and does not lead to acquisition of a degree in education or professional qualification;

- Individual training – purpose oriented learning activity aimed at raising the level of personal knowledge and skills(training is effected with the assistance of a family member, a colleague or friend; through the use of printed materials such as course books, professional journals, reference books, computerized study courses, watching TV educational programs and using audio/video CDs etc.) [1-3].

EXPOSITION

1. Lifelong Learning concept (LLL) in Bulgaria - current situation

Educational structure of population based on the National statistical Institute data (adult, 25-64 age segment taken for the year 2007) is shown on figure 1[4]. More than 50% of people have secondary school degree. This part of Bulgarian people is the main potential target group for LLL or continuing education.

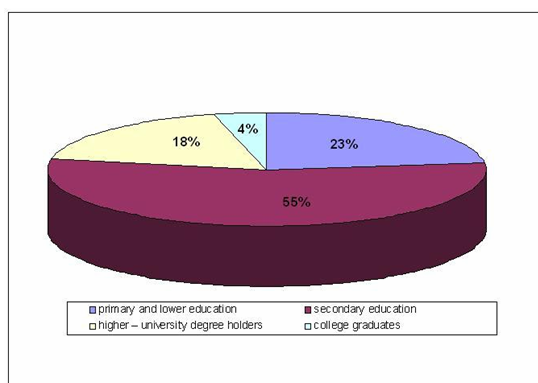


Fig.1. Educational structure of Bulgarian population

National Statistical Institute has conducted a series of surveys related to the level of participation of adults, aged 25-64, in one of the forms for lifelong learning. Reported figures vary from 16% for 2003 to 48.5% for 2007. Common factors contributing for this increase are:

- Overall economic growth of the country;
- Substantial change in the attitude of both employers and actively involved employees toward education and training;
- Active target oriented policy of government institutions;
- Bulgarian membership in EU and the subsequent implementation of many European programs which include measures and learning activities.

A close analysis of the survey outcomes indicates that:

- over one third (36.4%) of the population from the 25-64 age segment were involved in at least one form of formal and , more frequently, informal training by the end of 2007. There is an insignificantly small difference in the percentage of participation of men - 37% and women - 35.0%, respectively. Another interesting observation was found in the fact that only 19.7% of those who had participated in some type of formal or informal training declared their willingness to take part in other similar activities. The remainder 80.3% expressed their unwillingness to continue their possible participation in other types of related learning activities. These data are indicative of a prevalent attitude among the segment of actively employed persons (aged 25-64)to be involved in formal and informal education or training only for the

purpose of acquiring the needed level and confined solely to the period under survey, unwilling to enlarge their involvement over and into other similar learning activities

- Individual training covered 28.0% of the population from the segment aged 25-64. Ladies seem to be more active with their 29.7% as compared to men whose share is 26.2%.

- Persons from younger age segment, e.g (25-34) are considerably more active in formal and informal education or training with their 44.7% as compared to 39.7% for the age segment 35-54 and 20.3% for the age segment 55-64.

- Every third person, that is 35.2% of the population in the age segment 25-64, has participated in at least one informal training. For 96.3% of the participants their informal training was closely related to their work whereas for 89.5% their informal training was conducted mostly during their work time.

- Most active participants in learning activities are found among university degree holders 71.1% of which have participated in some form of education or training during the last 12 months prior to the survey. Every second person with a university degree i.e. 50.0% from the population of the 25-64 ages has participated in some form of informal training for a period of 12 months. This percentage is comparatively lower, 38.2% for secondary school graduates or holders of first level of professional qualification; it is lowest - 15.0% for persons with primary and lower education. Differences in percentage outcomes are much more considerable for the representatives of the three levels of education in terms of their involvement in individual learning which is 54.9%, 24.6% and 10.1% respectively.

- Employed persons participate in various forms of Lifelong learning more actively-(62.1%) as compared to those regarding themselves as unemployed - 19.9 % and those who are economically inactive - 18.6%. Half of the employed - 49.3% have participated in at least one form of informal whereas those who regard themselves as unemployed or economically inactive the percentage rate of participation is 6.3% and 4.2%, respectively. The latter category directs their efforts toward

individual training 15-16% rather than getting involved in informal training.

- Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ (72.0%) of all participants in informal training have taken part in one form of training for a period of 12 months prior to their interview ; every fifth participant - 19.7% has been involved in two trainings ; 3.1% have participated in three trainings and 2.4% have covered four or more trainings.

- Places of residence also affect involvement in lifelong learning as urban residents' share in this process is 52.2% as compared to the percentage of those living in the country - 38.0%. City and town residents are more active and have a wider range of possibilities for participation in informal training -38.1% as compared to those living in the country - 27.2%. Individual training percentage is represented by similar tendency with 31.1% for urban population and 19.1% for the country.

The outcomes of this survey are indicative of a prevalent attitude among those in active work age 25-64 to get involved in formal or informal education or training only in the necessary level and for the period of survey, unwilling to continue their participation in other similar activities of learning. The general conclusion is that education and training for adults is not a common practice in Bulgaria - Bulgaria accounts the weakest position amongst the countries in EC [4].

2. National strategy and priorities in the field of Lifelong Learning

In the past couple of years, there have been several growing tendencies, which determine the increased necessity to educate adults in various spheres:

- The number of school drop-outs is growing – every year between one-fourth and one-third of all students do not finish their secondary education (fig.2). Having no professional qualifications, such young people have poor chances to succeed in life;

- Vast increase in the number of unemployed specialists holding a Bachelor's or a Master's degree. The latter is due to the number of students admitted to universities being unrelated to the real demands of the labour market;

- Another tendency, worth noting is that a great part of the specialists with a tertiary education degree take a position requiring lower qualifications. Despite their high qualifications these people turn to different forms of education, re-training, master's programmes in other spheres in order to increase their own competitive power on the labour market [5,6].

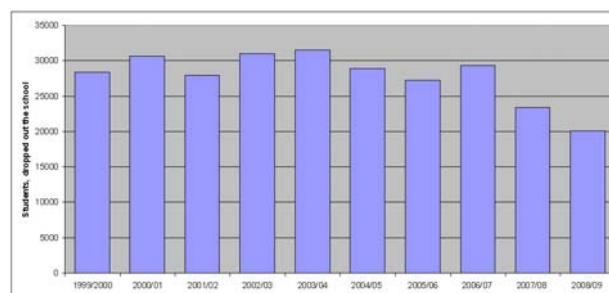


Fig.2. Number of students, dropped out from the school system (2000-2009)

National strategy for continuing vocational training 2005 – 2010. A National Strategy for Continuing Professional Training (2005- 2010) has been developed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Finance, the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Bulgarian Industrial Association, and the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria. The emphasis was laid predominantly on activities determined by the above reasons. In accordance with the above, the main objectives of the system of adult education are:

- acquisition of vocational qualification;
- gaining legal capacity to practice professions which requires it;
- constant improvement of vocational qualification;
- formation of a system of incentives for realization within a civil society;
- enriching general knowledge on the basis of national and universal values [7].

Structures, which provide opportunities for acquisition of new personal professional knowledge and skills, are termed Centres of vocational training (CVT). A network of centres of vocational training has been built

which supplements the possibilities for training offered by the system of public education (fig.3). The centres offer people over 16 years of age flexible and adjustable programmes, depending on the needs of those requesting education and the learners, combining and building on skills and competences. The National Agency of Vocational Education and Training is the institution, which licenses the CVTs, keeps a register of CVTs and exercises consistent control.

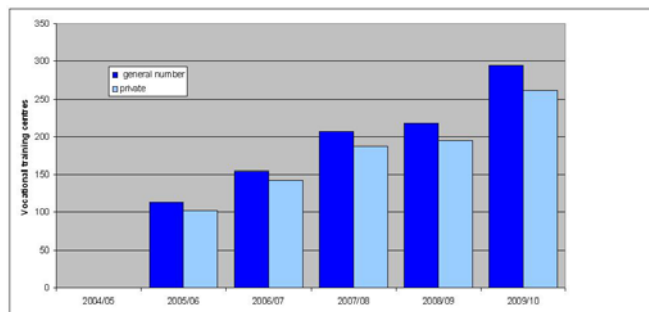


Fig.3. Number of Centres of vocational training

There are a number of other suppliers and those who assign training from the state-owned, the private and the nongovernmental sector:

- Adult education and continuing professional training offered by vocational schools and high schools;
- Adult education offered by evening upper secondary schools;
- Adult training offered by tertiary education institutions;
- Adult education and continuing professional training offered by the Bulgarian-German Centres for Vocational Training;
- Adult training offered or assigned by the National Employment Agency and the Labour Bureau departments (LBD);
- Adult training and continuing professional training assigned by enterprises;
- Adult training and continuing professional training offered and assigned by the social partners;
- Adult training offered by private suppliers including non-government organizations (NGO's) etc.

A basis for implementation of educational concepts "Lifelong Learning" is the Program for Development of Education, Science and youth policies in Bulgaria also. The Program

was elaborated for 4-years period by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.

The program aims:

- Achieving high quality of education.
- Ensuring equal access to education and opening up the education system.
- Development of conditions for implementation of the educational concepts "Lifelong learning".
- Incentives young people in the development and implementation of sector policies.
- Conversion of Bulgaria In the medium term Country in which knowledge and innovation are the drivers of the economy [6].

National strategy for lifelong learning (LLL) for the period 2008 – 2013. The most important strategy at national level to promote Lifelong Learning is the National strategy for lifelong learning for the period 2008 – 2013 [8]. The National Strategy worked out by Bulgarian Ministry of education, youth and science includes a conceptual framework for lifelong learning. The aim of the strategy is to create conditions to all citizens in Bulgaria to develop their personal and professional knowledge, skills and capabilities, and improve their own welfare and the competitiveness of national economy through:

- increasing the adaptability of each man to economic and social changes;
- encouraging participation in all forms of lifelong learning for professional and personal development.

The strategy was presented by seminars held all over the country. The basis for creating a comprehensive system of Long-life learning has been established

Program for Development of Education, Science and youth policies in Bulgaria for the next 4 years. The program, presented by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, aims:

- Achieving high quality of education.
- Ensuring equal access to education and opening up the education system;
- Development of conditions for implementation of the educational concepts "Lifelong Learning";

- Incentives young people in the development and implementation of sector policies;

- Conversion of Bulgaria In the medium term Country in which knowledge and innovation are the drivers of the economy.

Under the Human Resources Development operational program Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy proposed financing of projects and activities according to few schemes, enhancing the education system or promoting and encouraging LLL. The most important of these schemes, related to education and LLL are:

- ***Making the school more attractive for young people*** - main purposes of this scheme are:

- o creating conditions for development of the potential of each child, providing opportunities for physical, intellectual and personal development, a full social integration and subsequent career;

- o Improving access to education and training through diversification and expansion of out-of-class and out-of-school activities, forms of free time of students and the prevention of dropping out of school.

- ***Development of quality valuation system of secondary education and rating system for higher education in Bulgaria*** - this scheme consists of two components: *Component 1* - Development of standards for internal and external assessment, *Component 2* - Development of rating of high schools in Bulgaria;

Main purpose of this activity is to develop a framework for internal and external assessment in accordance with the National Program for the Development of school education and pre-school education and training (2006-2015).

- ***Information and communication technologies (ICT) in education*** - Main purpose of this scheme is to improve the quality of services in education and training, to enrich the educational content and to promote the introduction of innovative educational technologies and methods in the educational process through effective use of modern information and communication technologies.

- ***Enhancement of the qualification and creation of conditions for professional development of teachers, university lecturers and principals*** – this scheme has three components:

Component 1 Increasing the qualification and/or acquisition of new professional qualifications of teachers and teaching staff in kindergartens, schools and servicing units in the educational system.

Component 2 Develop programs and training for directors of schools, kindergartens and servicing units in the educational system.”

Component 3 Increasing the qualification of lecturers in universities”.

Main purpose of the scheme is to improve the quality of educational services through:

- o building of effective system for qualification and career development of teaching staff, university lecturers, directors of schools, kindergartens and servicing units in the educational system;

- o introduction of mechanisms for monitoring, analysis, evaluation, forecasting and planning of qualification services;

- o modernize the management of education and introduction of innovative approaches to management;

- o acquisition of managerial skills of senior staff of educational institutions and modernizing the management of education and introduction of innovative approaches to management.

- ***Integration of children and students from ethnic minorities in the education system***

The aim of the present scheme is to provide conditions for the successful social and labour realisation of children and students from ethnic minorities, who are threatened by social exclusion through:

- o improving the conditions for equal access to education

- o increasing the motivation for participation in the education process

- ***Student scholarships for equal access to education and raising the motivation for better results;***

- **Support for the education of children and students with special educational needs** -

the aim of the scheme is to support the education process of children and students with special educational needs – the development of integrated and inclusive education as well as of education in specialised schools through the following activities:

- o development of supportive environment and elaboration of training programmes;

- o specialised preparation of teachers for work with children and students with special educational needs;

- o change in the public believes in support of integrated and inclusive education, etc.

- **I can** - the operation aims to provide an opportunity to the employed persons on a labour contract to take part in vocational trainings in order to upgrade their professional qualification and better answer the requirements of the labour market. past surveys show that employed persons are the one most interested in participating in life-long learning activities and have the desire for new knowledge and skills. The operation however aims to include a maximum number of participants including people without education or with lower qualification.

CONCLUSION

The National policy in the field of education including Life Long Learning is based on the analysis of the international practices and the tendencies specific for the country in the economic and social development. Several factors have been identified which are not inherent to the system of Bulgarian education and do impact the government policy on its development:

- Changing demographic situation;

- Change in public values and increased expectations of society in general.

- Continuous rise of required level of qualification determined by the labour market;

- Impact of technologies;

- Impact of globalization;

- Continual financial and economic crisis [9].

In these conditions Life Long Learning not only contributes for keeping of the high competitiveness and of the potential opportunities for ensuring employment but it is also the best way to struggle with the social rejection.

This paper has been prepared under the “Chemistry is all around us” project (N° 167126-LLP-1-2009-1-IT-KA1-KA1ECETB, Lifelong Learning Programme)

REFERENCE

- [1] Marinova-Christidi, R. Bulgaria’s higher education system and the implementation of the bologna process. Proceedings of the 2009 EMUNI Conference on Higher Education and Research Portorož, Slovenia, 25-26 September.
- [2] Popova L., V. Gurova, Adults education guide (part 1 and 2), November 2006
- [3] Todorova M., L. Bratoeva, Association “Education for Adults in Bulgaria. DVV International
- [4] National statistical Institute data (education and Lifelong Learning), <http://www.nsi.bg/otrasal.php?otr=23>
- [5] Eurybase - Bulgaria, The Information Database on Education Systems in Europe - 2005/06
- [6] Fandykova, J. Program for Development of Education, Science and youth policies in Bulgaria (2009 – 2013 г.)
- [7] National strategy for continuing vocational training 2005 – 2010, Ministry of education, youth and science.
- [8] National strategy for lifelong learning (LLL) for the period 2008 – 2013, Ministry of education, youth and science.
- [9] General Overview on LLP. Ministry of educational and science.