

The Lifelong Learning in the Field of Employment Policy in Slovakia

*Mária Hužovičová - Peter Jakúbek**

Abstract: The rate of employment (or vice versa the rate of unemployment) is an important indicator of economic maturity and quality of life in a particular country. Compared to other countries of the European Union, unemployment in the Slovak Republic is a serious problem. Improving the quality and the efficiency of Slovak educational institutions can be one of the ways how to struggle with this problem. The Slovak economy has been transformed from planned economy to market economy, and, therefore, retraining, re-educations and improvement (in the field of industry and services) have been required. The Institute of Lifelong Learning is very helpful in this field. The article deals with shortcomings of the Institute of Lifelong Learning and it points out the reality leading to drawbacks. It also concerns the following possibilities, which might improve the current situation. In a theoretical analysis of the current state, we define the basic terms and problems in this field.

Key words: lifelong learning, adult learning, unemployment, education, efficiency of fund spending.

1 The definition of lifelong learning

A perspective of learning is required for the society to become successful and advanced. It brings the demand for constant learning, extending knowledge, competencies and skills of citizens. The experience indicates that the knowledge of graduates is not adequate for both graduates and employers. The graduates do possess the knowledge, but they are not able to apply it in their professional lives.

Thus, it happens that after reaching some academic degree, completing a course or training, a graduate is not able to find a job and becomes unemployed. These

* Mária Hužovičová, Dubnica Institute of Technology in Dubnica nad Váhom, Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia; huzovicova@dti.sk

Peter Jakúbek, Dubnica Institute of Technology in Dubnica nad Váhom, Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia; jakubek@dti.sk

shortcomings lead to the need for lifelong learning of all citizens. This concept means learning for the whole life. Its contribution should be top-quality education for all people (at the pre-reproductive, reproductive and post-reproductive age). A country or a company is developed and pushed forward by human resources. A desire for learning and developing one's skills is also very helpful. *"Under the concept of lifelong learning we understand all the activities carried out throughout one's life, with the goal to improve one's knowledge, skills and abilities ... it consists of school and further education."* (Stratégia celoživotného vzdelávania, 2011, p. 49). The concept of lifelong learning is understood as the group of all the activities related to education and development of human knowledge, skills and competencies throughout the whole life. As stated in the Memorandum of Lifelong Learning (Memorandum celoživotného vzdelávania, 2000), the attention is oriented on the individual, all according to his/her needs. Subsequently, the basic ideas and strategies of lifelong learning emerge from this demand: new basic skills, human resource investment, permanent innovation of educational and learning processes, new consultancy conceptions enabling the access to learning for all people regardless of the differences, and increasing the value of education. Veteška and Tureckiová (2008) tend to use the concept of learning throughout one's whole life, replacing the concept of lifelong learning. It is for the reason that this concept focuses on the skills to learn or more precisely on learning competencies.

2 Forms and periods of lifelong learning

The concept of lifelong learning and its forms defined by Memorandum of Lifelong Learning (2000):

Formal learning is defined by ISCED (In Classification of learning activities – Manual, 2006, p. 13) as education provided within the school system, university system and other educational institutions. It usually starts at the age of 5-7 years and continues to the age of 20. It is provided by institutions oriented on education and vocational training. A graduate reaches some academic degree. Cadefop's dictionary (2008, p. 86), the summary of basic terminology from the field of education, brings another definition of formal learning: *"The learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (e.g. in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to validation and certification."* According to the mentioned definitions we can identify some minor differences. In the Slovak Republic we use the definition identical to the definition of ISCED. Within the professional terminology, in the Slovak Republic, it is also stated as school education.

-

- Non-formal learning represents all the organised and systematic educational activities which do not correspond with the definition of formal learning. This learning occurs at educational institutions or also out of them. It includes people of all age groups (ISCED In Classification of learning activities - Manual, 2006, p. 13). This kind of learning can occur at the workplace or various organisations, *“which have been established to supplement formal educational systems”* (Porubská and Határ, 2009, p. 130). In the professional terminology, we may find it also under the concept of additional or further education. The Strategy of Lifelong Learning (Stratégia celoživotného vzdelávania, 2011) brings the concept of continuous learning. This concept represents the process of deepening, improving and extending knowledge. It also includes the development of all the skills and competencies necessary for a particular job position.
- Informal learning or other learning is not planned and intentional. Its basic characteristics are that it is neither institutional nor organised. It stems from the daily life. *“It is neither organised nor structured on particular goals, time or intention to learn. Informal learning is mostly not intentional from the student’s point of view.”* (Cedefop, 2008, p. 94). The informal learning is *“the reflexively adopted experience gained at work, within the family life or gained within the relationships with other people. Informal learning can also be an evaluation of one’s behaviour or particular situations or it can represent own educational projects.”* (Beneš, 2008, p. 54). This learning is related to real life situations and problems, which the individual has to deal with. This process of solving stems from the intrinsic motivation of the learner, which contributes to his own development. This is probably the main advantage of the informal learning.

Lifelong learning focuses not merely on its institutions, but also on the educational process, on learning and its outcomes. It is an inevitable and permanent activity, in which the continuity and need for whole life learning is emphasized. That brings the demand for its accessibility to everyone regardless of age. Not only the demands and interest of citizens, but also the demands of employers have to be taken into consideration.

Adult learning represents the subsystem of lifelong learning. Through adult learning, the individuals are not only allowed to develop themselves, but at the same time, they contribute to the development of the society in positive way. According to Plamínek (2012), adult learning is defined as intentional, systematic mediation and adoption of a human experience and knowledge from various fields. Meditation, gaining and consolidation of knowledge, skills and habits, development of social and work activities are considered to be the main goals of adult learning. Adult learning is also characterized as *“systematically organised development of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, interests, needs, aspirations and other personal characteristics, which are necessary for fully-*

fledged social life at work. It is also important for the life outside the workplace and for wide-ranging personal development.” (Švec, 2002, p. 160) As stated in Veteška and Tureckiová (2008, p. 16-17), the concept of adult learning is understood as “*an integral part of individual’s life within the society... i.e., it is an essential part of lifelong learning. Its goal is the improvement of knowledge, skills and professional competencies. It occurs within re-qualification and specialized courses, which can be offered not merely by companies but also by higher educational institutions and universities.*” Further education focuses on the possibility to provide education after reaching a particular academic degree. It is divided into vocational, civil and interest education (Veteška and Tureckiová, 2008). It aims not only to improve the chances of getting a job, but also increases the chance to being promoted as for the work position. An individual, subsequently, lives a productive, fully fledged and satisfied life. Beneš (2008) points out the fact that learning, especially adult learning, occurs depending on individual and biographical rarities. On a large scale, it is socially determined and differentiated.

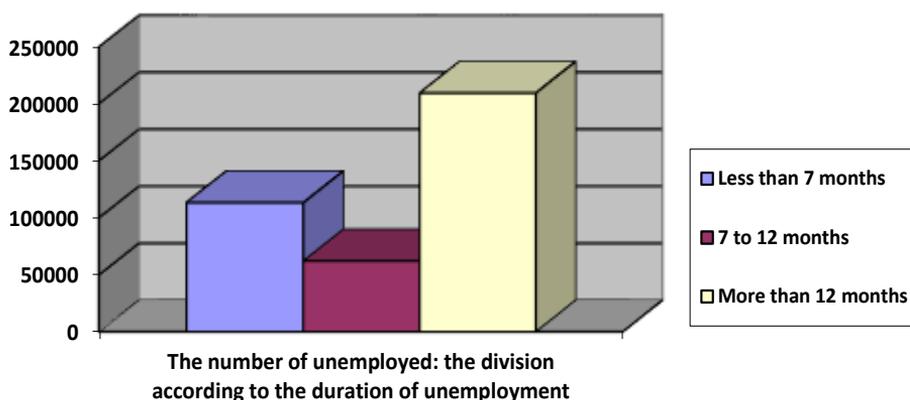
There also exists an educational financial aid, provided by the European Union. Between the years 2007-2013, the financial aid was provided via Grundtvig programme, which was the part of the funding programme called Lifelong Learning Programme, LLP. This programme focused on adult learning, on people older than 16. It did not include the university and secondary school students of internal studying programmes (SAAIC, 2010). The national project called *Ďalšie vzdelávanie a poradenstvo pre dospelých ako nástroj lepšej uplatniteľnosti na trhu práce* (Further Education and Consultancy for Adults as a Tool for Better Employability in the Labour Market) has been currently taking place. It has been implemented since 01/2013 to 09/2015. Its goal is to connect employers’ demands with the demands of learners and educational institutions. The individuals will gain skills, knowledge and abilities, which will guarantee the future possibility to be successful in the labour market. The acquired knowledge will be accepted in the system of further education. The employers will get an accurate description of learners’ knowledge, abilities and skills. It is possible due to the fact that they can participate in the creation of the modules of educational programmes (National Institute of Lifelong Learning, 2010-2014).

3 Slovakia and the lifelong learning policy

The need for adult learning in the Slovak Republic is inevitable, especially in the environment with increasing requirements on the abilities and skills of job applicants. It is not a problem only in Slovakia, but also in the European context. Despite the fact, that all the European governments support re-qualifications and employing people under 30, it is necessary to deal with another group of people.

It is the group of fifty-year old people (and older), who have more and more serious problems to find a job.

The opportunities for education are perceived in various contexts. The first and the most important is the economical one. According to the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, in the first quarter of 2014, 382 900 Slovak inhabitants were unemployed. And not speaking of 210 000 long-term unemployed people (those, who have been unemployed for more than one year), what represents the vast majority of unproductive inhabitants. These people cost a lot of money. An accurate division of unemployed people is shown in Figure 1.



Source: COLSAaF, 2014

Figure 1: Unemployment in Slovakia, 1st July, 2014, division according to registration at COLSAaF

A lot of people from this group grew up in the educational system, which was set according to demands of the socialist planned economy. For them, there is only a little chance to respond flexibly to the requirements of the labour market. The transition from planned economy to market economy (also for better efficiency of almost all competitive companies) must have led to the reduction and transformation of labour force. The theories that every problem in the labour market will be solved by an invisible hand seem not to be accurate, and do not work in the Slovak Republic. And therefore, what cannot be solved by the labour market itself, it has to be done by the state. One of these things is providing and organising adult learning and re-qualification courses for the unemployed inhabitants in order to become more flexible and efficient, using their new skills. As an example of implementing the 2012 governmental programme declaration, we can mention one of the current projects of the Government of the Slovak Republic funded by the European Union. The name of the programme is:

“Ďalšie vzdelávanie a poradenstvo pre dospelých ako nástroj lepšej uplatniteľnosti na trhu práce“ (Further Education and Consultancy for Adults as an Instrument for Better Employability in Labour Market.). The applicant of this project is the The National Institute of Lifelong Learning; with the irrecoverable fee of 27.994 million euros. The website of The National Institute of Lifelong Learning about the contribution of this project states: *“The Slovak Republic, with 2.8 %, is one of the countries of the European Union with the lowest number of people participating in the programmes of further education.”* Therefore it is inevitable to implement a reform of further education and set a system of consultancy for adults (NÚCVSR, 2014).

Table 1: Participation in lifelong learning (15-64 – year old)

Year (average in %)	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
ISCED (Total)	3.7	4.3	4.6	4.1	3.9	3.3	2.8	2.8

ISCED: A figure based on the reached academic degree

Source: NÚCV, 2011, p. 11

Adult learning within lifelong learning is undoubtedly helpful for citizens’ integration into the labour market. It is also an inevitable pillar when changing a job. There occurs one question: Is it helpful to invest money in lifelong learning for people, who have not been employed during their life? According to The Headquarter of Labour, Social Affairs and Family 2014 data, 85 000 Slovak inhabitants have never been employed. This represents one quarter of all the unemployed people. These people are usually secondary school or university graduates, especially those, whose field of study is not perspective. That means that there is a very little chance to get a job for them. The highest percentage of unemployed consists mainly of people with secondary vocational education.

Table 2: The division of unemployed people according to their education

The level of education	The number of unemployed to date 1st July 2014
Unfinished elementary education	18 596
Elementary education	91 206
Lower vocational education	8 199
Secondary vocational education	114 617

Complete secondary vocational education	94 262
Complete secondary general education	14 117
Higher vocational education	1 509
University education (bachelor degree)	7 552
University education (master degree)	33 994
University education (doctoral degree)	108
Not determined	9
In total	384. 825

* The academic degrees are stated according to the Slovak education system.

Source: COLSAaF, 2014

According to the results published by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the biggest group is created by unemployed citizens with elementary, secondary vocational and partially with university education. Lifelong learning directed by the government and The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of Slovak Republic, in cooperation with The Ministry of Labour, Social affairs and Family, is necessary to be made more efficient. There is also a need for helping people with lower education. Re-qualifications or the way how to supplement the education from other professional fields, would help many job applicants. Supposing the higher demand from employers, many applicants would be more advantaged.

The previous issue repeats a vicious circle. There is a large number of graduates, who are unable to find a job in the fields currently offered. Subsequently, funds are needed for re-qualification of these people. Of course, lifelong learning does not consist exclusively of re-qualification and enhancing of education (for the unemployed), but it also provides help for the employed. If the situation in labour market changes, thanks to lifelong learning they will be able to keep their jobs. Or as the case may be, they are able to change the job. In many cases, the fields of study are not efficient. It causes a professional stagnation, wasting time and money on side of the state. As stated by Tamášová and her team (2013), in 2007, a group of experts was established. The goal was to create a concept of lifelong learning development in Slovakia, named Strategy 2011. Its main goals are focused on:

1. Motivation and and the approach of individuals to lifelong learning.
2. Convergence of education with employers' demands.
3. System and structure of consultancy services with an emphasis on adult education.

4. The level of individual's competencies for his professional and personal development: financial literacy, entrepreneurial competencies, foreign language competencies, digital literacy, and active citizenship.
5. Further education funding.

Among other things, the document Strategy 2011 describes also the system tools, helpful in increasing the efficiency and success rate of lifelong learning in the Slovak Republic. This strategy is three years old, its system tools are, to a certain degree, supertemporal and usable for the future.

According to the Strategy of lifelong learning (2011), the main system tools are:

1. A communicational platform of educational institutions and employers.
2. A multimedia platform.
3. Career consultancy.
4. Finances supporting further education.

4 Conclusion

The educational policy of the state should be focused on strategic investment into citizens' education, concerning especially the field of most demanded professions. This way the chances of getting a job, the ability of adaption to employers' demands would be noticeably increased. The chances for breaking through in the career and for developing one's personality are also higher. In order to ensure successful results of lifelong learning, there is a need for the participation of all the entities (government, employers and citizens). A close connection between the educational programmes and the employers' demands is also required. A special attention is paid to education of the unemployed. The main task is to create an active employment policy, where vocational courses are created in order to keep one's job, or to get a new one.

In the document Strategy 2011 the recommendations for an action plan are suggested. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family is responsible for their implementation. According to our findings, we choose main ideas from the article:

1. To create a sustainable system of communication among the educational institutions and employers focused on mutual information exchange about knowledge, skills and competencies needed in the labour market.
2. To create an integrated consultancy system of career education consisting of databases informing about learning possibilities in the labour market.
3. To develop activities leading to closer link between the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Labour, Social affairs and Family activities, with the goal to avoid contradictory decisions (in the effort to increase the employment rate).

References

- BAREŠOVÁ, A. *E-learning ve vzdělávání dospělých*. Praha: VOX, 2011.
- BENEŠ, M. *Andragogika*. Praha: Grada, 2008.
- Classification of Learning Active – Manual* [online]. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2006 [viewed 30 July 2014]. Available from:
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/product_details/publication?p_product_code=KS-BF-06-002.
- Memorandum o celoživotnom vzdelávaní sa. Pracovný materiál Európskej komisie* [online]. 2000 [viewed 10 August 2014]. Available from:
<https://www.minedu.sk/9772-sk/dokumenty-a-predpisy/>.
- NÁRODNÝ ÚSTAV CELOŽIVOTÉHO VZDELÁVANIA. *Ďalšie vzdelávanie a poradenstvo pre dospelých ako nástroj lepšej uplatniteľnosti na trhu práce* [online]. 2010-2014 [viewed 30 July 2014]. Available from:
<http://nuczv.sk/projekty/dalsie-vzdelavanie-a-poradenstvo-pre-dospelych-ako-nastroj-lepsej-uplatnitelnosti-na-trhu-prace/>.
- PLAMÍNEK, J. *Vzdělávání dospělých*. Praha: Grada, 2010.
- SAAIC. *Čo je sektorový program Grundtvig?* [online]. 2010 [viewed 10 August 2014]. Available from:
http://web.saaic.sk/llp/sk/_main.cfm?obsah=m_uvodna_stranka.htm&sw_prog=.
- NÁRODNÝ ÚSTAV CELOŽIVOTNÉHO VZDELÁVANIA. *Stratégia celoživotného vzdelávania* [online]. 2011 [viewed 20 July 2014]. Available from:
nuczv.sk/wp-content/.../strategia-celozivotneho-vzdelavania-2011.pdf.
- ŠVEC, Š. *Základné pojmy v pedagogike a andragogike (s anglicko-slovenským slovníkom termínov s definíciami a s registrom ich slovensko-anglických ekvivalentov)*. Bratislava: IRIS, 2002.
- TAMÁŠOVÁ, V. et al. *Quality in the Context of Adult Education and Lifelong Education*. Dubnica nad Váhom: DTI, 2013.
- Terminology of European Education and Training Policy. A selection of 100 key terms* [online]. European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2008 [viewed 12 August 2014]. Available from:
www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/13125.aspx.
- ÚSTREDIE PRÁCE, SOCIÁLNYCH VECÍ A RODINY. *Mesačné štatistiky* [online]. 2014 [viewed 12 August 2014]. Available from:
http://www.upsvar.sk/buxus/generate_page.php?page_id=374518.
- VETEŠKA, J. and TURECKIOVÁ, M. *Kompetence ve vzdělávání*. Praha: Grada, 2008.