



**THE NEW ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENCES AMONG LIFELONG LEARNING,  
LIFELONG EDUCATION AND LEARNING SOCIETY**

**Zhiwei Chen,**

Ph.D.Scholar, Institute of Education, Goettingen University, Germany.& Visiting Scholar,  
Department of Education and Extension, Savitribai Phule Pune University)

***Abstract***

*Although the functions and effectiveness of lifelong learning, lifelong education and learning society have been paid great attention to by the society and people nowadays, there are always confusions of them in elaboration of them in different occasion. There are lots of differences among them and it is necessary to make these differences clear with comparing each pair separately and comparing them generally.*

**Keywords:** *lifelong learning; lifelong education; learning society.*



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Nowadays, the notions of lifelong learning, lifelong education and learning society have guided the new educational trend for the modern learning style and model. More and more people and government have believed that the society and capability of citizens could be largely promoted and enhanced according to the implementation and realization of lifelong learning and lifelong education, and finally, the society will come to the form of learning society. However, it is also important and necessary to understand there are many differences among lifelong learning, lifelong education and learning society. In order to make much clearer about the differences among them, it is better to compare each pair separately and then compare them generally. The following will discuss the differences according to the

concepts and meanings of them.

### **The differences between Lifelong learning and lifelong education**

The relationship of their concepts is very close with each other. Among the present studies, the understanding of both concepts is not consistent, which shows a wide range of usage. According to the study and summary, there are several basic usages as follows: First, talking about them separately, explicitly describing lifelong learning separately from lifelong education and believing them as a pair of distinguishing concepts. Second, equivalently using the two concepts, especially alternately using them in an article or book without a particularly note or comment about them. Third, using them in juxtaposition, as writing and saying “lifelong education and lifelong learning” together when explaining either contents of them which shows a cautious attitude on them. Fourth, mixing the two into one as using the expression form of word “lifelong education (learning)” (Chen, 2007) which however is more ambiguous: Are the both a same concept or the former contains the latter? It can be seen that the relationship between lifelong education and lifelong learning is indeed inextricable; therefore the research on treating and dealing with the meaning and relationship between them is an important prerequisite for other research work on lifelong learning. The improvement from lifelong education to lifelong learning is accompanied with the process reduction of government’s direct management in teaching. As the educational planning gradually evolves into the design for educational services offered by education market to consumers (say, the students), so the education consumers (the students and learners in schools and the educational places) also have the infinite diversity and possibilities on education choices (Zhu, 2008). Since then, the commoditization characteristics of knowledge began to appear slowly. As the social background, timing, conditions of the emergence of lifelong education and lifelong learning are all different with each other, the concerns of both are bound to have differences. In order to break away from the traditional educational system, lifelong learning will release the initiative to individuals, who could personally choose desired direction and make personal choices according to the needs of the community or personal wishes, on the contrary to lifelong education which mainly embodies the behalf and will of the country in a whole. It can be seen that lifelong learning is one of the basic human

rights which can be used to perfect humans themselves necessarily (Zhu, 2008). Lifelong learning is a transfer process of the subjects which stresses the learner-centered instead of the teacher-centered, but this is also a necessity in the lifelong learning environment. Accompanied with the teachers' status shifted from the subject to the direction, the principal position and the subject effect of students and learners begin to play a roll in the teaching and learning process, who can learn in their own lifespan as they wish to meet the different and various learning needs in each period or stage of their own life. Meanwhile they induce themselves into the development and exploration of their own potential and creation in this process (Zhu & Gao, 2014), and design and pursuit individual's own value based on social and history traditions. So we can say that the autonomy is the essential characteristics of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is a kind of goal-directed activity, which is composed by intentional and planned arrangement by individuals, but not by occasional or unintentional learning behaviors. In other words, lifelong learning includes the individual's subjective awareness and personal decisions, planning and sense of responsibility, and the learners personally choose what, how and where to learn. The report <Learning: The Treasure Within> by Delors published in 1996 by the International Board of Education of the 21st century of UNESCO referred to the "four pillars of education", such as "learn to know", "learn to do", "learn to live together" and "learn to be a man", which lifelong learning needs to establish and base on (Delors, 1996, pp2-5). All of these have made much higher requirements to the individuals' quality. Lifelong learning can contribute to the enhancement and improvement of the individual quality, which will serve and benefit lifelong learning in return. In addition, as an integral part of a comprehensive strength in a nation, the improvement of people's qualities, such intelligence, the capability of changing and developing with the changing society and personal needs is one of aim of education reform in the countries. One of the important mechanisms of the formation of a human's quality is internalization, which could be only realized with active learning by learners. Currently, the characteristics of subjectivity and initiative contained by lifelong learning offer the basis and premise for the formation of individuals' quality.

### **The differences between lifelong learning and learning society**

The concept of learning society, which is a much wider and larger concept than lifelong learning, mainly bases on the formal and organizational change in a society, internally reflects the basic idea and aims of lifelong education and lifelong learning. It means that lifelong learning is a constituent part and component of the learning society, and a basic method of the implementation of learning society. The lifelong learning system is conducive to the formation of the learning society, but it is only one of the prerequisites (Zhai, 2004). After all, the construction and improvement of the learning society is a complex process, which needs the cooperation from various departments and institutions in the society. However, lifelong learning is also a basic and fundamental factor for the construction of learning society. In other words, without the endeavor and effects by lifelong learning, such as the influences from it on people's ideas and thoughts, the learning society could not be realized. From the formation mechanism, the learning society means the whole and general results of lifelong learning and lifelong education, both of which are the accomplishing means for the learning society. It does not mean that the lifelong learning could definitely points to the results of completion of learning society in the future, because lifelong learning could influence a certain amount of people in the society to have the ideas and opinions to learn along with the spirit of lifelong learning, however, it does not mean that each social member or citizen could be influenced or affected to learn for lifelong. Moreover, there are also many other important and necessary factors in the process of forming a learning society. In this way, we could not equal the lifelong learning as learning society, or the direct result or consequence pointing to learning society. Lifelong learning is only one significant factor which could form the learning society with much more efficiency and correctness.

### **There are general divergences and differences among them.**

Different targets: These three ideas have some differences in their specific target as the goal of lifelong education tends to realize the exceeding of the current education system. Paul Lengrand criticized the traditional education system in the first line is its inflexible and one-off feature. He believed that thinking of the knowledge, skills and capabilities required in the whole life could only be obtained in the youth era was already out of date, and ought to be

thoroughly crushed and discarded (Yu, 2011). In the future, the society should build a education system with significant features such as continuous, comprehensive, organic and open, which fully consider the development needs of society and individuals, instead of simple overlaying of school years or relatively fragmented education systems. Lifelong learning tends to go beyond the traditional areas of education. It means the learning activities are not only themes which belong to the areas of education, but also a part of the survival matter areas, a theme which relates to the responsibility and way of life and survival. In other words, lifelong learning aims at the establishment of a society in the future with the feature as learning is to survive, learning is life, and there is not any social boundary between learning and survival, learning and life (Fang, 2014). The purpose of learning society even more exceeds a normal social form, and guarantees each one's right of learning and participation in learning activities, instead of the monopoly of learning right by the minority and small groups involved in learning activities (Yu, 2011). It will finally show in front of us as the individuals as lifelong learning individuals, the groups are lifelong learning groups and the society is a lifelong learning society. Different choice on strategies: Different targets sets with different strategic choices. In order to achieve the goal of going beyond the traditional education system, the lifelong education inevitably emphasizes on the integration of various resources in the country's education system which stands on view points of the society, to realize the possibilities of participations in various educational activities for every citizen in life-long span, so the most important strategy is to establish lifelong education system which is open to all citizens. In order to leave far beyond the traditional areas of education, lifelong learning inevitably more emphasizes on the attitude and ability on learning in the whole life, as well as the importance of everyone's involving in the learning activities, which stands on the view point of the individuals (or basic social organizations) (Zhu, 2008). That is to say, the first choice of lifelong learning strategies is to guide every citizen to regard lifelong learning as survival responsibility and way of life, to enhance their learning consciousness and abilities. As to the social responsibility, it should help with the formation of a continuous supporting process which brings human potential into play fully, with the premise of guarantee of learners' autonomy and voluntary. In order to exceed the existing social forms, the core

strategy of learning society is to reasonably clear learning obstacles, provide fair educational opportunities, and turn the society into a society with learning form. Thus, in specific strategic concepts, it is bound to take the same strategic choices as the lifelong education and lifelong learning (Wu, 2007, pp12-13), which are the introduction of advanced and open lifelong education system and advocacy conscious and effective learning by individuals and groups. Different focus in practice: Different purposes and different strategies will naturally lead to the different positioning of the focus in practice. Lifelong education focuses more on the reform of the traditional education system, including its resources, system, structure, distribution, communication, form, objects, content and methods. Lifelong learning focuses more on the confirmation of the subjects in learning activities, the respect of learners' learning will, the need of learners, learning attitude, continuation of learning, confidence in learning, improvement of learning abilities, utilization of learning resources , expanding of learning place. In addition to the two aspects above, learning society in particular looks forward to putting the following activities into practice, such as the implementation of the learners rights on learning, establishment of the learner-centered concept, construction of a diverse and open learning network, mobilization of the participation of social organizations, promoting individual to become learning-person, family the learning-family, social organizations the learning organizations, communities the learning communities, cities the learning cities, and the government a learning-oriented government. Generally speaking, it shows above that the three concepts are very consistent on issues such as the time limit, content, space and purpose of the teaching and learning, but are different on specific targets, strategic choices and practical focus: lifelong education is a top-down process whose strategic choice starts from social aspects, lifelong learning is a bottom-up process whose strategic choice starts from the personal view point, and strategic choice of learning society is the assemble process of both above. When the lifelong education is established without the guidance of lifelong education system, then it is impossible that everyone can be involved in learning, and thereupon no institutional guarantee for the learning society; when there is no prerequisites as everyone is involved in lifelong learning and the social foundations, lifelong education will be nothing but only a dream, and learning society is only a mirage (Yang,

Zhang, Feng & Niu, (2012). Only with background of the mutual cooperation and simultaneous development of the society and individuals, the lifelong education and lifelong learning are possible to come to a reality, and the ideal of a learning society could to be possible achieved.

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