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# **THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LEARNING SOCIETY IN TAIWAN**

### **Abstract:**

Lifelong learning is an essential mode of living and a key element for enhancing self-development as well as national competitiveness in this modern society. Ever since 1990, international institutions and nation states all over the world have been actively engaged in promoting lifelong learning. Some even regard the development of lifelong learning as a great social movement in the era.

Lately, Taiwan has also put great efforts in shaping a lifelong learning society. Several policies were made and put into action; yet, a task of setting up a learning society has not fully accomplished, not to mention the gap of lifelong learning in the society is not eliminated. It is agreed that the gap in lifelong learning will also enlarge other gaps in knowledge, economics, culture and the society. All these gaps will not only extend the social exclusion but also hinder the social integration. Base on the reasons mentioned above, this study aims to explore the current social development of lifelong learning in Taiwan from an international point of view. It first investigates the major issues that Taiwan has encountered with on its way to building up a lifelong learning society, and then provides pragmatic strategies for constructing the future lifelong learning society in Taiwan, which include to establish various learning organizations, to boost learning towns and cities, to promote lifelong learning organizations, to improve the quality of the course and the personnel, and to cultivate lifelong learning citizens.

### **Keywords:**

lifelong learning, learning society, learning Taiwan, adult learning

## Introduction

Lifelong learning is an essential mode of living and a key element for enhancing self-development as well as national competitiveness in this modern society. In response to the era of lifelong learning, the developed countries and many important international organizations such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Organisation for Economic and Co-operation Development (OECD) and European Union (EU) are devoted to relevant research, aiming to build up a learning society. There is no doubt that it has become a global trend in the twenty first century to promote lifelong learning which may lead to the emergence of a learning society. In 2009, UNESCO has therefore held The Sixth UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education, CONFINTEA VI in Belém with the theme topic of “Living and Learning for a Viable Future: The Power of Adult Learning”. The focus was to strengthen lifelong learning’s policy, governance, investment, quality, effectiveness, and influence; to make it to be a part of man’s living; as well as to facilitate the recognition towards its importance and effectiveness to the international society (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009a). In order to achieve such goals, UNESCO has also launched Belém Framework for Action. Such Action claims that adult learning is worth investing as it brings positive social effects, turning the society to become peaceful, integrated, healthier, more sustainable, and with better democracy and productivity. However, the quality of adult learning and education cannot be well-kept without sufficient financial support. Hence, the member states of UNESCO have made a promise to increase the expenditures in education which would reach at least 6% of their GDP and the distribution ration of that to the adult learning (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009). In other words, to invest in lifelong learning is to invest in human’s future. It will create diverse output and meaningful value in education, economics, society, and cultures.

Ever since 1990, international institutions and nation states all over the world have been actively engaged in promoting lifelong learning. Some even regard the development of lifelong learning as a great social movement in the era. The United Kingdoms, for instance, believes the evolution of lifelong learning is a New Age learning revolution. The ultimate goal is to build up a learning culture through comprehensive development in lifelong learning. Lately, Taiwan has also put great efforts in shaping a lifelong learning society. Several policies were made and put into action; yet, a task of setting up a learning society has not fully accomplished, not to mention the gap of lifelong learning in the society is not eliminated. It is agreed that the gap in lifelong learning will also enlarge other gaps in knowledge, economics, culture and the society. All these gaps will not only extend the social exclusion but also

hinder the social integration. Base on the reasons mentioned above, this study aims to explore the current social development of lifelong learning in Taiwan from an international point of view. It first investigates the major issues that Taiwan has encountered with on its way to building up a lifelong learning society, and then provides pragmatic strategies for constructing the future lifelong learning society in Taiwan, which include to establish various learning organizations, to boost learning towns and cities, to promote lifelong learning organizations, to improve the quality of the course and the personnel, and to cultivate lifelong learning citizens.

## **The Current Development of A Learning Society in Taiwan**

Lifelong learning is a comprehensive concept of education which can happen under any different kind of situation. It embraces two main ideas: being life-long and being life-wide. The former one implies that people can get educated not only during the school age but also through their entire life; while the latter one claims that learning comes from not just the regular schooling but anywhere and everywhere (Wu · 2004; Ekholm & Härd, 2000). There is a close connection between a learning society and lifelong learning. The two concepts have been greatly discussed especially after the 1990s. As a result, a lifelong learning society, which is often taken as a synonym for a learning society nowadays, has come into being. In short, it is the objective for the lifelong learning to build up a learning society. Meanwhile, it is also a learning society's strategy for development to promote lifelong learning. A learning society focuses on citizens' lifelong learning, and cares about the fairness and social justice for adult learning. Doubtlessly, it will be a long journey to seek for the accomplishment of a learning society.

Examining the current development of Taiwan from the viewpoint of international lifelong learning trend, obviously, a series of lifelong learning policies were made to satisfy the thirst for education revolution among the government and the people during the 1990s. The Ministry of Education took the first step carrying out a Five-year Plan for Developing and Improving Adult Education in 1991, resulted from the consensus achieved in the Sixth National Education Conference in 1988 that national education and lifelong education should be fulfilled through the establishment of adult education system. In 1994, actions and proposals for promoting lifelong education were further discussed in the Seventh National Education Conference. And a year later, the Ministry of Education declared "The Republic of China's Education Report: Visions for the Twenty-first Century", claiming that establishing a lifelong learning society to be an important policy for Taiwan. As a consequence, a Lifelong Learning Oriented Adult

Education Medium-Range Development Plan was brought into existence in 1996. It was in the same year that Education Reform Commission, Executive Yuan, also proposed General Education Reform Advisory Report which stated five suggestions, of which “Live and learn: the establishment of lifelong learning society” was one of them. It well analyzed not just the background and the concept of a lifelong learning society, but also the practical ways to achieve it. As a result, a milestone for promoting lifelong learning in Taiwan was set up in 1998. That year was also recognized as the Lifelong Learning Year for the Republic of China based on the fact the White Paper of Moving toward a Learning Society was announced by the Ministry of Education. The White Paper was considered the most profound document about lifelong learning education in Taiwan as it mapped out the pragmatic path for execution. Subsequently, the Ministry of Education regarded it as an important matter to promote lifelong education and information network education and subsumed it in the Educational Reform Action Plan. When it came to the twenty-first century, the development of lifelong learning was also greatly emphasized in the “Knowledge Economy Development Plan”, proposed by the Executive Yuan in 2000. Moreover, in the E-generation Talent Cultivation Plan, which was the sub-plan of “Challenge 2008: National Development Plan” announced in 2002, it clearly pointed out that creating E-generation social environment for lifelong learning to be an important national policy. Furthermore, same year in June, the promulgation of Lifelong Learning Act has provided legitimacy for the development of lifelong learning in Taiwan. Nevertheless, it takes more than just active attitudes but strategies which harmonize with the local political, economic, cultural, and social contexts to build up a learning society (Wu, 2004). In addition, in response to the fact that elder education is also part of lifelong education, the White Paper of Elder Education Policy: Moving towards an Aging Society was published in 2006. It is believed that the four visions stated in the White Paper, including lifelong learning, health and happiness, self-dignity, and social engagement, would add fuel to the flames in terms of developing a learning society in Taiwan (Ministry of Education, 2006).

In 2010, the Ministry of Education advocated “99 Lifelong Learning Action Year 331”, encouraging citizens to keep a daily routine of studying for 30 minutes, exercising for 30 minutes and doing one good deed a day. It is anticipated that the citizens would be able to enhance self-intelligence, physical fitness and introspection through such daily practice, and fulfill the goal of building up a learning society (Ministry of Education, 2010a). It was in the same year that the Ministry of Education convened the Eighth National Education Conference with the visions: new century, new education, and new promise. The conference brought up ten major issues among which promoting lifelong learning and a learning society were seriously discussed. In addition, six relevant topics were drawn out as follows (Ministry of Education, 2010b):

1. To complete the lifelong learning system and to promote national participation in learning.
2. To polish lifelong learning strategies and to shape a learning society.
3. To strengthen the elders' learning to respond to the aging society.
4. To deepen the community learning and to enhance the community college's influence.
5. To promote adult education for intensifying the key capabilities and competitiveness.
6. To strengthen family education and its function.

Generally speaking, the formal construction of Taiwan's lifelong learning society started after the mid-1990s. The concept and the term were firstly proposed by the Ministry of Education in "The Republic of China's Education Report: Visions for the Twenty-first Century" in 1995. And then the General Education Reform Advisory Report in 1996 clearly illustrated the concept of lifelong learning and the practical strategies. After that, the White Paper of Moving toward a Learning Society in 1998 set up a milestone of developing lifelong learning society by mapping out specifically 14 ways and 14 actions. Moreover, Lifelong Learning Act was promulgated in 2002 as the fundamental for the legitimacy and the policies. However, it is a pity that in the twenty-first century, the development of a lifelong learning society lacks a systematic policy, plan, or practice so that the influence cannot be fully demonstrated. What worth noted is that in the history of developing a lifelong learning society in Taiwan, adults were always the main subjects. Especially after 2006, more and more focus was put on the elders. From then and till 2013, Taiwan has already set up around 275 elder learning centers and 100 elder colleges (Ministry of Education, 2013). This is exactly how the authorities assist the citizens in becoming practitioners of real lifelong learners from womb to tomb.

## **The Problem Analysis of Developing A Learning Society in Taiwan**

It was after the mid-1990s that the development of lifelong learning society in Taiwan has gained significant progress. As previously mentioned, the White Paper of Moving toward a Learning Society announced in 1998 has set up a milestone for lifelong learning, drawing great impact to the society. However, series of the difficulties in terms of executing the policies have shown up with times.

According to the research Wu, Li, and Lai (2009) did for the Ministry of Education in 2009 about Taiwan's adult education, the ratio of adults participating in formal and

informal learning activities differed in age. The participation ratio of adults over 16 years old was 29.21%, while that of those over 65 years old was merely 11.40%. Meanwhile, the participation ratio of adults between 16 to 65 years old was 30.96%. The ratio also differed in gender that 32.47% of females took part in learning but only 25.70% of males did so. In regard to the difference between regions, 32.27% of the participants were from the north; 29.53% from the east and the outer islands; 27.12% from the mid-Taiwan; and 26.27% from the south. Generally speaking, the participation ratio was 19.82% to 35.50% between the cities in Taiwan among which Taipei City (35.50%) was number one, followed by Hsinchu City (35.14%) with second highest rate and Taichung City (34.79%) in the third place. In short, the average participation of adults below 64 years old was 30.96%. It was much lower than that of EU which was 42%. In other words, there were still a lot for Taiwan to work on in terms of moving towards a learning society.

Gladly, 2011 Adult Education Research Report pointed out that with the efforts the government and people made in promoting lifelong learning, the rate of adults taking part in formal and informal learning activities has increased to 34.25%. In specific analysis, the average participation of adults between 18 to 64 years old was 34.49% while the ratio of elder participants over 65 years old was 17.42%. In comparison with the report of 2008, the overall participation in formal and informal learning in 2011 has increased 5.04% in which the participation ratio of those between 16 to 64 years old was 30.96% and that of those over 65 years old was 11.40% (Wu and Li, 2013).

Generally speaking, the major obstacles hinder Taiwan from developing a lifelong learning society can be understood from the following aspects (Wu, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Committee for Educational Research, Ministry of Education, 2011). Firstly, the contemporary learning institutes are limited to certain types and topics. Even though many new learning institutes were brought into being during the Lifelong Learning Year, most of them were still designed to serve the public officials, local enterprises or their own communities only. Secondly, the establishment of learning cities and towns has yet not put into effect. It is believed to be a bottom up process sustained by local cities and towns to build up a learning society; nevertheless, all these years the pragmatic policies and practice in the locals are obviously behind the schedule. Thirdly, the function and the promotion for lifelong learning are to be strengthened. According to Taiwan Lifelong Learning Act, a lifelong learning organization refers to any organization or institute that offers opportunities for people to engage in lifelong learning. Therefore, it can be a government organization, a non-government organization, an enterprise, or a non-profit organization, as long as it provides lifelong learning courses. Base on such flexible definition, most lifelong

learning organizations in Taiwan are underestimated. A better propaganda is required especially in promoting strategic alliance and digital learning. Fourthly, the systematization is not firmly settled for both courses and staff. It is for sure that excellent courses will motivate people to increase their participation in lifelong learning. And professional staffs are the key to maintain the quality of the courses. In other words, a lifelong learning society cannot be formed before the quality control of courses and the professionalization of the staffs are achieved. Fifthly, schools in Taiwan have failed to cultivate lifelong learners. It is agreed that the development of lifelong learning is subjected to learners' involvement. Fundamentally, the school plays an important role shaping students' understanding, attitudes, and habits toward learning. However, neither the concept nor the scheme is embedded in school, no matter in what level of Taiwan's education, to mold potential lifelong learners. Sixthly, citizens' competences for lifelong learning, which are strongly connected to self-achievement, active citizenship, and employment, are yet to be developed. In view of this, EU has therefore listed eight must-have competences for people engage in lifelong learning, including being able to communicate in native language; to communicate in foreign languages; math and basic technological skills; digital competence; learning to learning; interpersonal, cross-cultural and civil relations, entrepreneurship; as well as cultural expression. And many other skills are emphasized and developed on the basis of these eight competences. However, unlike what has been carried out in EU, no fixed definition about competences for lifelong learning is made as a guideline for people to equip themselves in Taiwan so far.

In summary, Taiwan is struggling to develop a lifelong learning society. The problems mentioned above are resulted from significant backgrounds. In order the break the deadlock, comprehensive exploring and analysis to the problems must be taken to come up pragmatic solutions and strategies.

### **Sophisticated Strategies for Constructing a Learning Society in Taiwan**

The development of a lifelong learning society can be seen as a revolution not only for learning but also for the culture and for the society. It is a meaningful social system constructed by active learners with different learning types and diverse courses. And various learning routes are offered without space restriction. Such system is also an open learning network in which media and social interaction are irreplaceable elements. In addition to that, the sub-systems such as schools, libraries, museums, learning centers and other education institutes are equally important. In this system, learning is

living and living is learning. Moreover, this system is taking people to a whole new era that no one has ever experienced before (Olbrich, 1999; Wu, 2000, 2001, 2004). The spread of the idea, the increasing opportunities for learning, the implementation of tenable policies, and the lifted anticipation from the public can all result in a better chance to build up a learning society. In other words, the accomplishment of a lifelong learning society depends on the persistent practice of tenable policies, the integration of learning resources, the active involvement of the public, as well as the settlement of all kinds of problems and challenges raised in the progress (Wu, 2007a; Robertson, 1995).

Historically, the lifelong learning in Taiwan may not be able to compete with that in the developed countries in Europe or in the United States; yet, a good niche has been formed. In order to deepen and widen the development of lifelong learning in Taiwan, innovative strategies which integrate the local and international experiences must be practiced throughout the current and the future learning organizations. And only in this way can Taiwan break the deadlock and catch up with the international tendency towards lifelong learning. Six specific strategies to establish a lifelong society in Taiwan are as follows:

1. To carry out a full development of all types of learning organizations. It is generally agreed that the learning capacities are often the determinants of national competitiveness. Setting up a learning organization is an effective way to forming the lifelong learning habit and the climate. Members' potentials and self-achievements can be stimulated during the learning process; furthermore, result in the organization's sustainable prosperity and necessary adaption to the reality (Wu, 1997). The White Paper towards a Learning Society published in 1998 declared that setting up various types of learning organizations, such as learning organizations in private enterprises, in corrective institutions, in families, in communities, and for civil service servants, to be a specific approach towards establishing a learning society. The promotion has received significant response especially during Lifelong Learning Year; yet, it is a long journey without a finish line. All these learning organizations should be spread out to different levels in the society. In fact, Wu (2008a) pointed out that all types of organizations should equally share the chance to be a learning organization. And the approaches are illustrated as follows:
  - a. To advocate the concept and the practice of learning organizations.
  - b. To enhance members' capacities toward lifelong learning.
  - c. To response to adults' learning characteristics and barriers.
  - d. To design multiple learning plans and methods.



- e. To train the organization's leader to become a learning leader.
- f. To get familiar with the learning needs and to shape the learning climate.
- g. To promote the knowledge management and a knowledge community.
- h. To develop an organizational learning strategic alliance.
- i. To establish organizational learning assessment mechanisms.

2. To promote learning towns, counties, and cities.

The purpose of setting up learning towns, counties, and cities is to promote lifelong learning, encouraging the residents to become lifelong learners, and eventually achieve the goal of developing a lifelong learning society. It can stimulate residents' progressive capacity of innovation and adaptability to cope with the changing new era. Not only the people get transformed, the town and the city also get modernized

However, a learning town or city cannot happen without the endorsement of government policies and resource mobilization. The uniqueness of each city in terms of history, culture, politics, economics and education, should all be adequately considered in governing (Jucevičienė, 2007). Since a successful experience in one town may not necessarily be applicable to another, learning individuals and self-directed learning have become the core in developing a learning town, county or city. And strategies for developing future learning towns, counties or cities in Taiwan are suggested as follows (Wu, 2008c ; Campbell, 2009; Longworth, 2006; Senge, 2006):

- a. The government's policy commitments for learning towns, counties, and cities: the government should frame feasible policies and cross-sectors cooperation to effectively promote learning towns, counties, and cities.
- b. Innovative plans for forming learning towns, counties, and cities: it takes innovative thinking and continuous plans to raise public awareness of the importance to establish a learning town, county or city. It is exactly such awareness that will inspire people to put into action.
- c. Solving the urban problems and increasing the employability of the township: the value of a learning city is connected to its response to solving the urban problems. In other words, a learning city will find its way to cope with the employment challenges, to resolve the city difficulties, as well as to promote social integration.
- d. Transforming urban organizations to learning organizations: the development of an urban learning organization is not contributed by merely certain organizations. Instead, it requires the mobilization among various types of organizations which will be transformed to be learning organizations in towns, counties and cities.
- e. Defining indicators of assessment mechanism to measure the effectiveness of a

learning town, county or city: the implement of assessment mechanism is beneficial for complete development of learning towns, counties and cities in Taiwan.

- f. Constructing the partnership networks between the learning towns, counties and cities: the mobilization for establishing an urban learning is based on the interaction and the coordination among various organizations in the city. The better interaction among the organizations, the better chance to develop sustainable learning partnership networks in the real life.
- g. Promoting the social movement in the learning towns, counties, and cities: the development of a learning city should be seen as a new social movement to keep abreast of the innovative lifelong learning concept.
- h. Developing a local mode for establishing learning towns, counties, and cities: a local mode which embraces the unique culture of Taiwan should be explored and adopted to build up a learning town, county, and city.
- i. Forming the best practice for developing learning towns, counties, and cities through exploration and empirical studies: the intensive interaction, cooperation, and experience-sharing are the vital elements to achieve the goal of developing future learning towns, counties, and cities in Taiwan.

In short, the strategies mentioned above are complements to each other. They are all essential factors to develop learning towns, counties, and cities in Taiwan. It is a civil lifelong learning social movement from making policy commitments to establishing the best practice mode. The civil engagement in lifelong learning should be expanded so that the urban problems can be solved; the employability can be increase; and an integrated, prosperous, creative, and sustainable learning town, county, or city can be built up.

3. To promote effective lifelong learning routes for lifelong learning organizations. There are many types of learning organizations. Followed with the different nature, framework and task of each organization, different promotive methods should be tailored and adopted. Take the library for an example, the effective promotion can be as follows (Wu, 2003):
  - a. To reduce the digital gap in lifelong learning.
  - b. To develop various types of learning and study groups.
  - c. To improve lifelong learning guidance and counseling service.
  - d. To strengthen the ability in research and creativity in lifelong learning.
  - e. To establish the lifelong learning strategic alliance.
  - f. To expand the diversity of lifelong learning activities and opportunities.
  - g. To get transformed as a learning library.

In addition to that, public libraries are a starting point to implement the reading policy announced by the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, restrained by the laws and regulations in operation, public libraries can hardly become the community lifelong learning centers. It is strongly argued that public libraries should be supervised by the education department in both central and local level of the government. It is anticipated that the authorities would put more emphasis on reading and developing public libraries, bringing township libraries into municipal or county library system. The township libraries can become the branches, following the rules and structures formulated by the municipal or county libraries in terms of resource allocation, service plan, and standard operating procedure. The goal of developing community lifelong learning centers can then be achieved (Ministry of Education, 2010).

It is worth mentioned that lifelong learning organizations are the core organizations promoting civil lifelong learning. That is to say lifelong learning organizations play the key role in the process of moving towards a learning society. However, there may be disputes resulted from different objectives, ideologies, organizational cultures, interests, resources, communication, or capabilities for conflict resolution between the lifelong learning organizations in developing partnerships (Wu, 2007b; Tett, 2005). The definition for a lifelong learning organization is so flexible that as long as a norganization provides the opportunity and function for lifelong learning, it is broadly considered a lifelong learning organization. Therefore, a lifelong learning organization can be a community college, a school, or a learning organization host either by the enterprise or by the government. All these diverse lifelong learning organizations play an important role in developing a learning society. And close partnerships should be built between each other especially in the trend of globalization. It's a win-win strategy which brings mutual benefits to the joint members. Instead of cooperating with organizations that share similarities in nature, the idea of forming the strategic alliance refers to partners sharing complementary resources to meet their actual needs. The specific practice is drawn as follows (Wu, 2007b):

- a. To carefully select and assess strategic partners.
- b. To set up correct recognition and concepts toward the strategic alliance.
- c. To shape a common vision for the alliance.
- d. To confirm the categories and the contents of the alliance.
- e. To establish a dedicated and responsible team for the strategic alliance.
- f. To develop the best practical strategy.
- g. To thoroughly assessing the achievement of the strategic alliance.

Besides, in the digital era, digital learning which can be done anytime and anywhere should be well-applied in promoting a learning society. The government should encourage the full development of digital learning which the courses must be user-friendly, considering the learning styles and the conveniences for individuals. The effective exploitation and producing of digital learning programs will sharpen citizens' capacities, reduce the digital gap, and increase their participation in lifelong learning.

4. To upgrade lifelong learning quality and staff professionalization.

UNESCO addressed in Global Report an Adult Learning and Education that the quality of lifelong learning was the key fundamental for developing a learning society. On top of that, making connections and bringing benefits were very much emphasized in promoting the lifelong learning quality.

Take making connections for instance, the supply of lifelong learning should connect to learners that both policies and plans must be integrated from child education to higher education, covering regular education, irregular education, as well as informal education. That is to say, lifelong learning must bring hopes to learners and connect to their daily contexts. As for bringing benefits, lifelong learning itself must be a valuable activity that would stir the participants to achieve the scheduled objectives. UNESCO; furthermore, pointed out that the facilitation of lifelong learning was related to the effectiveness control and quality assurance. And professional staffs of lifelong learning were the critical factors to assure the learning quality. A so-called professional lifelong learning staff would need to undertake training programs to polish his or her professional competence. Moreover, adult teachers and trainers must understand completely the life contexts and the meaning they represented to the learners (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009b).

In recent years, EU put great emphasis on maintaining lifelong learning quality and the staff professionalization. In response to the complexity of lifelong learning, EU has suggested the most representative and appropriate indicators including the following four parts and fifteen indicators. These contents can be inspirations to Taiwan in enhancing lifelong learning quality and staff professionalization (European Commission, 2002):

Part One: Skills, Abilities, and Attitudes:

- a. Literacy.
- b. Arithmetic.

- c. Learn new skills needed in the society.
  - d. Learning how to learn.
  - e. Active citizenship, culture and social competence.
- Part Two: Participations and Entry Routes:
- a. Participations in lifelong learning.
  - b. Entry routes to lifelong learning.
- Part Three: Lifelong Learning Resources:
- a. Investment in lifelong learning.
  - b. Educators and learning.
  - c. The informatics and communication technologies for learning.
- Part Four: Strategies and System:
- a. Lifelong learning strategies.
  - b. Integrated supply.
  - c. Guidance and counseling.
  - d. Accreditation of learning achievement.
  - e. Quality assurance.

The concepts and strategies UNESCO and EU have raised regarding to lifelong learning quality and staff professionalization could be important references for Taiwan to follow. Looking to the future, the urgent tasks for lifelong learning in Taiwan are to establish the indicators to implement, monitor, and manage lifelong learning; to carry out lifelong learning staff professionalization; and to establish lifelong learning accreditation system.

5. To foster lifelong learners.

UNESCO emphasizes that everyone has to be a lifelong learner in order to cope with this dramatic changing era. It insists lifelong learners must equip themselves with four following characters: being an active explorer with creativities, an activist with self-reflection, an activist seeking for self-achievement, and a coordinator of learning. Since schools are the major institution to foster lifelong learners, they ought to play an active role in this lifelong learning era (Wu, 2009a; Medel-Añonuevo, Ohsako & Mauch, 2001).

In this rapidly changing knowledge society, every individual has to get rid of the traditional belief that learning happens only during a certain period of time in one's life. In fact, it is necessary for everyone to start being an enthusiastic lifelong learner assisted by the school. As what was just mentioned, schools should be and can be the main contributors in turning people from being traditional learners to being lifelong learners. There are practical strategies such as follows (Wu, 2009a):

- a. To implement the education policy of fostering lifelong learners.
- b. To clearly define and draw out the capacities of lifelong learning.
- c. To facilitate the organizational learning in the school.
- d. To get the support and the encouragement from the school leader.
- e. To demand the teachers to join in lifelong learning.
- f. To improve teachers' capacity in lifelong learning.
- g. To shape a lifelong learning environment.
- h. To come up the best resolution of fostering lifelong learners.

6. To develop citizens' lifelong learning capacity.

The lifelong learning capacity is essential in terms of enhancing the competitiveness of an individual, an organization, and a society. The so-called lifelong learning capacity is referring to various abilities that help learners to carry out effective learning under different situations throughout their lives. Each ability is constituted by the knowledge, the skill and the attitude, and can get improved through continuous learning. Recently in the world, international organizations, UNESCO, OECD and EU for examples, all insist that no matter it is about fostering lifelong learners or developing a learning society, they both ought to be fulfilled on the basis of developing individuals' lifelong learning capacities (Wu, 2009b, 2010; OECD, 2005a, 2005b; The European Association for University Lifelong Learning, 2009; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2008a, 2008b)..

The development of the lifelong learning capacities is more than just a continuous practice throughout one's life. In fact, it is closely related to many factors such as education policies, learners, schools and the society. Since it can only perform the best influence when all these factors are carefully considered and well connected, the following suggestions should be seriously put into action (Wu, 2009b, 2010):

- a. To form a policy which clearly define the contents of lifelong learning capacities.
- b. To promote the learning rights.
- c. To ensure everyone to develop his or her lifelong learning capacities.
- d. To develop personal lifelong learning journey.
- e. The school plays as a founder of lifelong learning.
- f. The society plays as reinforcement of lifelong learning.
- g. To establish the lifelong learning assessment mechanism.

A learning society is for all the citizens to share and to join. Especially for those disables and the minorities, their rights to participate in lifelong learning should be respected and protected. Hence, it is prior to other tasks that the authorities must make laws and integrate the resources, making sure the lifelong learning rights are

equally enjoyed by everyone, including the disables and the minorities.

The strategies mentioned above have widely covered various aspects including learning institutes, learning cities, lifelong learning organizations, the quality of lifelong learning and professionalization of the staff, lifelong learners, and lifelong learning capacities. It is worth noted that among all these aspects, learning institutes are the most important fundament. In other words, the establishment of a lifelong learning society can only be achieved through pragmatic practice of learning institutes in different fields, blending the idea of learning into real living. In this sense, the development of lifelong learning towns and cities are also indispensable. In addition, the lifelong learning organizations are the major institutions for promoting a lifelong learning society. With effective learning routes, the learning institutes would result in citizens' better participation in lifelong learning. As it is critically addressed that the development of a learning society should focus on both the increasing number of the participants and the stable quality of the courses, an urgent task that must be fulfilled in time is to improve the quality of lifelong learning and the staff. Nevertheless, all these external factors will not necessarily guarantee the success of constructing a lifelong learning society. After all, it is learners who are the main actors engaged in learning. Therefore, all the strategies should be carried out on the foundation of a significant pool of lifelong learners equipped with key lifelong learning capacities have been fostered and then a lifelong learning society can eventually get built up.

## Conclusion

The establishment of a lifelong learning society is a long way which requires systematically planned strategies and supporting measures. We should in one hand understand the international trend of lifelong learning, and on other hand, grasp the actual need that the locals thirst for to come up feasible policies and strategies. Besides, it is necessary to set priorities to implement these policies and strategies, making the best investment in progressing towards a learning society

Originally, the establishment of a learning society will help to decrease or even level up the learning gap between the rich and the poor. Yet, we find two obvious lifelong learning gaps exist in Taiwan. One is the international lifelong learning gap that Taiwan's civil participation in lifelong learning is still quite behind in comparison with advanced countries in EU. The other one is the national lifelong learning gap which the significant differences in participation rate are reflected in the following socio-demographic variables such as gender, age and region. And urgent resolutions are expected to fill both gaps.

Undoubtedly, there is still much to work out to build up a learning society in Taiwan. In order to break the deadlock of lifelong learning development in Taiwan, strategies such as to develop various learning institutes, to promote learning towns and cities, to facilitate effective routes for lifelong learning through lifelong learning organizations, to improve the quality of lifelong learning and professionalization of the staff, to foster lifelong learners, as well as to develop citizen' lifelong learning capacities must be put into action. It is only through the implementation of these essential strategies that the gap in lifelong learning can get leveled up and the goal for establishing a learning society will be achieved in Taiwan.

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