

MAKING COLLEGE STUDENTS LIFELONG LEARNERS

Asenath Maobe

University of Eastern Africa, Baraton,

P.O. Box 2500, Eldoret, Kenya

Cell: +254721518973/ +254706558074

Email: zenamao@yahoo.com, maobe@ueab.ac.ke

Abstract

In recent years, there have been growing concerns of the education stakeholders (the public, students and faculty) regarding the quality of learning in college students. The public feels that graduates are unprepared to face the workplace; the students note that learning is focused on the exams and note taking while faculty note a low student morale to learning. While most stakeholders agree that the issues deserve attention, consensus dissolves around how to respond to the concerns. This literature review looks at one of the approaches to addressing those concerns: making students lifelong learners. In this paper, a student is considered a lifelong learner when they are engaged in the process of gaining knowledge and skills in all stages of their lives and the outcomes can be observed. Notably, many students after spending many years of their lives in school, they feel that the learning phase of their lives has ended once they graduate. The paper is primarily intended to give an overview on how to make student learners by looking at four aspects of lifelong learning: its benefits to the students; the implications of non-lifelong learning, the teachers' role in the process and the role of the students in becoming lifelong learners.

Keywords: lifelong learning, college students, stakeholders

Introduction

A lifelong learning orientation to education is critical to college students in the ever changing environment of the 21st century. A college student is considered as someone attending a HE institution. Encouraging these students to be lifelong learners is an objective that ought to, not only be on the minds of teachers but the students as well. Whenever a student shows an interest in any subject matter they should be supported by the teachers to research it further and find out all that they can about it. The students should also be self motivated to learn and utilize this knowledge and skills throughout their lives.

Over a number of years, lifelong learning has not been well understood. It has been equated to second chance education or linking graduates to the workplace industry. However, lifelong learning is a process which commences with birth and only ends at death, it is then carried on by others in a never-ending continuum (Cohen, 2009). In the paper, its meaning is focused on ways of engaging the students to acquire knowledge and skills in all stages of their lives. As a result, some aspects of making students continuous learners will be discussed by responding to the following four questions:

1. What are the benefits of lifelong learning to the students?
2. What are the implications of non- lifelong learning to the students and colleges?
3. Are the teachers critical in making students lifelong learners?
4. What is the role of students in lifelong learning?

What are the Benefits of Lifelong Learning to the Students?

In a rapidly changing world, where all education stakeholders are called upon to find new solutions, lifelong learning is critical to social and economic developments of the students. These developments are measured on the basis of higher employment rate, higher productivity, higher earnings, higher life satisfaction, better health, happiness and longer life expectancy. These indicators have been measured in an empirical study by Education Council (2010).

Lifelong learning should avail tangible benefits to the students just as banking does to their customers. Today's banks focus on growing their customers 'for good'. This entails empowering them to grow their money in the long term. Some of the



Indicators that the bank uses to establish whether their customers are getting lifelong rewards include improved net worth, enhanced satisfaction, progressed living standards and continued business with the bank.

Lifelong learning would benefit students to stay competitive leaders in the job market by making them good leaders. It makes them knowledgeable and enhances the ease with which they connect with others in order to stay influential at their work place. By way of example, Theodore Roosevelt was one leader who was charismatic, remarkable and all rounded due to continuous learning. As Heinlein (1987) famously proposed:

A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects. (p.81)

What are the Implications of Non- Lifelong Learning to the Students and the Colleges?

Learners would not survive in a changing and highly inequitable world that is characterized by globalization if they fail to embrace lifelong learning (Senge, 1996). The world today is dented by poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, homogenization, family disintegration, terror attacks such as the most recent Westgate Shopping Mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya on 21st September, 2013 where a number of people were killed. If students embrace lifelong learning skills, it would be a way to help solve one of the world's problems such as unemployment and remain competitive in a global world.

The short term agenda of learning creates an aspect of memorization in the students. Memorization is not the primary goal of higher education as it results to a low morale for lifelong learning among the students (Fink, 2003). The HE institutions need be aware of the widening scope between what is taught and what the workplace requires which is another clear implication of memorization. When students learn by rote for the sake of passing exams, they fail to internalize critical skills necessary to be effective in the workplace. This then has an effect on their sustained employability since the workplace requires graduates who are critical

thinkers, able to analyze and reason.

Lack of lifelong learning can be felt by the society as a whole when students fail to be useful in their communities. Societal expectations of the students are that once they finish college, they will be critical thinkers who will be on the front line in helping to solve societal problems. Jesus was a model to students in critical thinking. Taylor (2010) gives an example of how Jesus reasoned logically when the enemies claimed that He drove out demons by using satanic powers. Jesus' response to these accusations was that Satan could not drive out Satan.

With regard to the universities, the failure to espouse lifelong learning in some of these institutions has brought about numerous challenges which have necessitated their radical transformation. Duke (2002) points out that universities are confronted with massive problems among them the push for change in support of quality education. However, during the last decade, colleges have undergone episodic changes that are structural in nature. They have also taken measures to embrace information technology and have adopted a new vision of what constitutes lifelong learning.

By way of example, the University of Eastern Africa- Baraton in Kenya, in its curriculum has integrated general requirement courses such as; vocational skills, keyboarding, physical and recreational activities and agriculture amongst others. These courses are undertaken by students from all disciplines to help prepare them for the world after graduation. These efforts are crucial since students apply these concepts in all stages of their lives. This practice would be a practical relevant example to other HE colleges in the country. As a result, the university has been generally dubbed as 'the school that prepares you for life.'

There is a need to advocate for lifelong learning in HE. Universities need to inculcate practical values of learning and defocus from short term objectives. In essence, universities are centers where significant learning experiences happen. The students are expected to be inspired to be 'more' through continued learning much after they graduate. Fink (2003) has suggested that colleges should focus their efforts on developing people who engage in complex problem solving skills and reasoning. Failure to achieve this would produce graduates who are not useful in the workplace and the society

as a whole. This indeed is something no HE University would want to be remembered for.

Are Teachers Critical in Making Lifelong Learners?

The role of a teacher in shaping students' long term behavior and learning can never be gainsaid. Teaching engages the soul. The work of teaching and saving souls are inextricably intertwined. The Bible in 1 Corinthians 12:28 reveals that in God's gifts to the church, teachers are numbers three, after apostles and second prophets in their mission. The Bible has placed teachers on a critical path to influencing the students and mentoring them. Teachers have a heavenly obligation to equip learners with knowledge and skills that they can use in their entire lives. This is the real meaning of lifelong learning.

In order for teachers to achieve lifelong learning in students, they will need to radically transform their teaching styles. In an empirical study by Cohen (2009) it is reported that the challenge of lifelong learning is to fundamentally rethink learning and teaching in an attempt to change mind-sets. This will require great effort from the teachers for they will be required to play the role of facilitators and change agents in the learning process.

In the writings of Palmer (1998), the powers of teachers do not necessarily lie in their teaching techniques but on their capacity to awaken a truth within the students that they can reclaim years later after they graduate and recall its outcome in their lives. To stress on meaningful learning, Ban (2004) has suggested that teachers can make learning meaningful by allowing grading for instance, to be a way of feedback rather than a way of ranking students. Teachers should use evaluations to check on the progress of students' learning and not to separate sheep from goats. It is apparent therefore that students should be assisted to defocus from passing exams and 'relax' so that quality learning can happen. In fact in HE, learning should be fun and viewed as a gradual way to develop new long lasting abilities in the students.

The teachers should also embark on facilitating the unlearning of students' mental models to allow for new lasting concepts. Helping students change their minds is critical to learning (Lieberg, 2008). Nevertheless, teachers need to base their teachings on sound principles to attain lifelong learning. As Ramsden (2003) observes, teaching is based on theories which

have evolved over time to guide teachers. HE teachers should use those theories (formal, descriptive and normative theories) for effective teaching. This implies that lifelong learning can be achieved by great teachers who focus on the students' concerns. They help them unlearn mental models and also use proven teaching theories to stimulate the students to learn throughout their lives.

Education Council (2010) has listed suggestions informed by a substantial body of empirical research, which can be handy for teachers to promote lifelong learning in HE. According to the Education (2010) teaching methods should be: task-focused, inspiring, focused on team learning, reflective; non fragmented and cognizant of the individual students' potential. The teachers must let go their authority and recognize that lifelong learning is not synonymous to lifelong schooling. They should empower students to take on the responsibility for their own learning to achieve lasting results. Good teachers are therefore, arguably, the most important resource that a student can encounter in a HE institution.

What is the Role of the Student in Lifelong Learning?

The role of students in lifelong learning especially in the 21st century is ubiquitous. Graduation ceremonies are called a 'commencement' to mean it is the beginning of learning. During graduation, students are called upon to stay motivated and to continue learning after graduation. As a matter of fact, intrinsically motivated students will keenly engage in learning out of interest, enjoyment, and a desire to accomplish personal objectives (Brewster & Fager, 2000). It is such students who are more likely to be lifelong learners as noted by Kohn (1994). Lifelong learners are more likely to take a more active part in the civic community, lead a more sustainable lifestyle, and have improved health.

Through student self-regulated learning, students can take their own steps in order to learn, but they "also should... take care of their own monitoring, motivation and feedback process during and after learning" (Van Eekelen et al., 2005, p. 451). Self-regulated learning plays a key role in sustained lifelong learning among college students. In another study, Zimmerman (1989) presents skills, which are important in identifying student characteristics in self regulated learning, namely: setting specific



goals for oneself, adopting powerful strategies for attaining these goals, monitoring one's performance, restructuring one's learning environment to make it compatible with one's goals, managing one's time effectively and self-evaluation of one's methods. It is evident that these skills enable students to become lifelong learners.

Students are equally required to possess a high degree of self-awareness in becoming lifelong learners. Senge (1996) has pointed out personal mastery as fundamental to lifelong learning. People who possess high degrees of personal mastery are continually increasing their capabilities to produce what they purpose to achieve. Their permanent search for self-advancement and self-discovery triggers the fortitude for learning. The search can also include spiritual growth and the critical approach to life throughout the students' lives. What is more, as students with personal mastery work together, they feel connected to God and others in a continual learning mode.

Conclusion

Lifelong learning is now recognized by all stakeholders as one of the most important competencies that people should possess. The benefits students stand to gain are numerous. However, the process needs episodic changes on how teachers teach and how learners learn. The HE teachers are required to be facilitators and change agents, guiding the students to continue learning. The students are also called upon to stay motivated, manage their time well, set their learning goals, yearn for knowledge and be critical thinkers among others. The implication of non-lifelong learning is also evident in high unemployment rates among the graduates, impeding changes in the universities and a general dissatisfaction from all the stakeholders on the quality of education. In summary, more pragmatic approaches need to be adopted by the HE industry to enhance lifelong learning among college students.

References

- Bain, K. (2004). **What the best college teachers do.** Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brewster, C., & Fager, J. (2000). Increasing student engagement and motivation: from time-on-task to homework. *Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, 14*, (1). Retrieved from <http://www.nwrel.org/request/oct00/textonly.htm>
- Cohen, J. (2009). Education techniques for lifelong learning: lifelong learning in the 21st century and beyond. *Radiographic, 29*, 2.
- Duke, C. (2002). Managing the learning university. *The Society for Research into Higher Education, Open University Press.* Retrieved from <http://www.openupusa.com/openup/chapters/0335207650.pdf>
- Education Council. (2010). *Europe 2020: A new European strategy for growth and jobs.* Brussels: European Council.
- Fink, D. (2003). *Creating significant learning experiences: An integrated approach to designing college courses* (1st ed..Manhattan, KS: The IDEA center.
- Heinlein, R. (1987). *The past through tomorrow: future history stories.* New York, NY: Acer.
- Kohn, A. (1994). The risks of rewards. *Education Resources Information Center.* Retrieved from <http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/pdf/the%20risks%20of%20rewards.pdf>
- Lieberg, C. (2008). *Teaching your first college class: A practical guide for new faculty and graduate student instructors.* Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing.
- Palmer, P. (1998). *The courage to teach: exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ramsden, P. (2003). *Learning to teach in higher education.* New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- Senge, P. (1996). Leading learning organizations. *Executive Excellence, 13*, 4.
- Taylor, J. W. (2010). Jesus Christ: Master teacher. *The Journal of Adventist Education, 73*(2), 4-9. Retrieved from http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/JAE_v73%232.pdf
- Van Eekelen, I., Boshuizen, H., & Vermunt, J. (2005). Self-regulation in higher education teacher learning. *Higher Education, 50*, 3.



Zimmerman, J. (1989). A social cognitive view of self regulated academic learning: Which are the key sub-processes? *Contemporary Education Psychology*, 16, 317.