

Thematic Section:  
Higher Education, Lifelong Learning and Social Inclusion

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## Students' Plans for Lifelong Learning and Teaching

### Abstract

One of the roles of the higher education is to prepare and encourage students for lifelong learning. However, no evidence can be found about students' plans for further learning and teaching related to formal, non-formal and informal context. The purpose of this study was to explore these students' plans in relation to their study group, level of knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning, study year, parents' formal education and monthly income. 553 students from the Juraj Dobrila University of Pula took part in the study. Students of educational sciences, humanities and economics differed in their plans for further informal learning, while no differences were found regarding their plans for their further formal education and non-formal learning. When it came to plans for teaching, students differed in their plans for informal teaching regarding their study groups, study year and fathers' formal education. No differences were found in students' plans related to the level of mothers' formal education and monthly income. Results are discussed in the perspective of lifelong learning.

Key words: lifelong learning and teaching, formal education, non-formal and informal learning, students' plans, parents' formal education, monthly incomes

### Introduction

Education is a process that lasts for a lifetime. As teachers, we need to further explore how we can use creative tools to ensure that our learners recognise the need for lifelong learning. It is up to teachers to reflect on how to promote education as a creative process (Ogunleye, 2008) and experience.

The need for lifelong learning has also been recognised at the global and national levels. For example, Europe 2020 (European Commission, 2010) emphasises that Europe must act, among other things, within education, training and lifelong learning. Croatian government recognises that modern education development strategies are based on the concept of lifelong learning and the concept of learning society (Vlada RH, 2001).

The concept of lifelong learning, developed in the sixties of the last century, mostly relates with objectives of economic nature, such as improved competitiveness and long-term employability. However, at the same time there are equally important objectives that contribute to the active role of individuals in society, such as fostering social inclusion, development of active citizenship, and the development of individual potentials (Pastuović, 1999). Schools and educational institutions have a major role in preparing and motivating

students for lifelong learning by teaching them how to learn and by encouraging positive attitudes towards learning (Klapan, 2007).

Lifelong learning is accomplished through the model of formal, non-formal and informal learning. According to this model (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; European Commission, 2001), formal education is the institutionalised, chronologically and hierarchically structured “education system”, that stretches from primary school to university; non-formal learning is any organised and systematic educational activity outside the formal system that provides selected types of learning to particular groups of people regardless of their age; and informal learning refers to the lifelong process, unorganised and often unsystematic, by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment.

One of the roles of the higher education is to prepare and encourage students for lifelong learning. However, no evidence can be found about university students’ plans for further learning and teaching related to formal, non-formal and informal context.

### The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the previously described model of formal education, non-formal and informal learning (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; European Commission, 2001) by exploring university students’ plans for lifelong learning and teaching of these types of education and learning. The objectives of the study were: (1) to explore if there are differences in students’ plans for formal education, non-formal and informal learning considering their study group, knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning, year of study, parents’ formal education and monthly income; and (2) to find out if there are differences in students’ plans for non-formal and informal teaching, again considering their study group, knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning, year of study, parents’ formal education and monthly income.

### Method

A total of 553 students from the Juraj Dobrila University of Pula took part. Their age ranged from 18 to 36 years. One quarter of them (23.5%) were male students and three quarters (76.5%) were female students. They were chosen to meet the following criteria: 1) affiliation to study group that is trained for teaching and a study group that is not trained for teaching; 2) presence of all study years; 3) representation of the university gender ratio.

They differed according to their:

a) Study group: 52.5% of students in the sample studied economics, 21.2% studied educational sciences and 26% studied humanities. The latter two groups study to become teachers.

b) Knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning: it was examined with a 15 items test that was created for the purpose of a larger survey that was exploring students’ knowledge and attitudes about formal education, non-formal and informal learning. 16% of students in this sample scored higher than one standard deviation above the average result on the test, while 13% scored less than one standard deviation below the average result.

c) Study year: 38.2% of students in this sample attended the 1<sup>st</sup>, 20.4% the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 23.1% the 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 18.3% attended the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year.

d) Parents’ highest formal education: 4.3% of fathers and 8.5% of mothers in this sample completed elementary school as their highest formal education, 68% of fathers and 62.4% of mothers completed high school, 23.3% of fathers and 25.1% of mothers completed college/university and graduate studies.

e) Monthly family income: 4.5% of total sample had income up to 2.000 kn (Croatian kuna); 12.7% had 2.001 – 4.000 kn; 25.9% earned 4.001 – 6.000 kn; 34.4% earned 6.001 – 10.000 kn; and 17% had more than 10.000 kn.

Data were collected in a larger survey that examined students' knowledge and attitudes related to formal education, non-formal and informal learning. Instruments were administered during lectures at the university with students' oral consent and anonymously. Students were firstly given the knowledge test on formal education, non-formal and informal learning. After it was filled in and collected, students were instructed about the three forms of education/learning. Then they were given, among other, open questions about their plans for formal education, non-formal and informal learning, as well as for their formal, non-formal and informal teaching. Answers to these open questions were then categorised and analysed. A coding system was used for collating data from the two phases.

## Results and discussion

### Students' plans for future formal education, non-formal and informal learning

In order to answer to the first objective, chi-square tests were performed. Students mostly report about their plans for non-formal learning (27.7%), then for formal education (20.4%) and least for informal learning (17%). The only significant difference is found in plans for informal learning among students of different study groups ( $\chi^2=17.9$ ;  $df=8$ ;  $p=0.02$ ). Future pre-school teachers and primary school teachers (36.1% of those who answered) mostly want to learn about art techniques, maybe because their teachers during study encouraged them to that. Maybe they understand that art techniques cannot be learned at once, but it takes lifelong time to learn something new and useful for work with children. Students of economics (31.2%) mostly plan to take one to one lessons in mathematics, probably because they look at the near future and will seek help for the coming exams. Students of humanities (38.6%) give answers that are least focused – so they fit the category „other“, for example: *Everything; Volunteering; Reading; Playing bridge; Juggling*, etc.

Other comparisons do not reveal any significant differences. Students of educational sciences, humanities and economics have similar plans for pursuing their formal education (various studies or postgraduate studies;  $\chi^2=2.12$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.35$ ) and non-formal learning (foreign languages and diverse, unfocused plans;  $\chi^2=0.99$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.61$ ) probably because their motivation for studying, its continuation and obtaining various licenses does not differ regarding their study group. Regardless of their knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning, students report of similar plans for formal education (various studies or postgraduate studies;  $\chi^2=2.33$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.127$ ), non-formal (foreign languages and diverse, unfocused plans;  $\chi^2=1.87$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.171$ ) and informal learning (foreign languages, art, social sciences and humanities, natural sciences and mathematics, and other  $\chi^2=1.57$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p=0.814$ ). Students of every study year identify similar plans for their further formal education (various studies or postgraduate studies;  $\chi^2=4.38$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p=0.223$ ), non-formal learning (foreign languages and diverse, unfocused plans;  $\chi^2=2.36$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p=0.502$ ), and informal learning (foreign languages, art, social sciences and humanities, natural sciences and mathematics, and other;  $\chi^2=11.2$ ;  $df=12$ ;  $p=0.511$ ). The probable reason for this is that students of all study years have the goal to finish their studies, with a more general, not specific vision of what might be necessary for their work. Regardless of their parents' highest level of formal education, students report to have similar plans for their further formal education (various studies or postgraduate studies; related to fathers' formal education:  $\chi^2=0.15$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.928$ ; related to mothers' formal education:  $\chi^2=0.88$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.643$ ), non-formal learning (foreign languages and diverse, unfocused plans; related to fathers' formal

education:  $\chi^2=1.29$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.524$ ; related to mothers' formal education:  $\chi^2=0.16$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.924$ ), and informal learning (foreign languages, art, social sciences and humanities, natural sciences and mathematics, and other; related to fathers' formal education:  $\chi^2=9.41$ ;  $df=8$ ;  $p=0.309$ ; related to mothers' formal education:  $\chi^2=6.42$ ;  $df=8$ ;  $p=0.60$ ). Also regardless of their family's monthly income, students express similar plans for their further formal education (various studies or postgraduate studies;  $\chi^2=5.99$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p=0.20$ ), non-formal learning (foreign languages and diverse, unfocused plans;  $\chi^2=3.29$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p=0.51$ ), and informal learning (foreign languages, art, social sciences and humanities, natural sciences and mathematics, and other;  $\chi^2=18.6$ ;  $df=16$ ;  $p=0.289$ ). It is very likely that students' population is already selected by higher parents' formal education and monthly income which makes them a more homogenous group. Previous research documented a strong influence of social selection of university students in Croatia (Bjelajac & Pilić, 2005; Ilišin, 2009).

### Students' plans for future non-formal and informal teaching

In order to answer to the second objective, again chi-square tests were performed. Students report more about their plans for informal (21.2%), and less for non-formal teaching (11.4%). Significant differences are found related to plans for informal teaching. One is found among different study groups ( $\chi^2=19.80$ ;  $df=10$ ;  $p=0.031$ ). Although students of all study groups dominantly plan to give one to one lessons (70.4% of humanities students that answered this question, 57.8% of students of educational sciences, and 47% of students of economics), their second choice differs: future pre-school and primary school teachers (13.3%), as well as humanists (11%), are less focused in their plans (example of answers: *According to circumstances; If there is need; When I need money; Everything that I'm good at; Free time activities*), while the students of economics (23.5%) prefer teaching social sciences (psychology, economics). It may be that students of economics are more oriented towards concrete plans, especially on the labour market. On the other hand, future teachers maybe feel or expect that their education and experience provides them with a variety of competences for teaching. The next significant difference is found related to the study year ( $\chi^2=37.6$ ;  $df=15$ ;  $p=0.001$ ). Again, students of all study years prefer to give one to one lessons. However, these plans vary across study years: these plans are more articulated on the first study year, with decline towards the higher study years. At the beginning of the study maybe students see one to one lessons as a good opportunity for a financial support, but towards the end, they are more oriented to finishing their studies and finding a job, so their intentions for one to one lessons decrease. The third significant difference is found in plans for informal teaching regarding students' fathers' formal education ( $\chi^2=18.4$ ;  $df=10$ ;  $p=0.048$ ). Although regardless of father's formal education, students mostly plan to give one to one lessons, but among them more plans to do so have those students whose fathers have finished the lowest level of formal education. The explanation for this could be that being able to give one to one lessons contributes more to the sense of achievement for students with lowest formally educated fathers than for students whose fathers have higher formal education. The difference can also be found in the areas of one to one lessons. Students whose fathers have finished highest formal education would like to teach social subjects, students whose fathers have finished high school education – other subjects. Possible explanation is that fathers with highest education have more interest in social subjects, while the high school education, mostly present in this sample (as well as in the country) is more diverse so their children have more diverse and less focused plans.

Other comparisons do not reveal any significant differences. Students of educational sciences, humanities and economics have similar plans for non-formal teaching (foreign languages, art and other unfocused plans;  $\chi^2=5.11$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p=0.276$ ). It could be that they do not expect a safe

job on the labour market, so they probably expect to find temporary or part-time jobs in various non-formal contexts, regardless of their profession. Students have similar plans for non-formal (foreign languages, art, social subjects and other;  $\chi^2=6.34$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p=0.175$ ) and informal teaching (foreign languages, art, one to one lessons, and other;  $\chi^2=3.11$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p=0.540$ ) although they have different levels of knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning. Students of every study year identify similar plans for their further non-formal teaching (foreign languages, art, social subjects and other;  $\chi^2=9.43$ ;  $df=9$ ;  $p=0.399$ ). They probably see the sense of non-formal teaching, but they will decide about it after they graduate. Regardless of their parents' highest level of formal education, students report to have similar plans for their further non-formal teaching (foreign languages, art, social subjects and other; related to fathers' formal education:  $\chi^2=11.40$ ;  $df=6$ ;  $p=0.077$ ; related to mothers' formal education:  $\chi^2=9.81$ ;  $df=6$ ;  $p=0.133$ ). The same situation was found with students' plans for informal teaching regarding their mothers' highest formal education ( $\chi^2=11.7$ ;  $df=8$ ;  $p=0.167$ ). Also regardless of their family's monthly income, students expressed similar plans for their further non-formal (foreign languages, art, social subjects and other;  $\chi^2=12.4$ ;  $df=12$ ;  $p=0.417$ ) and informal teaching (foreign languages, art, one to one lessons, and other;  $\chi^2=8.27$ ;  $df=12$ ;  $p=0.764$ ). ). The same reason can be applied here as for the learning plans regarding parents' education and monthly income. Because students' population is very likely already selected by higher parents' formal education and monthly income, they differ less among each other.

Few limitations of this research would be worth mentioning. Parents' education was focused only on their formal education. For a broader picture, their non-formal and informal learning background would be useful to be analysed. As it was already elaborated, monthly income and parents' formal education span was narrow, so it cannot provide generalisation of results.

## Conclusion

Educational institutions have a major role in preparing and encouraging students for lifelong learning. It is expected that this should contribute to a better knowledge based society (Cendon et al, 2009) and facilitate social inclusion (European Commission, 2010).

Although less than 30% of university students in this research mention plans for their further formal education, non-formal and informal learning and even less (than 20%) for teaching, they mostly do not differ significantly in their choices. They mostly choose rather general areas of learning or improvement (e.g. foreign languages) than specific areas, and in the case of teaching they mostly rely on their current knowledge planning to offer one to one lessons.

Obtained results contribute to the model of formal education, non-formal and informal learning (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; European Commission, 2001) by identifying how study group, study year, knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning, parents' formal education and income are or are not related to students' future plans for learning and teaching.

From the perspective of lifelong learning promotion, it is crucial to raise awareness, inform and educate university students about types of education and learning and the opportunities they can bring.

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