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E-portfolio in Lifelong Learning Applications

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Abstract

In today's world, with the expansion of technology, new pursuits and in parallel with that, new concepts such as life long learning and e-portfolio emerge. Ever-growing technology removes the borders of learning and results in continuous learning need. That's why learning is defined as "from cradle to grave". It is inevitable to have self-reformation, discover the facilities of technology and use them in both private and work life. People record their detailed curriculum vitae, personal development and new acquisitions under the name of "portfolio", "personal output folder" or "personal development folder". These folders are recorded in digital setting and even made available by means of online access; which is called "e-portfolio". Thinking "lifelong learning" concept in parallel with "e-portfolio" it can be said that, e-portfolios will be much more crucial in near future. In this study, development of these two concepts, their collocations and usage styles in near future are examined.

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1. Introduction

Education and learning are of the most indispensable necessities of people. New information is learned, skills are acquired constantly from birth to death. Learning is sometimes realized formally and sometimes informally. Irrespective of its type, the investments made for education and learning are substantial in the modern information societies. Countries use their financial possibilities and qualified man power as much as possible in the area of education. Even many countries have taken international steps by developing partnership projects and exchange programs with other countries. Most of the projects realized recently focus on the main idea of lifelong learning of people. This idea has spread the concept of lifelong learning in time. One of the leading communities conducting serious studies in this field is European Union. EU constantly develops programs for almost any education grade. EU determined the name of his new program that it maintains between the years of 2007-2013 as Lifelong Learning Program. With this program, targeting the education of the individual from every age and business sector in the desired area, the view to learning concept has gained a different dimension. Teaching style has changed and also the number of individuals willing to have education has increased with the integration of developing technology into lifelong learning programs.

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Especially widespread use of the internet has presented new opportunities for the individuals who want to learn lifelong. Internet and its accompanying educational tools have brought considerable advantages in terms of providing access to more individuals, sharing information and experience, and time saving. E-portfolio is one of those educational tools. E-portfolios, known as learner output folder, have been used in internet environment and taken the name e-portfolio. Learners can watch, assess, and share the studies of both themselves and other students. The usage of e-portfolios which provide many benefits to teachers as well as students is becoming widespread increasingly. Today, lifelong learning programs are among the education programs in which e-portfolios can be used easily, too.

2. Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning means acquiring and updating each kind of knowledge, skill, and quality throughout the process from cradle to grave (Akkoyunlu, 2008). As it is understood from the definition, the concept of lifelong learning not only includes acquiring each kind of knowledge, skill, and quality but also updating them. People have to update and renew the knowledge they have learned at school. The process covering all the education periods starting from preschool period, to retirement and following educations are considered as lifelong learning. In addition to its benefits in terms of education and career, lifelong learning is also significant for the integration of people into the society. Lifelong learning may play a key role in the integration of people into both new life conditions and new environmental conditions. Although it has become popular recently, lifelong learning firstly emerged as a fact aiming the professional education of the workers in England. It was used as a term related with the development of education in the international commission report of the UNESCO in 1972 (McAllister et al, 2008). This concept has broadened later, and become a phenomenon including whole of the education and life. European Union (2001) defines lifelong learning as, “all of the educational activities made to develop knowledge, skill, and proficiency for a definite time”. Delors said in the book he published in 1996 that “lifelong education is a must in democracy.” (McAllister et al, 2008). Lifelong education means at the same time that “creating a second chance for people by updating basic skills and presenting more advanced learning facilities (Akkoyunlu, 2008). As it can be comprehended from the definitions and comments, lifelong learning should be an opportunity that must be provided to all individuals of the society. When it is considered that living conditions become difficult day by day, it is seen that this opportunity will be very beneficial to people in adapting to society, obtaining new jobs and career.

3. E-Portfolio

The world portfolio is etymologically the combination of Latin rooted “portare” (carry), “folium” (paper, page) words, collocation of them in Italian as “portafoglio”, and in English “portfolio”. (OECD, 2007). Portfolio, which is known as “personal development folder”, “learner development file”, and “learner output folder” in the literature of the field, is a personal archive or collection that exhibits learner’s development process in detail, with outputs from the beginning. According to Arter ve Spandel (1991) portfolio is the reflection of student works in one or more than one areas with the aim of presenting to others. With regard to another definition, portfolio enables learners to assess their own works, and watch their progress, and it forms a basis for the individual assessment of the students’ performances (Grace, 1992). According to a more succinct definition portfolio is “the personal sum of the information that individual documents and depicts his achievements and learning” (Wikipedia, 2007).

While the works on paper were archived generally at first, portfolios started to be stored at magnetic environments such as cassettes, disks, and CDs initially, and later on DVDs and USB devices with the development of technology. This type that is more effective and striking with its sound and image materials is called as Electronic Portfolio (e-portfolio). Even though “digital portfolio” and “digital development (output) file” names are used, the concept of e-portfolio is preferred more. According to portfolio expert Niguidula (1993), e-portfolio is software that helps people present their own mastery and skills in a richer manner”. As a result e-portfolio is a digital collection that a person or organization produces for a specific purpose. It is overall activities that have structural and meaningful unity, and have certain outputs.

4. The Relationship between E-Portfolio and Lifelong Learning

Three new factors which require new learning technologies have emerged together with the technological developments (Koper and Specht, 2006):

- 1- New internet technologies have entirely brought about different learning methods. The concepts such as blog, wiki, information spaces are some examples.
- 2- The concept of information society is changing. A learning process, which is not just limited with schools and universities, and continuing lifelong and integrated with work and other areas of the life, has been formed.
- 3- Changing and developing conditions have resulted in new methods at learning and teaching. Many new concepts like cooperative learning, virtual learning unities, and social tools have been included in education.

Taking these items into consideration, it is obvious that how privileged it is to use information and communication technology tools, and e-learning materials in lifelong learning activities. E-portfolios are one of those learning tools. It is necessary to record the individual development and determine new learning facilities and topics with regard to learner's present knowledge level in order to support lifelong learning adequately. E-portfolios are needed with this aim.

Those learning lifelong has three characteristics (Berlanga et al, 2008):

- 1- They have self-management, and they are responsible for their own learning processes.
- 2- They can participate in formal and informal learning activities at the same time.
- 3- They have different approaches towards acquired skill.

These features have caused developments of new approaches for lifelong learners. Many activities are realized such as start of participants' informal learning process without any school education, being responsible for their own learning processes, managing the network, and alteration of their roles in the network. Proficiencies, infrastructures, and experiences of the learners are different from one another. Interactions with various networks, people, and learning groups are performed in this process. As a result of this, e-portfolios are used to present gains and experiences acquired.

Haper (2007) stated that e-portfolio should be defined as not a technology but thinking and learning process (McAllister et al, 2008). The parallelism between e-portfolio and lifelong learning will be understood better when these two definitions are considered together. They both mention an ongoing process.

The concept of e-portfolio has become widespread recently. The aim of "e-portfolio for everyone in 2010" was determined at the conference in Lisbon in 2003. Europe puts a significant importance on lifelong learning to realize its "economic, employment and social" targets. The development and becoming widespread of the e-portfolios support the concept of lifelong learning. Europortfolio consortium was founded in 2003 in the leadership of European Institute of E-Learning established in 2001. Many projects have been developed to use e-portfolio more widely in Wales, England, Spain, and Austria. Universities have encouraged learners for usage of e-portfolio in order to continue their education after school period. Thus; lifelong education has been targeted.

Inter/National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research has been pioneering e-portfolio studies in USA. Australia and New Zealand consider e-portfolio studies highly significant, as well. Many universities encourage the use of e-portfolio both at school period and after school with the aim of lifelong learning. "Mahara" is a free e-portfolio development platform that was brought about as a result of the project conducted with the participation and support of a great number of universities. "Mahara" presents its users the facilities of lifelong learning; and presenting their skills, and proficiencies.

As it is seen that projects are being developed to make e-portfolios material that are used lifelong. It is important to continue e-portfolio studies that show person's gains after education ends. An e-portfolio continuing after school

can provide substantial benefits to individual in the long term. A well prepared window e-portfolio might be very helpful in getting a good job with the changing working life. E-portfolio is a good method for the exhibition of certification and skills of the person (Greenberg, 2004).

E-portfolio is a useful tool for the configuration and presentation of the education in and out of the school. Thanks to e-portfolio, people may find the opportunity to communicate; get advice from the other people with the same interests, and to learn new topics. People constantly try to increase their knowledge and skills via various learning networks, virtual learning unities and social communication sites. The best way to exhibit new gains by lifelong updating is a well-prepared e-portfolio. In addition, individual can develop himself thanks to reflection and feedback tools in e-portfolio.

5. The Conclusion

The definition of Alfred North Whitehead dated 1931, “the idea that people will use the things they learnt in their youth is not valid”, has formed the basis of the concept of lifelong learning that will emerge in 1970s with emphasizing that education is an ongoing process. E-portfolios started to be used for educational purposes in 1990s, and became a collection that supports and presents personal development.

E-portfolios function as bridge between education and working life, and form an important tool for employment. E-portfolios provide individuals the opportunity of presenting their background, works, projects, and cultures. Therefore, they support the formation of the lifelong learning idea in individuals. E-portfolios that are prepared by students for individual and pair works can be shown as first examples in grasping the importance of e-portfolio in lifelong learning.

The incredibly rapid progress of the technology has brought with itself the renewing of learning and teaching technologies. As a result of this, learning shall continues constantly formally or informally, dependently or independently from the environment. It is indispensable that individuals will need platforms and tools where they can show their gains continuously for a better future and career while learning is continuing. In this case, the concepts of e-portfolio and lifelong learning will be referred together for a long period of time.

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