

Lifelong Learning and Learning for Life: As Envisaged by Grundtvig, Tagore, Gandhi, and Friere

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ABSTRACT

Lifelong learning is designed to enable people, at any stage of their life, to take part in stimulating learning experiences, as well as developing education and training across the society. It implies that learning is a continuum which occurs every day, week, month, and year. The present paper explains what N. F. S. Grundtvig, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and Paulo Friere meant by Lifelong learning and Learning for life with relevance to the present context. Lifelong learning has three broad constituent elements: Learning for life, Learning for livelihood, and Learning throughout life. The first one, learning for life is a Grundtvigian innovation of more than 200 years. The aim of this education, as visualized by him, should make neither education nor itself its goal but the requirements of life. It must take life as it really is and shed light on and promote its usefulness. Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi have thought about the three components of lifelong learning in a holistic way. Learning for life denotes learning which is essential for the human being, a learning that adorns life and makes it worth living. Tagore felt that to uplift the quality of life of rural community, the rural population should be brought within the circumference of formal, informal, and non-formal learning so that the people themselves could appreciate and enhance their own cultural traditions. Mahatma Gandhi experimented with the same thoughts when he came out with his concept of basic education. His scheme placed supreme importance on knowing through doing, which he visualized as craft-oriented. To Paulo Friere, 'Conscientization' is the most important aspect of education. Conscientization is a political-education process which enables the masses to overcome 'false consciousness'. This is absolutely necessary for the oppressed masses to get rid of 'Culture of Silence'. In today's 21st century the concept of lifelong learning and learning for life are extremely relevant to keep oneself ongoing and meet the latest requirements of the technology driven society.

Keywords: Lifelong learning, Learning for life, Grundtvig, Tagore, Gandhi, Friere, present relevance

The concept of *lifelong learning* implies that learning is a continuum which occurs every day, week, month, and year. Lifelong learning is the "ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated" pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. Therefore, it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development, but also self-sustainability, as well as competitiveness and employability. It may be broadly defined as learning that is pursued throughout life: learning that is flexible, diverse, and available at different times and in different places.

Lifelong learning crosses sectors, promoting learning beyond traditional schooling and throughout adult life.

The concept of *learning for life*, firstly, focuses on the life of young people. The youngsters deserve learning that helps them discover their unique purpose and is fuelled by their passion. Secondly, it believes that the only constant in life is change. So, young people should be provided with support that continues beyond the first step of their lifelong journey. Thirdly, it is in service of people and planet. Life on earth has learned to survive and thrive over

3.8 billion years. We risk losing invaluable wisdom if we do not pass these lessons on to young people and empower them to create a world for all life to flourish in.

Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Paulo Friere (1921-1997) were four epoch-making thinkers who were pioneers of people's enlightenment in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Their educational philosophy reflects the idea of lifelong learning and learning for life.

Objective

The objective of the present paper is to analyze the concept of Lifelong learning and Learning for life as propounded by N. F. S. Grundtvig, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and Paulo Friere with relevance to the present context.

N. F. S. Grundtvig

N. F. S. Grundtvig is considered to be the father of adult education. Born in 1783, in Uby, Denmark, his concept of Folk High School conceived as 'school for life' and not the 'black' school or 'the school for death' is also the forerunner of the modern concept of lifelong education. Folk High School and Cooperative Movement which emanated directly from Grundtvig's idea of education play an alternative path to development and social progress. It is a non-violent path to peaceful societal transformation.

Grundtvig's philosophy of education rests on the following tenets:

- (i) 'living word' rather than books,
- (ii) enlightenment for life as opposed to examination-based education,
- (iii) people's enlightenment as fundamental condition for successful implementation of democracy,
- (iv) the notion of *Vekselvirking* which speaks about creating preconditions for one's enlightenment within society, and
- (v) reliance on the wisdom of ordinary people rather than that of the educated and elite.

His lifelong learning programme aims to:

- ❑ increase the number of people in adult education,

- ❑ improve mobility conditions in adult learning,
- ❑ improve the quality and cooperation between adult education organizations,
- ❑ develop innovative educational and management practices,
- ❑ ensure social inclusion through adult education,
- ❑ support innovative ICT-based educational content, services, and practices.

Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore's system of education emphasizes the intellectual, physical, social, moral, economic, and spiritual aspects of human life by which a man can develop towering personality. His educational policies founded in his Santiniketan are more applicable and it can be described as follows:

- ❑ **Intellectual development:** Rabindranath Tagore emphasized intellectual development of students. It comprises skills of imagination and intellectual progress.
- ❑ **Self-Realization:** Self-realization means that every individual must recognize his interesting fields and weak ended fields. As a solution he must spend more time in the field he feels non satisfaction and try upgrade it to higher levels. Self-realization helps an individual to make a manifestation of a good personality. It is required to develop thinking ability and expand internal resources to a vast possibility.
- ❑ **Love for Humanity:** According to Rabindranath Tagore, the feeling of singleness should be developed through the concepts like brotherhood of man.
- ❑ **Physical Development:** Tagore's educational philosophy also emphasized on physical development of the students. He gave more importance to sound and healthy physique. In Santiniketan Ashram, yoga, games, sports, and different kinds of exercises are prescribed as an integral part of the educational system.
- ❑ **Freedom:** Freedom is considered as an integral part of human development, as education is a man making process.
- ❑ **Mother tongue as the medium of instruction:** Language is the true vehicle of self-expression. According to Rabindranath Tagore, mother

tongue should be the medium of instruction for an individual's education.

- ❑ **Moral and spiritual development:** Spiritualism is the essence of humanism. This concept has been reflected in Tagore's education philosophy.
- ❑ **Establishment of relation between man and God:** Tagore also greatly emphasized on establishment of relationship between man and God.
- ❑ **Social development:** Rabindranath Tagore wrote, "In our country, in every village, let the cooperative principle prevail introducing and distributing wealth—this is my desire".

Mahatma Gandhi

- ❑ **Educational policies of Mahatma Gandhi:** Mahatma Gandhi's movements had deep social connotations. His philosophy of basic education is comprehensive enough because he looks upon education as an instrument for social economic progress, material advancement, political evolution, and moral development especially of an individual in the society. His view of basic education is greatly influenced by his philosophy of truth, non-violence, firm belief in God and dignity of labour. He also emphasized on a key point that the educational philosophy should be sympathetic, friendly and based on deep feelings of love.
- ❑ **Keeping aloof from modern machinery:** Gandhi utterly defers in accepting modern machinery in the education field. He declared that "real freedom will come only when we free ourselves of the domination of western education, western culture and western way of living which have been ingrained in us. Emancipation from this culture would mean real freedom for us". Gandhi had not only disallowed colonial education but also put forward a radical alternative.
- ❑ **Keeping mother tongue familiar:** Gandhi's scheme of basic education emphasized on using mother tongue as the medium of instruction.
- ❑ **Hand crafts as a syllabus part:** Knowledge of crafts, such as spiraling, weaving, metal work, basket making, and book binding had been the domination of specific caste groups in the traditional social pyramid. His concept was

on production processes that manual works should not be seen as something substandard to mental work. What he really wanted was for the schools to be self-financing as far as possible.

- ❑ **Political environment and social progress:** Mahatma Gandhi's basic education pattern sought to universalize education by making the school flatter to the home and participating in value coordination with vocationalization, while warranting the economic self-sufficiency of the school.
- ❑ **Truth, non-violence, and confidence:** Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of truth, non-violence and Satyagraha helped India get emancipation from British rule as it was a great achievement in the Indian history.

Paulo Friere

Rather than reducing learners to objects of economic globalization, Freire's pedagogy considers students political participants who actively shape their vocational and social lives.

Although never actually employing the term *lifelong learning* in his writings, Freire encourages students and teachers to play an active role throughout their lives in shaping and reshaping the world around them. He understands that education is an inevitably political enterprise, and argues that a properly designed education involves the freedom to act in moral and rational ways that satisfy the process of humanization. Freedom and humanization are achieved, in Freire's view, when students are awakened to the possibility of influencing history by acting upon the world. Freire's politicizing of education is a means of historicizing social injustice and challenging the traditional forms of education that ignore human freedom and development. According to him, traditional education controls, dominates, and dehumanizes the masses, a trend that can only be reversed by transforming human consciousness.

The scope of what might be termed lifelong learning in Freire's pedagogy extends far beyond simply serving the needs of the labour market. Instead, lifelong learning serves as a framework to free oneself from an oppressed state and move toward a liberated state of critical consciousness and transformative action. Freire distinguishes

between an education supporting “naïve transivity,” with its oversimplification of problems and magical explanations, and “critical transivity,” with its deep interpretation of problems. Critical transivity requires dialogue between teachers and learners, and offers sound arguments to advance alterative worldviews. This approach to education as a lifelong learning commitment is “concerned with social and political responsibility” (Freire, 1974, p. 19) and serves to “increase men’s ability to perceive the challenges of their time” and “resist the emotional power of transition”.

The role of education as lifelong learning, then, is to foster continual reflection on social reality and transform the conditions that limit historical understanding and human liberation. The lifelong learner does not accept defeat or terminate reflection with self-congratulation, but continually organizes and works with others to shift the relational dynamics of power toward increased measures of social equality. Freire believed that education is not liberatory unless based on an abiding respect for the humanization of the learner.

Freire’s ideas and their implication for lifelong learning are powerful because his model of lifelong learning encourages students to act on their own behalf and to assist others to act as agents of social change.

Evaluation

If these Grundtvigism ideas are compared with Friere’s concept of adult education, one will find striking resemblance particularly with Friere’s notion of humanization and dehumanization, dialogical communication, and creation and re-creation of culture.

Tagore, Gandhi, and Friere worked in the colonial/post colonial societies of the Third World fragmented by narrow domestic walls of racism, casteism, and class-antagonism. All three of them deeply contemplated on the state of the mute millions of their people and sought ways and means by which their economic, political, and social conditions could be improved.

If we consider the theories propounded by Tagore and Friere, we shall observe that both of them considered education as the practice of human freedom. Tagore called it ‘Atma Shakti’ or

‘strengthening of the soul’. All his endeavours were geared towards manifestation of this inner strength. For Friere, education is the process of *becoming*.

Tagore’s concept of education called for an all-round development of the personality. Culture played a very significant role in this process. Fine arts and crafts, dance and music, literature and science- all these, he prescribed, for the proper growth of the faculties of an individual. Friere started his literacy process from the premise of culture and then broadened it in the realm of freedom.

Both Tagore and Friere opposed rote-learning. Tagore considered creativity to be the key to the development of personality of an individual. For Friere creation and re-creation constitute the process of liberation.

Gandhi and Friere contributed two most significant concepts to humanity- Satyagraha and conscientization.

Both Tagore and Gandhi were of the opinion that the medium of instruction should be the mother tongue. Both of them favoured craft education. For Tagore, craft was one of the subjects to be taught to the students. However, for Gandhi, craft was the centre around which all education should revolve. The interesting fact is that Gandhi borrowed heavily from Tagore’s Sikshasatra experiment in which craft education played a major role.

Present Relevance

Today’s youth have more needs than ever before. We live in a changing world that has seen the disintegration of many families, rampant drug abuse, extreme violence, and moral decay. Learning for life has become relevant today to prepare youths to successfully handle the complexities of the society and to enhance their self-confidence, motivation, and self-worth. Learning for life can help youth develop social and life skills, assist in character development, and formulate positive personal values. It can prepare them to make ethical decisions that will help them achieve their full potential.

Grundtvig’s concepts which are equally challenging today can be categorized in the following headings:

- (i) freedom of responsibility
- (ii) mutuality
- (iii) cultural identity

In the 21st century, academicians need to be lifelong learners, adapting continuously to the new demands of the knowledge society. Lifelong learning is more than education and training beyond formal schooling. From this perspective, lifelong learning involves the constant upgrading of one's skills to make oneself more responsive to the contemporary world.

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