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## READING LITERACY IN KAZAKHSTAN AND LIFELONG LEARNING FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF DIFFERENT AGES

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**Abstract.** The article considers the importance of reading literacy as a part of lifelong learning. The significance of reading process in lifelong learning is recognized as a necessary factor for further development of human beings, which should be practiced and experienced throughout life. Moreover, the statement of lifelong learning in Kazakhstan is represented as an example, where reading literacy level and the reviews of international survey assessment should be taken into account. The measurement of reading literacy among Kazakhstani young adolescents demonstrated poor results, which may be considered as worrisome for further literacy development. As literacy level is a pivotal and beneficial issue in lifelong learning, a brief review of various life-learning strategies in well-developed countries represents that people of different ages may start learning process voluntary at any age of their adulthood. The learning process is considered to be of high quality, it is in high demand and may be far from traditional education. The analysis of specific features in educational experience of well-developed countries contributes to the widespread use and implementation of lifelong education in the structure of education in Kazakhstan, which is represented in the form of a “mind map” framework as a way of promoting reading literacy level throughout life.

**Keywords:** lifelong learning, perspectives, teachers, learners, adults, literacy, reading skills, abilities, comprehension, assessment

# ЧИТАТЕЛЬСКАЯ ГРАМОТНОСТЬ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ И НЕПРЕРЫВНОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ У ЛЮДЕЙ РАЗНЫХ ВОЗРАСТОВ

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**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается читательская грамотность как фактор непрерывного процесса образования. Значение чтения в процессе непрерывного обучения определяется как необходимый фактор для дальнейшего развития человека на протяжении всей его жизни. Исходя из вышеизложенного, читательская грамотность является основным фактором непрерывного образования в Казахстане. В представленных примерах уровень читательской грамотности и результаты оценок международных исследований приняты нами за основу, и данные показатели, по-нашему мнению, требуют дальнейшего развития и улучшения. Анализ читательской грамотности среди 15-летних школьников выявил слабые результаты, что послужило основной причиной внедрения новых методик для положительного решения данной проблемы. Поскольку уровень грамотности человека является основным ключевым вопросом в обучении на протяжении всей его жизни, считаем необходимым провести краткий обзор образовательных методов по улучшению читательской грамотности на примере развитых стран, в которых обучение на протяжении всей жизни человека, независимо от возраста, является добровольным делом каждого, считается качественным, пользуется повышенным спросом и может быть далеко не традиционным. Изучение опыта образования развитых стран способствует, с учетом специфических особенностей, широкому применению и внедрению непрерывного образования в структуру образования Казахстана для повышения уровня читательской грамотности, представленной в виде «интеллектуальной карты» - «mind map», у учащихся средних классов и на протяжении всей жизни.

**Ключевые слова:** непрерывное образование, перспективы, учителя, обучающиеся, люди преклонного возраста, грамотность, навыки чтения, способности, понимание, оценка

## **Introduction**

Lifelong learning is a term, which may be associated with the learning and/or studying throughout life. Current researchers [Aspin & Chapman, 2000; Schuetze, 2014; Schuetze & Slowey, 2012; Head et al., 2015; Zuber-Skerritt & Cendon, 2014] define *lifelong learning* as a global tendency of modern society because learning process should never be late for those who are ready and would like to continue their education and apply “*fresh*” knowledge in practice at any age.

In Kazakhstan, the process of lifelong learning was officially announced almost twenty years ago, when in 2010 Kazakhstan became a member of Bologna Process and the term “lifelong learning” started to be implemented and was

introduced in the document. In addition to membership in Bologna Process, Kazakhstan since 2009 has actively taken part in several international surveys such as Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA), Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), etc. Since that time the development and integration of lifelong learning have been changed rapidly due to active implementation of innovative technologies into the global education system. Thus, as a result, at present in Kazakhstan the demands in knowledgeable and competent people in education are high in order to enhance the quality of education, to modify and reform the standards in education due to update international changes and outcomes, which are closely related to the future welfare of citizens and economic development of the country.

### **Theoretical framework**

#### ***Why Reading is important in Lifelong learning (LLL)?***

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) “Lifelong learning covers all purposeful learning activity, from the cradle to the grave, that aims to improve knowledge and competencies for all individuals who wish to participate in learning activities” [OECD, 2004, p. 1]. As almost all learning processes start from gaining information and knowledge development with reading as a simple decoding process of the written text, may be the foundation of this process.

Reading is a crucial aspect that leads to literacy and prosperity of the society and population in general. Reading skills are essential for gaining knowledge and obtaining required information, which is necessary for literacy development. No doubt, the processes of learning to read and reading for learning could be challenging, significant and essential for young adolescents and adulthood in the future. Literature also highlights that the term “reading skills” is widely applied by teachers in the curriculum and is one of the key domains in teaching and learning languages [Afflerbach, et al., 2008]. Therefore, PISA framework pays particular attention to assess reading literacy level of 15-year-old students, as reading skills are defined as one of the required and necessary abilities of the human beings.

Reading skills underscore the development of reading, which later on should be automatic and build up certain tactics for strategic reading. Educators and researchers [Rayner et al., 2001] consider that a skillful and proficient reader needs a lot of practice, appropriate instruction, and effective ways of teaching and learning to reach the appropriate reading literacy level. As teaching to read mainly starts in the school context, where classroom climate, engagement of the learners, teacher-student and student-peer relations mainly depend on what, where, and how teaching and learning process of reading activities are being orchestrated. Reading literacy should be embedded from young adolescents to lifelong learning.

Some researchers [Sullivan & Brown, 2013; Sullivan, 2015] state that reading is a part of lifelong learning that plays a significant role in the process of continuing education and extending knowledge. Likewise, Alice Sullivan, & Matt Brown [Sullivan & Brown, 2013] vocabulary and literacy level till the middle age (i.e., forty-two years of age). However, if the reader stops reading regularly for pleasure from the age of forty-two the vocabulary development and literacy level may decrease significantly. Therefore, regular reading for pleasure is necessary in order to gain

literacy and enlarge vocabulary. Consequently, reading process should be properly underpinned in the lifelong learning of adulthood as regular reading process may improve thinking skills, academic curiosity, creativity, attitude, extent literacy level, etc.

Other researchers [Lamb & Johnson, 2010] claimed that they were frustrated when they came to the conclusion that most teachers at school do not read regularly for pleasure, albeit the absence of free time, overloaded classes and work are not an excuse. According to Annette Lamb & Larry Johnson school teachers, who are taking part in promoting children in learning process and encouraging motivation to read more for pleasure should “provide young people with tools and resources” [Lamb & Johnson, 2010, p.68].

Reading is a root of lifelong learning; people should frequently read in the young age and continue reading in the adulthood. For this reason school, teachers, parents, school libraries and other stakeholders should be very careful and attentive to managing reading process as part of children’s daily routine to gain educational success and prosperity. This statement should be considered useful for defining reading literacy level in Kazakhstan as a part of lifelong learning, because regarding some results and reports of international assessments like PISA and PIRLS reading literacy level of the Kazakhstani young adolescents is worrisome and alarming [OECD, 2019].

### ***Reading Literacy in Kazakhstan***

Kazakhstan has become a participant in several international assessment programs such as PISA, (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) IEA –TIMSS, and PIRLS. Although low results of Kazakhstani 15-year-old students in reading literacy in PISA (M=390 in 2009 to M=387 in 2018) could be worrying in terms of literacy development and the quality of education [OECD, 2019b] in Kazakhstan.

Regarding OECD reports, Kazakhstani students have not received enough “key knowledge and skills essential for full participation in society” [OECD, 2019a, p.11]. Thus, for example reading literacy of Kazakhstani 15-year-old students in PISA-2018 [OECD, 2019b] means that performance showed lower results than in 2009, and only (M=35%) reached Level 2 on average in reading, which is significantly lower than the results from the OECD countries (M=77%). Only negligible percent of Kazakhstani young learners were able to accomplish Level 5 or 6 in reading literacy but that did not influence the main results on average for the whole country.

Consequently, by School Resources Review [OECD, 2015], Kazakhstan has embarked on profound reforms to improve the quality of the education system and is increasingly looking for international standards and best practices. Although the level of education attainment of the population is high, the performance of Kazakhstani 15-year-olds in PISA-2012 suggested a considerable room for Kazakhstan to improve the quality of students’ learning outcomes. Thus, the importance of PISA for Kazakhstan is obvious as the world measurement of the country may be valuable and crucial for further development of future generation and human beings in education, politics, and economics. The level of reading literacy could also be indispensable for

lifelong learning as it demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses in the system of education.

## **Materials and methods**

At present, in our modern and changeable society lifelong learning is a relevant topic as studying and learning processes require a certain kind of mental work, behavior, cognition, critical thinking, etc. Among tremendously vast volume of information, we accidentally came across several articles devoted to the problem of lifelong learning education from the perspectives of various ages and groups. The first article describes the problem of college-aged students while writing reflective compositions in the United Kingdom. The second one represents another aged group of students, who have already obtained certain experiences in the working places, and now are just studying to broaden and/or fulfill their knowledge (the case of German universities is taken into account). The third one tells about old people aged 65+ in Sweden who are taking part in several governmental and non-governmental circles, such as *knitting cafes*. Then we highlight the possibilities of the impact of reading literacy in Kazakhstan for further perspectives to lifelong learning (LLL) in a form of mind map. This mind map will be a further framework foundation of reading literacy throughout life through the assessment of reading literacy skills as the scaffolding for LLL. This mind map may also prove that lifelong learning is a long process and experience that could be observable and noticeable in several stages of life from young ages in education till adulthood in various groups of people.

## **Results and discussion**

### ***Lifelong learning in college***

*'Awakening the Learner Within: Purposeful Prompts and Lifelong Learning Measures in a First-Year Composition Course'* is the title of the defined topic by Moore & Shaffer [Moore & Shaffer, 2017]. As it is really a painful moment for most first-year college students to meet coincidence of demanded requirements in learning and motivation for challenges more than 40% of them do not receive bachelor degree. Thus, the purpose of their intention was to decrease the percentage of young learners who drop out of college and do not obtain first four-year degree in Great Britain.

The researchers clarify that the staff and administration of the institute in Great Britain were ready to help young learners to define their learning growth as well as to apply the knowledge not only in class but also outside the class. In order to do so the usage of Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) was implemented to support and evaluate students' achievements and improvements in education via seven directions. The measurement started from composition course of first-year students so that the scores of pre-and post-course of the semester were analyzed. Data collections were students' reflective writing assignments that were put into ELLI online platform. The outcomes were represented in a form of spider net 'a *spidergram*' regarding *Resilience, Creativity, Changing and Learning, Meaning Making, Strategic Awareness, Critical Curiosity, and Learning Relationships* [Crick et al., 2004; Laal & Salamati, 2012]. As the analysis evaluated the results of pre-and-post of the course, the students were able to see the progress. Later on the students

could see which area they are in and decide what they should do in order to be motivated for the ongoing opportunities in the world.

Students can take the online ELLI tool several times while they complete the program they will soon receive the scores and see the gaps of the progress as well. The net showed the path to learners where to make improvements and pay attention. The mechanism of ELLI program depicts possible opportunities for students to reach success in several targeted issues. For the first time learners face how to act, if you did poor in academic exams, or how to make friends in a new environment, and even further. The analysis revealed that after the course teachers and students showed improvements. The learners by themselves demonstrated the progress in the new educational sphere and became very oriented for further changes.

### ***Longitudinal perspectives of teachers and learners in university***

Different stages of education regarding lifelong learning are represented by Eva Cendon [Cendon, 2018] in her article '*Lifelong Learning at Universities: Future Perspectives for Teaching and Learning*' where she describes that most universities in Germany apply e-learning and digital studying in the process of lifelong learning. She says that according to the rules of most universities in Germany if a student has not finished up his or her higher education and/or could not receive the required number of credits for obtaining degree, he or she is able to do it later when she or he be ready to complete their education with the help of digitalization or digital studying. Digital studying for most German university staff is considered as an ideal platform for both learners and teachers, because students can get and keep in touch at any location i.e. *online*. On the one hand, such teaching and learning process via digital era is a "*flexible*" path for both learning and teaching. On the other hand, the quality cannot be guaranteed but the communication of students and teachers is in the center of learning process.

In addition, Eva Cendon [Cendon, 2018] provides an example of teaching concepts by Kember [Kember, 1997], where the teacher has five forms of activities towards student as a learner. Even though the main objectives of the article are determined in two directions of longitudinal qualitative study and the perspectives of teachers and teaching programs. In the article, the author represented results from two perspectives (students and teachers). The viewpoints of students depicted as learners showed that they started to think critically and began to implement the received skills into practice. Regarding teachers, who were playing the role of facilitator and then as a person engaging the process of communication, teachers noticed that during digitalization or digital studying (i.e., via internet and electronic devices/ online) most their students became more disciplined and serious concerning several cases, as most teachers stimulated their students through dialogues and face-to-face talking and discussions.

### ***Lifelong learning for adults***

Another example of lifelong learning was demonstrated in the article of '*Lifelong learning in policy and practice: The case of Sweden*' by Ann-Kristin Boström where the author describes the policy of lifelong learning in the case of Sweden from two perspectives as lifelong and lifewide. The author mentioned that Swedish government was totally aware of the program of lifelong learning, so then since 1990 the

government released and published several documents for this issue and even included lifelong learning to the Core curriculum for studying in secondary education, so the students could be able to know about lifelong process in real life.

The documents representing lifelong learning in Sweden appeared in 1994, and then later in 1996 with a number of recommendations published for pre-school, compulsory school as well as for education and trainings of adults [Boström, 2017]. Using the term “practice of lifelong learning” in the later life the author provides answers to the following questions such as “Who is getting learning and education in the adulthood?” “What are the criteria and final results of such people?” Mostly the author explains that lifelong learning is understood as the learning of adults as well as with the benefit to the society. In Sweden, the government mostly regulates the process of lifelong learning and provides special documents that have to be evaluated. Even though a certain kind of context has been prepared for studying in various study circles, participants attending them, do not receive any degree or formal documents like in ordinary schools. In addition to this, the number of such circles for adults to study requires registration and charges monthly fee; as it is not so expensive all circles have a timetable and duration of the sessions.

It is interesting to mention that the author compares Swedish situation of lifelong learning in the case of studying and attending circles with the *knitting cafes* or *knitting circles* –which appear almost in thirty-one countries in the world. These knitting cafes are free and do not demand any registration, moreover such kinds of knitting cafes are not regulated by the government or any social organizations. People, taking part in such knitting cafes were also interviewed and their opinions were mostly positive. Because of this, most participants were satisfied with the knitting process because they take knitting as a kind of repetitive action, which makes them feel calm, comfortable, and excited because they realize their productivity for the society while knitting new clothes.

### ***The impact of reading literacy in Kazakhstan for further perspectives to lifelong learning (LLL)***

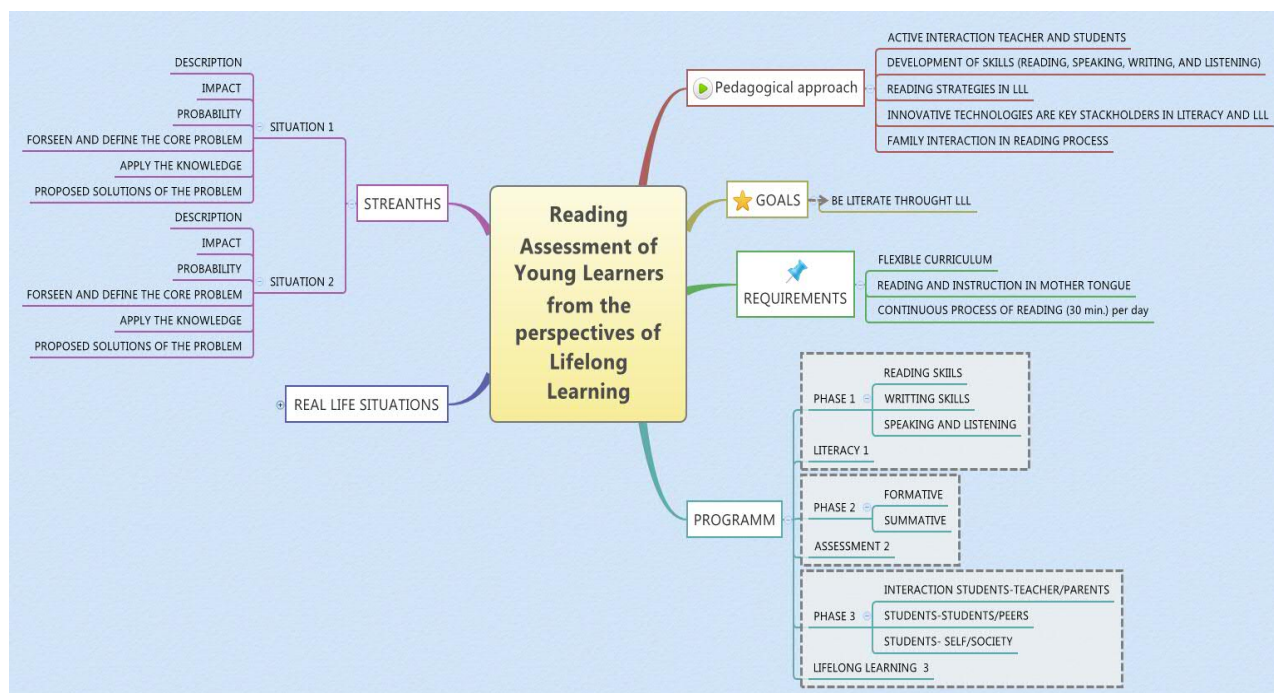
The term “reading literacy” was mainly established as the foundation for lifelong learning, which is a crucial opportunity for integral communication and complete involvement to the society. Thus, according to PISA 2018, reading literacy framework defines several cognitive processes that span a range of difficulty. Each cognitive process is assigned to a superordinate category which will be used for the final scaling of the 2018 Main Survey data: “Locate information, Understand, and Evaluate and Reflect” [OECD, 2019b, p.35].

As we mentioned previously, the perspectives of lifelong learning in Kazakhstan started in 2010 when Kazakhstan became a part of Bologna process. In Kazakhstan, the perspectives of lifelong learning are mainly focused on higher education, when the implementation of Bologna process officially started to be regulated. The regulation of lifelong learning in Kazakhstan provides the opportunity to finish up the main higher formal education for all adults and non-professional workers. According to some experts, educators, and researchers working in Kazakhstan under the regulation and implementation of Bologna process [Dixon & Soltys, 2013, p.111] claim that lifelong learning “is the self-motivated pursuit of

knowledge for either personal or professional reasons, on an ongoing and voluntary basis by adult or non-traditional learners”. This means that in Kazakhstan, together with receiving formal completed education, there are a certain number of courses that provide an access to education non-traditionally without receiving any credits. These courses are usually organized by the employer or the company, where the person is working or planning to work. Such courses are necessary for providing required competences and enhance professional skills and literacy in a certain professional area or field. Although sometimes those people attend such courses for personal demands, reasons and interests, they think that these courses may be useful for their future career goals.

**Figure 1**

Mind Map: *Reading Assessment of Young Learners from the perspectives of Lifelong Learning*<sup>1</sup>



However, preparation and readiness to these courses demand certain qualification from universities and education centers, where several barriers could appear and be challenging both for educators and learners in the process of teaching and learning to continue education. In this case, we would like to represent and suggest our framework of reading literacy from the perspectives of lifelong learning for Kazakhstani young learners via assessment. The detailed information is illustrated in Figure 1 (see Figure 1). The framework offered is made up in a form of mind map, which may be useful for future intervention to teachers, policy makers and other stakeholders to increase reading literacy level from the younger age and further in the adulthood. Although we suppose that the perspectives of assessing reading literacy skills from young learners in the middle school and further in the adulthood should be

<sup>1</sup> The mind map concept is based on [https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1GCEA\\_enRU945RU945&sxsrf=ALeKk01z4srYkgVDVbcoY2NZQmOTtB1zjg:1621424105060&source=univ&tbn=isch&q=Figure+1+Mind+Map:+Reading+Assessment+of+Young+Learners+from+the+perspectives+of+Lifelong+Learning+and+sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiIrL--09XwAhXu-SoKHVHkAWAQjKjEgQIBRAB&biw=1680&bih=939](https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1GCEA_enRU945RU945&sxsrf=ALeKk01z4srYkgVDVbcoY2NZQmOTtB1zjg:1621424105060&source=univ&tbn=isch&q=Figure+1+Mind+Map:+Reading+Assessment+of+Young+Learners+from+the+perspectives+of+Lifelong+Learning+and+sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiIrL--09XwAhXu-SoKHVHkAWAQjKjEgQIBRAB&biw=1680&bih=939)



continued throughout lifelong learning and frequently implemented in education system of Kazakhstan.

Consequently, regarding some researchers and educators [Field, 2000; Knapper & Cropley, 2000; Medel-Añonuevo et al., 2001] people should be ready to extend their knowledge and enhance literacy in collaboration with universities, companies, employers and society to manage the quality of learning process. This may benefit to assess all pros and cons in the working process and will promote and increase the literacy level among people in the future. In this case we absolutely agree with Gerhard Fischer who claims that lifelong learning should be constant in the society and people should be flexible to the way of "...how we think, work, learn, and collaborate in the future. A lifelong learning perspective is more than training and continuing education: it forces us to rethink and reinvent our schools and universities" [Fischer, 2000, p.19].

## **Conclusion**

This current research study is just one of the attempts to show the importance and perspectives of reading literacy in the process of lifelong learning for Kazakhstan. Moreover, we suppose that reading literacy level may be a part of lifelong learning, which relates to personal development and career goals throughout life. Moreover, at present the concept of "lifelong learning" is under dynamic discussion and the review of lifelong learning in European countries supports this issue. This should be taken into account for further education progress in Kazakhstan as well as active development of this issue in the research training and innovation. No doubt, to improve the quality of teaching and learning learners, teachers, policy makers, educators, and other stakeholders should be in close collaboration. This collaboration may be effective in developing personal skills in a certain area and in making participation more flexible, active and appropriate for everybody, who is ready to continue, enhance, master and increase his or her knowledge at any age.

From different age groups, perspectives, readiness and ranges, the process of lifelong learning and the concept of education could be different throughout life. This happens because the starting point is not similar to the final one, and the perspectives of knowledge are clearly defined and pointed.

To overall the topic of reading literacy level of Kazakhstani young learners throughout lifelong learning should be involved in the framework of regular reading skills assessment via certain programs, requirements, strengths, and pedagogical approaches by teachers, parents, policy makers, and other stakeholders. At this point we hope that "mind map" of reading literacy considered in the study will be integrated in secondary education and become the part of the teaching process from young age till adulthood in order to be "afloat" of lifelong learning activity, dynamic progress and active development of the society.

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