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**Changing Paradigms & Future Directions in Higher Education**

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*Mohammed I University*

*Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Oujda, 2023*

**Measuring Lifelong Learning among Applied  
Linguistics' Doctorate Students: a Case Study of Moulay  
Ismail's University**

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**Abstract**

It is well-acknowledged that the purpose of higher education is to nurture within learners the desire for and the implementation of perpetual education. All vital parties involved in tertiary education – graduates, stakeholders, tutors and accreditation entities – concur that this result is highly essential due to the accelerated evolution of our society, particularly in engineering and technology. Consequently, contemporary universities must provide more than simply traditional and current knowledge and aptitudes to their students; they must be

capable of furnishing them with generic skills and capacity to direct their own learning both during and after their studies as they adjust to a vast selection of contexts after the completion of formal education. In this regard, this study seeks to measure the propensity for lifelong learning among Applied Linguistics' Doctorate Students in Moulay Ismail's university of Arts and Human Sciences. It also employs a quantitative methodology, utilizing a survey instrument developed by Kirby et al. (2010) to investigate the lifelong learning skills of 38 participants. The results of the survey reveal slightly significant differences between male and female student populations, particularly in the trait of "setting goals," in which females self-reported a higher ability. These findings imply that it would be advantageous to invest additional resources into creating curricula which emphasize lifelong learning traits, thus enabling students to foster their growth.

*Keywords:* Lifelong Learning; Learner Autonomy; Evaluation and Assessment of Student Learning

## **1. Introduction**

The concept of lifelong learning, as defined by empirical research, refers to the intentional acquisition of knowledge and skills aimed at improving one's quality of living. It is expected that individuals take ownership of their learning experiences (Dunlap and Grabinger, 2008). The term "l'éducation permanente" was first used by Faure

(1972) and entails the idea of continuously seeking knowledge and development from birth until death. The Faure Report further declares lifelong education as a comprehensive framework for educational policies in both developed and developing nations (Friesen and Anderson, 2004). The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) (2020) also recognizes the aim of promoting this characteristic globally, with a particular focus on adult learning, continuing education, literacy, and non-formal basic education. The institute strives to provide opportunities for lifelong education and the fulfillment of human potential, human rights, and democratic values.

Without a doubt, Morocco's implication on the subject of lifelong learning is apparent. In 2022, his majesty, King Mohammed VI called for the creation of the "African Institute for Lifelong Learning" during the 7th UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII) in Marrakech (Morocco World News, 2022). However, the implementation of the concept of lifelong learning in Moroccan Education, specifically at the tertiary level, remains a far-fetched goal.

In light of the limited availability of substantial research studies on lifelong learning within Moroccan higher education institutions, this research paper has undertaken a quantitative investigation to examine PhD students' propensity for lifelong learning. Through conducting a

survey with 38 students from Moulay Ismail's university, the following research questions are considered:

1. Do Applied Linguistics' Doctorate Students of Moulay Ismail's University have propensity for lifelong learning?
2. Does gender influence students' propensity for lifelong learning?

## **2. Literature review**

Lifelong learning is a pivotal priority for governmental bodies, educational institutions, and administrators alike. In fact, education accreditation entities explicitly incorporate lifelong learning into learning outcomes. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) places a strong emphasis on lifelong learning as a fundamental aspect for graduates to possess essential learning skills, enabling them to pursue further studies with a sense of autonomy (Martínez-Mediano and Lord, 2012). Furthermore, the Qualifications Framework of the EHEA underscores the importance of empowering graduates to identify their own training needs in their chosen field of study and in their professional lives (European Higher Education Area (EHEA), 2020). Additionally, the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) acknowledges and promotes the value of continuous learning by specifying that graduates should possess the ability to engage in lifelong learning (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, Inc. (ABET), 2021). This dedication to lifelong learning is also evident in one of the twelve graduate attribute

profiles in both the Washington Accord and Sydney Accord (International Engineering Alliance (IEA), 2013). Similarly, Malaysia also places great emphasis on lifelong learning and actively advocates for its importance. Consistent with this, the Third Outline Perspective Plan of Malaysia recognizes the value of lifelong learning in a knowledge-based economy, where continuous improvement and skill development are crucial (Buntat et al., 2013). Nevertheless, lifelong learning should be an emphasized trait not only in the fields of engineering and technology, but also in social and human sciences.

In this regard, the attributes of individuals who embody the concept of lifelong learning have been extensively discussed in literature, with particular focus on two overarching dimensions: aptitudes and proficiencies related to the acquisition of knowledge, and attitudes and beliefs towards learning and knowledge. Prior research has sought to foster the practice of lifelong learning and bolster its effectiveness (Martínez-Mediano and Lord, 2012; Micieta et al., 2019). Notable variables affecting student aptitudes in conventional learning have also been investigated (Castaneda & Cheng, 2019; Chen and Liu, 2019; Thongmak, 2021). Eschenbacher and Fleming (2020) have emphasized the challenges associated with lifelong learning, particularly regarding the importance of transformative learning in times of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The diversity of studies focusing on lifelong learning from different perspectives indicates that the awareness of its importance is gradually surfacing in the academic

sphere. It is our expectation that the valuable insights gleaned from these endeavors will aid in the advancement of lifelong learning amongst individuals from all backgrounds.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1. Participants*

A total of 38 Doctoral students in Applied Linguistics, who are enrolled at Moulay Ismail University of Arts and Human Sciences, completed an online survey. The survey was posted on a WhatsApp Group specifically created for these students, and no remuneration or incentives were provided for participants to encourage their participation, as the task was carried out exclusively by volunteers. 19 participants were excluded from the final analyses due to visible inconsistencies within their answers, leaving a final sample size of  $n = 19$ .

#### *3.2. Data collection and Analysis*

The questionnaire was developed on the Google Form platform. Participants were required to rate each item using a five-point Likert agreement scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire is composed of 14 questions extracted from the lifelong learning questionnaire developed by Kirby et al. (2010). The survey questions are based on the five characteristics of lifelong learning, namely:

- a. goal setting.
- b. application of knowledge and skills.
- c. self-direction and self-evaluation.
- d. locating information.
- e. adaptable learning strategies.

After the collection of data, every questionnaire item was coded and scored according to the manual of the lifelong learning scale (LLS) of Kirby et al (2010). The scores were, then, entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS was used to conduct descriptive and inferential statistics to answer the research questions of the study.

#### **4. Results**

The overall result of the descriptive analysis conducted in order to answer the first research question yielded a mean that does not surpass 3.05 and a standard deviation of 0.84. This indicates that doctorate students of Moulay Ismail's university have a moderately low propensity towards the characteristics of lifelong learning. Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of all the participants depending on each characteristic. It is important to note that reverse-scored questions were reverse-coded before the analyses. A lower mean score indicates a higher self-rated propensity for that trait. Students feel more propensity towards knowledge appropriation and moderate propensity towards the other traits of life-long learning.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics for characteristics of lifelong learning (n=19)*

	<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>				
	N	Max	Min	M	SD
Setting Goals	19	2.00	3.60	2.8526	.41549
Appropriating Knowledge	19	1.33	3.33	1.9825	.60322
Self_Direction	19	1.50	3.50	2.5263	.56455
Locating Information	19	2.00	4.00	3.0526	.84811
Learning Strategies	19	1.67	3.33	2.5965	.50404

*Note.* ‘M’ refers to the mean; ‘SD’ refers to standard deviation.

As for the second question of the research paper, an independent samples t-test was used to analyze the differences of students based on gender. Table 2 summarizes the mean, standard deviation, and the standard deviation mean of males and females depending on each characteristic. When comparing female and male students’ propensity towards lifelong learning, females exhibit higher propensity towards setting goals, but equal propensity towards the other traits.

**Table 2**

*Detailed analysis on characteristics of lifelong learning based on different genders*

	Gender	<b>Group Statistics</b>			
		N	M	SD	SDM
Setting Goals	Female	11	2.9636	.32023	.09655
	Male	8	2.7000	.50143	.17728
Appropriating Knowledge	Female	11	1.9091	.57910	.17460
	Male	8	2.0833	.66069	.23359
Self_Direction	Female	11	2.6364	.55186	.16639
	Male	8	2.3750	.58248	.20594
Locating Information	Female	11	3.0000	.89443	.26968
	Male	8	3.1250	.83452	.29505
Learning Strategies	Female	11	2.5758	.42403	.12785
	Male	8	2.6250	.62836	.22216

*Note.* ‘M’ refers to the mean; ‘SD’ refers to standard deviation; ‘S’ refers to Standard deviation mean

#### 4. Discussion



The results presented above suggest that gender does not have a major impact on lifelong learning on its five characteristics. The scores for both were found to be comparable, except for the slight difference shown in setting goals. This observation aligns with the findings of a previous study conducted by Kirby et al. (2010) on undergraduate students from diverse educational backgrounds, including art, nursing, education, business, information technology, and science. Furthermore, a study by Bayrakçi and Dindar (2015) also yielded similar results, indicating no significant gender-based disparities in the factors influencing lifelong learning among undergraduate students from Math-Science background.

The disparities observed in the lifelong learning results among Applied Linguistics' doctorate students provide valuable insights into their enduring learning capabilities. It should be noted, however, that these results may not be directly comparable due to the differing level of education of the participants: undergraduate students as investigated by Kirby et al. (2010) and Bayrakçi and Dindar (2015), and postgraduate students as observed in the present study. In the same line of thought, Perry Jr (1999) conducted an in-depth survey with university students and found that the students initially hold a binary perspective on knowledge - it is either true or false. However, as their knowledge accumulates, they come to realize that the truth is relative to the context. In the final stage, students become cognizant of the existence of multiple perspectives and may even incorporate their

own opinions (Perry Jr, 1999). Notably, Level 4 students displayed a more analytical approach and were conscious of their strengths and weaknesses, likely due to their exposure to more qualitative problems, in contrast to Level 2 students, which indicates that even the level of study can affect the lifelong learning characteristics. To conclude, it was also observed that the notion of lifelong learning was confused by the concept of autonomy among these students.

### **5. Implications, Recommendations and Conclusions**

Continuous education is a significant strategy for an individual's personal growth and professional expertise in terms of fundamental qualities and practical domains. In particular, the rapid evolution of information and technology in the global landscape has made continuous education imperative for individuals. It is imperative to increase awareness about this approach through means such as seminars, conferences, and panels, which shall be arranged in consideration of this information. Additionally, through cooperation between universities and the Ministry of Education, novel programs for continuous education shall be established to foster the advancement of society as a whole.

### **6. Limitations & Directions for Future Research**

The limitations of this study can be summarized as the lack of statistical significance in the results due to the small sample size. Enlarging the participants' body with a more diverse population would have greatly impacted the outcomes. It is suggested that a mixed-method approach would be better suited for describing the tendency of Doctorate students towards lifelong learning. In subsequent research, it is recommended that two or three preexisting instruments be combined to cover a broader range of lifelong learning traits. Furthermore, a comparative analysis across multiple universities would offer valuable insights regarding the university's influence on fostering lifelong learning attitudes among students.

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