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## ***Lifelong Learning as a Research Topic in European Journals: Prevalence, Subjects, and Types of Research<sup>2</sup>***

### **Extended summary**

The paper explores lifelong learning as a significant research topic in European journals, posing three key questions: the prevalence of research, the subjects of the examined texts, and the types of research conducted. We conducted a systematic literature review, incorporating a detailed data collection process and a coding strategy to categorize research subjects. The analysis focused on articles published between 2019 and 2024, resulting in a total of 326 texts from 125 European journals. We employed content analysis techniques and presented the findings in terms of frequencies and percentages. We used a structured protocol for content analysis to collect data.

We began with the understanding that the process of lifelong learning is considered essential for personal and societal growth and encompasses three interrelated dimensions: learning capacity, social skills, and personal skills. It does not solely focus on developing the technical skills required for employment. Lifelong learning is promoted as a strategy for preparing individuals for the new realities of a knowledge-based society, aiming to develop autonomous,

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proactive, and self-aware individuals. This focus is particularly important in dynamic work environments, where success depends on the ability to adapt and acquire new competencies and skills. Although the concept of lifelong learning is not strongly scientifically grounded, it significantly and complexly influences educational reality. To contextualize the idea, we thought it would be helpful to examine the content and methods used by authors in European journals that write about lifelong learning, as well as to assess how common it is as a research topic.

Based on the previously formulated criteria from a database that included 3,853 texts, each of which was reviewed, we identified 326 texts (less than 10% of the selected articles) that contained explicit and detailed discussions on lifelong learning and/or lifelong education.

Between 2019 and 2024, the highest number of articles related to the terms “lifelong learning” and/or “lifelong education” were published in journals from the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. A slightly different pattern emerges when examining the prevalence of lifelong learning as a research topic in European journals based on the country where the first author was employed at the time of publication, revealing a predominance of publications with first authors from Germany, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Analyzing the prevalence of lifelong learning as a research topic in European journals based on the region where the first author was employed further clarifies the situation—most of the examined texts include authors from Europe and America; however, a significant number also originates from Asia.

The primary research topics related to lifelong learning and lifelong education identified in publications from European journals between 2019 and 2024 include lifelong learning policies and the role of lifelong learning as a framework for professional development. Additionally, many studies address topics such as information and communication technologies related to lifelong learning, the lifelong learning of human resources, social dimensions of lifelong learning, lifelong learning skills and competencies, and participation in lifelong learning.

As expected, given the research topics, 35.2% of the texts are theoretical. Furthermore, there is a noticeable increase in both qualitative and quantitative research, with a clear predominance of qualitative (30.1%) over quantitative research (22.1%). In comparison to other corresponding areas, it is particularly noteworthy that there are very few mixed-method studies (4.6%), while multi-method research is extremely rare (0.3%).

Our systematic literature review did not cover specific research details in the journals. Future studies could address these issues. They could involve a larger number of journals or focus exclusively on journals indexed in the WoS or SCOPUS databases. Possible future research could examine the interconnection between the first author’s country of employment at the time of publication, the subject of the paper, and the type of research conducted, along with specific methodological details such as data collection, sample, and instruments used. Each of these research projects would significantly enrich the pool of knowledge related to lifelong learning.

**Keywords:** lifelong learning, systematic literature review, research subject, types of research

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