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## **Questions of the Validation of Previously Acquired Knowledge in the European Union**

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### **Proposal information**

In my poster presentation I would like to survey the topic of the validation of previously acquired knowledge. This topic is of high importance to deal with because the enforcement of learning achievements gained in informal environment can contribute to the increase of both employability and mobility, and they can mean the decrease of unemployment and the increase of economic competitiveness in the long run.

My research questions are the following: How does the question of the validation of previously acquired knowledge appear in the documents of the European Union and on the level of the individual states? What are the most important functions of validation, what kind of aims does the validation procedure serve? What kind of circumstances influence the development of the individual national validation systems?

Preliminary knowledge appeared first in the theory of teaching and learning as a necessary condition, then another function of preliminary knowledge survey opposed to this came to the foreground, the knowledge surplus detecting function. As the knowledge of the students can derive from several sources out of school, it can happen more and more often that they already possess part of the knowledge at the beginning of their studies which the teaching process aims at. There can be considerable overlaps between preliminary and achievable knowledge (Csapo 2006).

Different social, economic, political and ideological factors play a role in the development and maintenance of the systems assuring the validation of preliminary knowledge beyond the principles of rational educational organization. According to this, the validation of preliminary knowledge is not the denomination of a single unified

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process, but a collective term of several, more or less similar educational, pedagogical evaluation activities.

Several different concepts have been spread about preliminary knowledge. Their abbreviations identify the suitable systems as logos. I am going to survey the most widespread ones, which are the following: APL – Accreditation of Prior Learning; APEL – Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning; APFL – Accreditation of Prior Formal Learning; PLA – Prior Learning Assessment; PLAR – Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition; RNFIL - Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning.

As years passed, the notion system of the procedure discussed was going through continuous changes, by this time the expression 'recognition' lost its ruling position against 'validation' mainly in the European Union policy because CEDEFOP had already formulated the guiding principles of the validation of non-formal and informal learning in 2009. This row was supplemented by another notion, the definition of learning achievement, which shows what the student has acquired, taken up from the things taught for him/her and which he/she can show at the completion of the learning activity.

The different organizations and committees of the European Union have formulated several recommendations in connection with life-long learning, adult education, informal and non-formal learning. In one of the recommendations of one of the workteams of the European Union in 2003 the problem of preliminary knowledge appears as the validation of formal and informal learning. The recognition of formal and informal learning had already been mentioned by the Copenhagen Declaration in 2002, and in the Maastricht Resolution in 2004 it appeared in the first place in the list of priorities closely connected to the question of interoperability among professional training systems and to the claim to accept the common references and principles. The strategy named Rethinking Education launched in 2012 encourages the member states in the reform of the educational systems. Over and above the respect for the subsidiary principle the member states are expected to take the necessary steps to validate the results of formal and informal learning achievements by the year 2018 at the latest.

## **Methods**

As the antecedents of the research it is important to mention that I have participated in the state financed project entitled 'Adult age knowledge correction commitment and autonomous learning', which aimed at the exploitation of the background notion of informal and autonomous learning, my task was to examine the possibilities of the validation of preliminary knowledge.

While researching the professional literature related to this subject matter I started processing the European documents, result of forums, European Commission, Council of

Europe and CEDEFOP resolutions. I went through several primary sources and original documents, and paid special emphasis to European Qualifications Framework.

Today we can get a rich picture of the processes going on on the level of the member states of the Union as well from different sources. Undoubtedly, among them the most important one is the follow-up program which has been working with the support of the European Committee since 2005.

This poster presentation concentrates first of all on the level of the Union and less on what happens in the member states striving for the analysis of the European trends. I try to follow here the development of the community policy and the realization of this policy using the European Union documents but keeping in mind that the most important thing is what happens to this policy on the level of the member states. Keeping in mind also that the success of the community policies basically depends on how seriously the member states take it, to what extent there is an inner drive to accept these policies. The frameworks of this study do not make it possible to present the processes going on on the level of the member states. I emphasize only some cases as an illustration to demonstrate that the processes going on in one part of the states are by far ahead than the ones on the level of the Union,

After processing the international and the European documents I have come to the comparison and the collation of the results of national and international special literature. I have paid particularly great attention to the processing of the sources of the Hungarian adult education processes, besides the most important books, studies, periodical articles.

The material presented in my poster presentation can be useful for other European states as well because validation, the recognition of preliminary knowledge, plays an important part in every European Union state.

## **Conclusions**

After the brief account of the European Union documents, recommendations, decrees, I deal with the question in details which functions of validation appear besides the display of learning achievements. The validation of preliminary knowledge contributes to the customization of organized trainings and besides this it supports the concept of life-long learning from the point of view of education. Validation can be interpreted not only on the level of the individual and the employer, the appearance of knowledge, competence acquired within informal frameworks can have significant returns on the economic, educational, social and psychological levels as well.

I survey what influences the development of the national validation systems, what has a decisive effect concerning the validation of preliminary knowledge. I examine in each country to what extent the overestimation of preliminary knowledge is determined by the evaluation and learning culture of the given state, the appearance of credit

accumulation and transfer mechanisms, modularization and what kind of differences appear in connection with general and professional trainings.

I reveal what kind of characteristic features can be observed in connection with the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the countries of the European Union because several differences can be disclosed in this respect between the older states and the new ones which joined after 2004. Finally, I compare how far the individual countries got to in the development of their validation systems. The states operating a developed national system for several years adjust their validation systems to the changes originating from the reforms of the qualification systems, in other states the national systems have been organized in the recent years. Consequently, big differences can be discovered concerning the question between the member states, which I deal with in details in my poster presentation as well.

**Keywords:** validation, previously acquired knowledge, preliminary knowledge, European Union

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