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ROLE OF KEY COMPETENCES IN PREPARING YOUNG
PEOPLE FOR THE LABOUR MARKET

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Abstract

In today's society, the speed of change is on the rise, and people need to stay at the forefront of the social and professional challenges. Adaptation is difficult in a world subject to permanent dynamics. Knowledge becomes rapidly obsolete and is not sufficient for effective professional and social integration. Valuing the individual through knowledge has been replaced by competence assessment. The European Parliament and the Council recommended that all EU countries should pursue key competences for pupils during compulsory schooling through the education process, thus ensuring a unitary framework for young people training, with a view to achieving an easy and efficient social and professional inclusion and lifelong learning. Can these competences be valued and valorised by a young person on the labour market? Do they provide stable levers for effective job integration, but also for continuous development? Is the set of key competences sufficiently complex for the current and future society? These are some of the questions the study aims to respond to, presenting the role and importance of key competences in training young people for the labour market, but also the impact on their social and personal development.

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1. Introduction

We live in a society where the speed of change is on the rise, and people need to stay at the forefront of the social and professional challenges. Adapting to the requirements of a society that is in permanent dynamics is difficult.

In order to achieve this goal, through a Recommendation of The European Council, a lifelong learning program was proposed, which would “offer people learning opportunities at all stages of life” (Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council -2006/962/EC on key competences for lifelong learning, n.d.).

The European Parliament and the Council recommended that all EU countries should pursue key competences for pupils during compulsory schooling through the education process, thus ensuring a unitary framework for young people training, with a view on efficient social and professional inclusion. These competences must also form cornerstones for lifelong learning (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning, n.d.).

Adult people develop key competences through lifelong learning conducted in a coherent and comprehensive manner.

2. Literature Review

Key competences - conceptual delimitations

These key competencies represent a prospective vision of education, oriented and adapted to the requirements of modern society. These competences “are a transferable and multifunctional package of competences that need to be developed until the completion of compulsory education” (Bocoş, Răduţ-Taciu, Stan, Chiş, & Andronache, 2016, pp. 223) for the person to flexibly adapt to a world in constant state of change.

Key competences have been formulated with the aim of providing a European benchmark for policy makers, education providers, employers and pupils themselves to facilitate national and international efforts to reach the commonly agreed objectives, according to the Recommended of the European Parliament and the Council.

In the Recommendation 2006/962/EC regarding key competences for lifelong learning, eight areas of competence are mentioned. These are illustrated in the following image (Figure 01):

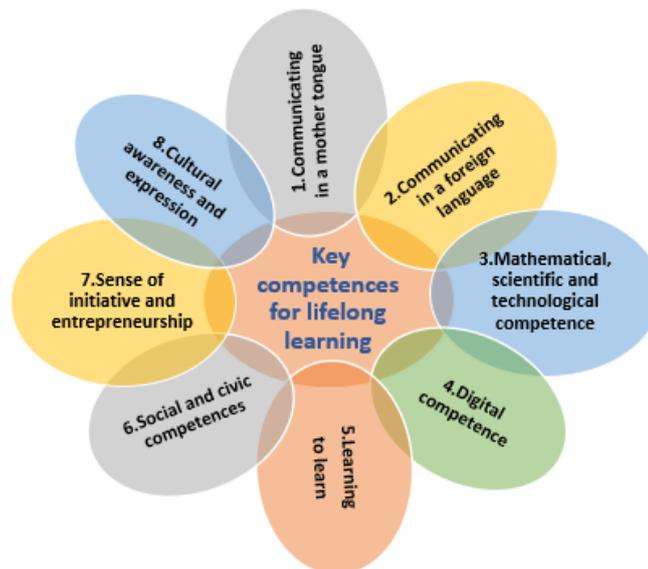


Figure 01. Key competences for lifelong learning according to Recommendation 2006/962/EC (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Ac11090>)

3. Research Method

In order to highlight the role of key competences in the labour market, papers from the literature, studies about labour market needs as well as educational policy documents prepared at the level of the European Union have been reviewed. Information from different areas of the professional activity with the graduate profile has been linked, prefigured from the perspective of key competences.

By analysing the importance of key competences in training point by point, their key role can be ascertained.

3.1. The importance of key competences from a professional perspective

Key competences, translated into knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, will help students develop personally, find a job, and actively participate in society. Building key competences is the foundation for the vocational training of young people and for school, social and professional insertion after compulsory schooling.

The role of these competences is to be the basis or even the starting point, providing young people with a mutual start in vocational training. Key competences can also be reviewed from the perspective of equalizing young people's chances of joining the labour market in certain professions. Vocational training cannot be deemed ended once the compulsory studies have been completed or even at the completion of higher education, training has to be continuous throughout life.

From the perspective of employers, the issue of a common framework of competences makes itself felt. In the paperwork *Employability skills for the future* (Curtin, 2004), the competences pursued by employers are mentioned: collecting, analysing and organising information, communicating ideas and information, planning and organising activities, working with others and in teams, using mathematical calculations and ideas, problem solving, technology use. Other authors (Urtasun & Núñez, 2012) state that

technical skills, motivation, participation in decision-making and the performance of unusual and complex tasks are predictors of a successful career.

Based on the above, there are many similarities between the employer's expectations at the level of the employee's competences and the key competences that the young person must have at the end of compulsory schooling.

Key competences can be considered tools that equip the young person with everything they need to move to a higher level of learning and training, to be able to update their training permanently, to adapt to the changes that occur with rapidity in all professional and social fields.

3.2. Language proficiency and impact on the labour market

Language proficiency is presented in the European document as equally important as the development of language proficiency of children, young people and adults fosters the mobility of people with different specializations as well as of students in order to increase the employability at European level. Improving language proficiency is important in achieving the goals provided for in The Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs (Europe 2020: European Union Strategy for Employment and Growth, 2017).

The importance of communication skills for the labour market is underlined in specialised papers. For example, in the paper *Employability Skills At a glance* (Wibrow, 2011), the language proficiency is presented from the perspective of the employer. Thus, the description of these skills is carried out on three levels. As such, communication skill means: Listening and understanding working instructions, clear speech, reading and interpreting messages at the workplace (e.g.: documentation, instructions, rules, etc.), writing for work notes and reports, interpreting customer needs, exchanging information with other employees, negotiation, assertive expression, empathy in customer relations, but also basic math skills - requirements involving measurement and counting, or creating and using networks.

Language skills are also useful in social life, but especially in the labour market. This is highlighted in the case of labour markets at national and European level, and the business of EU enterprises, therefore it operates on an international scale. Poor language proficiency is a serious obstacle for young people and other age groups to capitalize on foreign professional opportunities, in businesses or organizations active at international level.

Both communication in the mother tongue and communication in an international language provide the candidate on the labour market with professional and personal benefits through access to a complex professional, social and personal development. The ability to convey information and personal attitudes, to make one's point, to relate effectively, being accepted in a professional group or friends and, at the same time, to have the emotional comfort that information has been transmitted and received correctly are only some of the benefits that people mastering these skills can enjoy, no matter the workplace they choose.

3.3. Digital, mathematical, science and technology skills

The areas of digitized skills, mathematical skills, basic skills in science and technology are extremely important for a society undergoing various, rapid, accelerated changes. Spectacular technological developments are an important challenge for education and vocational training systems.

Due to the exponential development of artificial intelligence, millions of jobs will disappear, others will change considerably. The study conducted by McKinsey Global Institute Analysis (McKinsey &

Company, 2018) presents the major impact that IT development will have on jobs. The impact will be extremely high. Automated systems could replace over 130 million workers globally. In the next 10-15 years, the adoption of automation technologies will transform jobs, by the fact that people will interact frequently with increasingly intelligent machines, so the need for digital and technical skills is becoming increasingly acute.

The areas in which new developments have emerged and have evolved spectacularly in the field of artificial intelligence, according to McKinsey Global Institute (McKinsey & Company, 2018), are: Mobile internet, automation of work with information, the internet of things, “cloud” technology, advanced robotics, autonomous and semi-autonomous vehicles, energy storage, 3D printing, advanced materials, advanced exploration and extraction of oil and gas, renewable energy. The impact of these changes is extremely strong, as the current workforce is not ready to adapt quickly to these developments. “When a 3D printable backhoe was introduced in 2017, life suddenly changed for a lot of companies. The number of connected devices continues to experience explosive growth - from 18 billion in 2016 to 75 billion in 2025 - according to the most recent estimates. The size of the market for artificial intelligence is expected to grow as well by 50-60% per year” Disruptive forces in the industrial sectors Global executive survey Automotive & Assembly, Advanced Electronics and Aerospace & Defense.

The impact of digital technologies on the labour market is, and will be, major, as they can substitute the labour force, with productivity gaining significant increases, but this is not reflected into wage growth as well. Some companies, due to increased accessibility to telecommunication services (voice and data), can use cheaper local labour force to carry out activities in a particular area where the same activity is better paid, generating competition on the labour market.

In the paper Competences and Competence Model of University Teachers (Blašková, Blaško, & Kucharčíková, 2014) it is mentioned that in addition to digital skills and other general competences, e.g. social skills are also required by an employer. Thus, the acquisition of general competences plays a dual role: Both for the social reality, but also for the professional reality. These competences are important, virtual reality being support for actions in reality, for example, electronic banks, online shopping, e-learning, e-library, e-administration, etc.). Thus, digital skills can be important in different areas, but associated with other key competences can lead to performance in the chosen field.

3.4. The competence of learning to learn

Learning to learn, one of the key competences, is defined in European education policy documents as the ability to organise one's own learning. The description of this competence is detailed in the documents drawn up at European level, thus adjusting the ways in which it can be developed. As evidenced by these documents, “learning to learn is the ability to pursue and persist in learning, to organise one's own learning, by effectively managing time and information, both individually and in groups” (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning, 2006).

This competence includes awareness of one's own learning process and needs, identifying the opportunities available and the ability to overcome the obstacles to successful learning. It also means assimilating new knowledge and skills, as well as searching for and using new skills. Learning to learn employs learners to rely on previous learning and life experiences to use and apply new knowledge and

skills in a variety of contexts: At home, at workplace, in education, and in training. To build this competence, motivation and trust are essential. Among the key competences, this is the competence that gives the individual the ability to adapt to change repeatedly by becoming aware of the need for self-training, self-motivation and self-preparation to become more competent and more competitive. A person who has this competence is always ready to start all over again in learning in a new field, accepting the trainee status without feeling any discomfort whatsoever (Andersen, 2015). Thus, in the labour market, the novelties will become exciting challenges, not obstacles that lead to abandoning the task or even to professional failure.

3.5. Entrepreneurial skills

“Entrepreneurial skills refer to the ability to act in the face of opportunities and ideas and to transform them into values for others. They are based on creativity, critical thinking and problem solving, initiative and persistence, and the ability to work collaboratively to plan and manage projects that have cultural, social or financial value” (Recommendation of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning, 2018, p. 11).

This category of skills, in particular, finds its applicability especially in professional activity. A young person who identifies development opportunities for the company he/she works for or for his/her own business will bring added value in the field of activity. He/she will move from the employee-robot level, who just performs tasks, to the level of analysing, organising and managing projects, contributing to professional, social and personal progress.

Entrepreneurial skills have been described in the paper *Toward a new entrepreneurial skills and competence framework: a qualitative and quantitative study* (Loué & Baronet, 2012) following extensive research in which entrepreneurs from France, Canada, Algeria were interviewed. The skills identified were grouped into eight key categories: Opportunity recognition and exploitation; Financial management; Human resources management; Marketing and commercial activities; Leadership; Self-discipline; Marketing and monitoring; Intuition and vision.

From the employer's perspective, entrepreneurial skills are very important because the entrepreneurial capacity determines the competitiveness of the organization. In the study *Key Competencies for Entrepreneurship* (Robles & Zárraga-Rodríguez, 2015) significant individual skills are explored to develop entrepreneurial skills. Twenty skills are mentioned. This study shows that experts agree that personal competences are relevant for entrepreneurship: Risk taking, initiative, accountability, dynamism, information search and analysis, result orientation, change management and quality of work. This study also states that innovation is not one of the most important competences for experts, although it is frequently quoted in literature as an important factor in entrepreneurship. Probably this is due to the fact that from the viewpoint of the experts it seems that it is not so easy to acquire and develop this competence through learning.

By correlating the description of the key entrepreneurial skills with employers' expectations, there are many similarities, even overlaps: creativity, initiative, risk taking, the ability to plan and manage projects, etc. In conclusion, it can be said that once the key competence is built at the end of compulsory schooling, the young employee has the necessary tools for a successful insertion into the labour market.

4. Analyses and Findings

In the next 10-15 years, the adoption of automation technologies and artificial intelligence will transform jobs, and people will increasingly interact with ever smarter machinery. According to the same study, these technologies and human-machine interaction will bring many benefits in the form of higher productivity, improved performance and new prosperity, but also the changing of skills required from workers. In the study *Skill shift: Automation and the future of the workforce* (Bughin et al., 2018) conducted by McKinsey Global Institute it is stated that the need for technological skills has increased since 2002 and will accelerate between 2016 to 2030. It will also increase the need for social and emotional skills on an accelerated basis, instead “the need for (...) physical and manual skills will decrease” (Bughin et al., 2018). Between 2016 and 2030, the demand for social and emotional skills will increase in all industrial sectors by 26% in the United States and 22% in Europe. While some of these skills, such as empathy, are innate, others, such as advanced communication, can be built and refined. The rise in demand for entrepreneurship and initiative will also see the fastest growing in this category, with 33% in the United States and a 32% increase in Europe.

From the data highlighted above, we observe the trends of the skills required on the labour market. Directly or subordinated, all areas of key competences are present. As transversal skills, in varying proportions, key competences can be found in any field of activity. Thus, employers' needs are correlated with the skills that can be proven by any future employee. Without a key competence, a young person will encounter serious problems at the time of professional and social insertion and in building other skills required by the labour market.

5. Conclusion

In view of the above, it is clear that the role of key competences, especially in the areas of computer skills, science and technology skills, entrepreneurial skills and learning to learn, is extremely important in the basic training of young people to prepare them for professional insertion. These areas of competence provide not only the necessary skills to operate in the IT and technical fields, but also to accumulate and develop knowledge and skills to adapt to multiple changes in this field, with a major impact on all areas of activity.

One of the EU's key competences objectives is formulated as follows: Young people should acquire a “sufficient mastery of key competences at a level enabling them to prepare for adult life and to provide a basis for future training and professional life”, as well as for “developing and updating key competences throughout life” (Recommendation 2006/962/EC on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, n.d.).

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