

## The role of different learning forms in adult education

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**Abstract** Adult education builds on the basis of knowledge brought by the person entering the process. Taking this as a baseline, it is obvious that the wider the foundation of knowledge, the more efficient and cost saving the education of adults will be. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as in the past, the range of knowledge an adult possesses may not only be gained in the framework of a formal education program; the importance of non-formal and informal learning is growing. Increasingly, informally obtained knowledge is becoming appreciated in adult employees. At the University of Debrecen, we conducted an examination of the diverse ways of learning associated to the validation procedure applied to formally recognize the pre-existing knowledge of enrollees in the correspondent section of a Master’s course in human resource advisory. The process of validation establishes a possibility for applicant students to have acknowledgement of their non-formally obtained course or career-related knowledge and work experience, in the form of Master’s degree credits. The result of the process is the exemption from having to take defined courses, so that students may avoid repetition and focus on the more thorough acquirement of the new knowledge the Master’s course offers them. The objective of our research was to measure what role knowledge achievable in a non-formal way has in the workplace and in the motivation to learn among those students who could use this validation procedure. In the completed questionnaires filled in by all the students of the above-named course (191), we also wanted to know the costs and objectives respondents had in their education outside the school system. Our results showed that half of the respondents have informally achieved knowledge which is considered useful and that the reason for learning in this non-formal way may be related to the expectation of their employers.

**Keywords** adult education • motivation • non-formal and informal learning • validation

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## 1. Learning and knowledge from different approaches

Knowledge currently is an interdisciplinary term for which there are different forms for its understanding. By applying a pedagogic approach for the term knowledge, we can use the understanding of Csapó (2002a), who believes that a certain part of knowledge is built on such knowledge components, which are acquired by students outside of school, parallel with their formal education. Their in-school educations, through long years, formalized parts of their disciplines and the school was practically the only *locus* available to them for acquiring knowledge. Technical development, e.g. the introduction of computers, opened new ways to gain knowledge and meant new challenges for schools. Csapó (2002b) emphasized the role of “brought in” preliminary knowledge, which may exceed the amount of knowledge obtainable at school. The *locus* of knowledge gradually exceeds that of the school building itself. The number of such sources of information has increased, which establish the possibility to gain knowledge that is comparable or even exceeds the amount of knowledge obtainable at school.

### 1.1. Learning as a way to gain knowledge

In this study, naturally we deal with adult age learning, still our statements are hardened, since there is not a well-accepted international definition for adult learning. An examination by the OECD examining 18 countries has revealed that different terminologies are applied by different countries (Mihály 2003). The result of an international professional discussion made it widely accepted that, from the point of view of education, only such citizens are considered to be adults, which are 25-64 years old and who have thus exceeded the range of ages covered by compulsory education. Learning may be understood as a meeting one of the following requirements considering adults:

- It is realized in formal or non-formal frames and the content of learning may be identified
- It may be identified whether personal or technical motives are determinate
- The program is either full or part time

The term learning, by definition, means a process leading to the growth of knowledge. Knowledge may originate from numerous sources, which are defined as formal, non-formal and informal learning by professional public life. These different kinds of learning are accepted as equals and therefore appreciate the result of learning, independent of the environments where the learning occurs, i.e.:

- Study carried out in a formal (school scheme) education system
- A non-formal (outside the school scheme) but organized form of education
- Informal (outside the school scheme) knowledge acquired by experience

Mainly fact-like knowledge and lexical knowledge may be acquired in formal and non-formal ways. Informal learning is an original form of learning, conscious self-training, spontaneous learning and socialization may also be considered similarly. McGivney (1999) believes that informal learning may be not preliminary defined or self-directed; it may be accidental or planned. It may be initiated by individuals or may be a communal process. It may also be an answer for imagined or explicit requirements. Tót (2002)

considers informal learning unstructured, individuals acquire such knowledge through it, which may be relevant from the point of view of work; still, in many cases, these do not raise awareness of the result of a learning process.

### *1.2. Learning through a lifetime*

The term lifelong learning has been used since the 1970s in many forms by the professional and education political communities involved in adult education. Education was believed to be the best means of reacting to the increase of unemployment. This is the reason why lifelong learning was less frequently used compared to the mostly applied term of lifelong education. The document of the Council of Europe “Memorandum on Life Long Learning” does not consider this lifelong learning conception to be a part of, but a directing principle of education and training. Considering this study, we emphasize the chapter “Key message 4: Valuing learning” (I1), which highlights the fields of non-formal and informal learning. An analysis by Márkus (2011) states that, considering the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of adult education, the acknowledgement of non-formal and informal knowledge, career guidance and consultancy are reflected in important jobs.

## **2. International and national research in relation to different forms of learning**

In Hungary, a representative research study in context with the participation in different learning forms was published in 2004 by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH), examining a sample of 68,000 respondents (KSH 2004). The results of the survey include a population aged 15-74 living in non-institutional households and show the ratio different groups of the population connected to the various forms of education and the factors which affected the participation in education (Table 1):

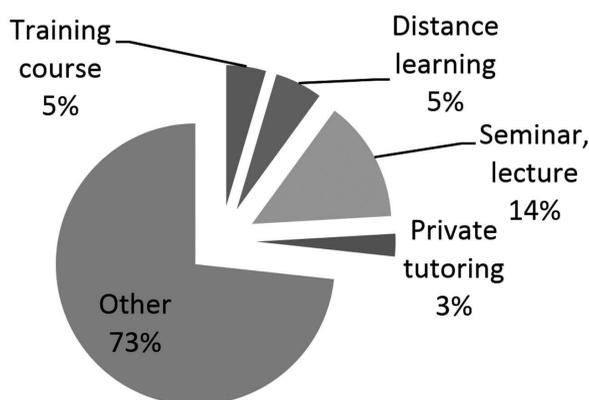
**Table 1 | The ratio of the participants in education by educational forms and age groups**

Age group (year)	School scheme education	Out - of - school scheme education	Informal education
15-24	92.5	9.5	18.9
25-34	40.7	36.8	41
35-44	17.9	48.6	51.8
45-54	6.6	44.3	64.1
55-64	1.1	29.9	85.2
65-74	0.0	7.6	95.7
Totally	63.9	22.1	33.3

*Source: Private edition by KSH (2004) study on lifelong learning Remark: The table indicates a cumulative distribution of respondents in education, those who participate in numerous forms of education will be present in all types*

It is worth noting how low the participation of the most active layer of the labor market (aged 35-44) is in learning. Their participation in school scheme education is halved, but their leaving of the formal frames does not mean that they keep on learning outside the school scheme or informally. 46.5% of the unemployed, 41.5% of the economically active participate in out-of-school scheme education. There is a considerable difference in relationship with informal learning. Only 29.6% of the unemployed stressed this form of private development, while 51.2% of the employed gain knowledge in this form. Of the entire population of 352,000 people, 4.2% of those affected participated in the outside-of-school scheme education system a year before the examination.

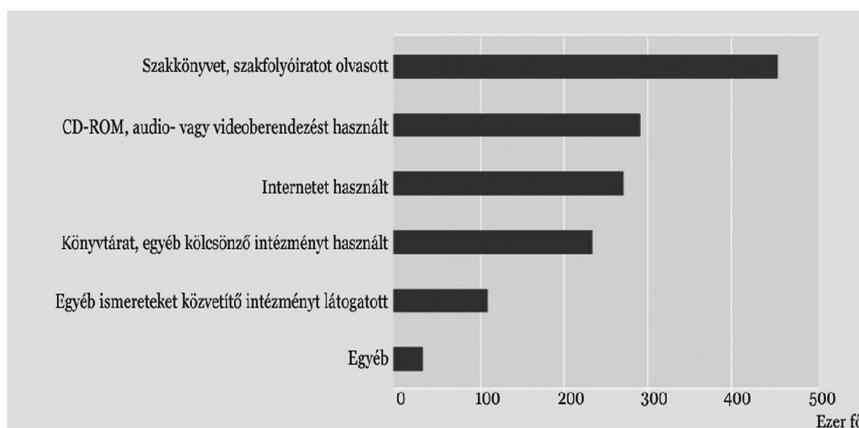
The reason for joining the outside-the-school scheme education in all age groups is the intention to increase the level of current qualification (Figure 2):



**Figure 2 | The distribution of respondents participating in outside-the-school scheme education by educational forms**

*Source: Private edition by KSH (2004) study on lifelong learning.*

The survey of the KSH did not reveal the motivation background of this learning form, but later in an own private study, we try to justify our hypothesis, which explains that work places require much knowledge and competencies from workers, which they can or must learn informally. The KSH has examined the characteristics of the participation of the sample in informal learning. As a consequence of the survey, only 7% of the 15-74 aged population, 530,000 people continued learning informally (Figure 3):



**Figure 3 | The number of those learning informally by the nature of the study**

*Remark: several answers might be marked*

*Source: KSH (2004) study on lifelong learning. Legend, lines from top to bottom: Read subject-specific publication, journal; used CD-ROM, audio or video resources; used the Internet; used a library or other loaning institution; visited other institutions which disseminate knowledge.*

87% of those participating in informal learning have read professional books or journals. We deem it important to highlight that KSH considers those knowledge gaining processes to be informal learning, where willfulness may be identified. The researchers of this definition have referred that informal learning does not by all means mean willful learning; moreover, individuals may not recognize its contribution to their knowledge and competences.

### 3. Our research, in context with different learning forms

We have carried out an examination of the participation in different learning forms among Human Resource Adviser MA correspondence students at the University of Debrecen, Faculty of Child and Adult Education (GYFK). Our sample included these master course students, 191 individuals, the whole affected data base. The professional reason for the selection of the sample is in relationship with the validating activity of the Faculty. GYFK experimentally conducts a special activity, as the result of which applicants to the MA course may formally request the validation and acceptance of their preliminary knowledge.

The University of Debrecen is a definitive higher education institution in Hungary. 33,000 students study in 15 faculties. The number of active students of the Faculty of Child and Adult Education is 1,498, of which 1,060 are correspondence students. The educational supply includes two higher level training programs (full time training and by correspondence), four BA programs (full time training and by correspondence) and the Human Resource Adviser MA program (only by correspondence).

This degree course was accredited in the Social Sciences, but Management and Human Resource Management also form a major part of the course structure. The qualification entitles students to work in adult education, counseling and human management tasks. 317 students were accepted to and 126 graduated from the correspondence course. The case study was prepared using 191 active status students.

Students can only apply for admission with receiving a diploma, 66% of them had college degrees; the others had university degrees. The MA degree ensures a higher level status; in addition to the knowledge the students who only possess college degrees gain. Moreover, for those working in public administration and public service, the MA degree also creates the opportunity for them to enter a higher level remuneration category. Considering the examination, an important aspect of analysis is the nature of the professional qualification, in addition to the nature of the diploma (Table 2).

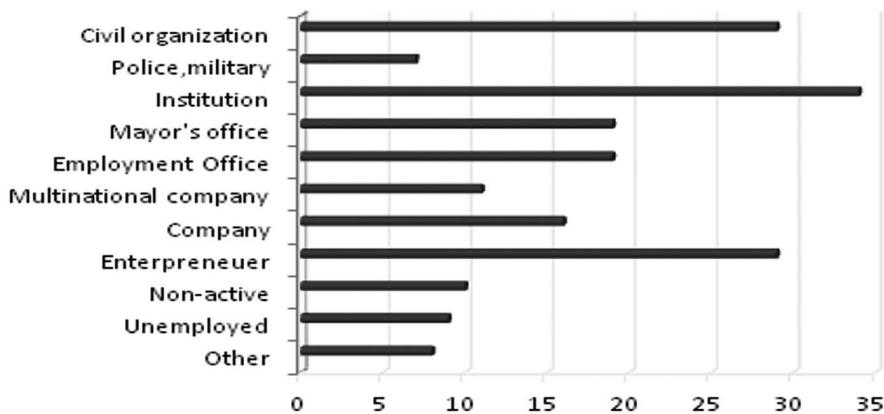
**Table 2 | The distribution of EET MA students by basic qualification (%)**

Andragogy	Cultural manager	Social educator	Social worker	Human resources	Teacher	Kindergarten educator	Other
15.4	5.3	20.5	1.8	3.5	13.2	4.4	35.9

Source: Private examination, 2012 (n=191).

The Faculty of Child and Adult Education offers *inter alia* the following education profiles: cultural management, andragogy, social education and kindergarten teacher training. These degree courses are overrepresented in the types of degrees actually awarded, with 46% of students earning these types of degrees.

In the theoretical part of our examinations, we noted that knowledge may be achieved outside the formal frameworks of the labor market. This is why we consider it important to represent the distribution of students examined by workplace (Figure 5):



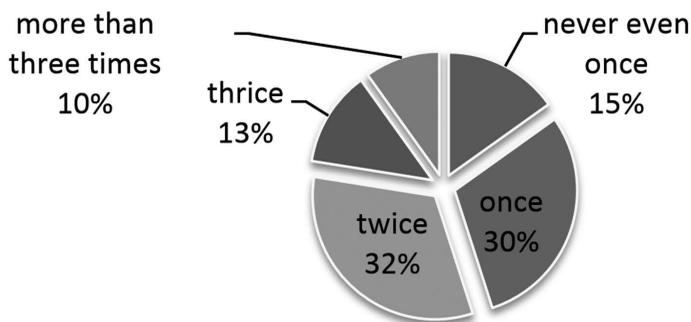
**Figure 5 | The distribution of students by workplace (persons)**

Source: own examination, 2012 (n=191)

The data justify that the predominance of the students do not work in a workplace corresponding to their actual area of education. Without formal technical knowledge, 56 persons work in a human organizational unit of a business organization and 41

work in the human-political department in the public administration/public service. 97 of the 191 students work in the field of labor issues or human management; only 6 have the adequate qualifications to do so. 24 students work in such organizations which offer adult educational activities. The other category of the distribution shows a strong diversity considering workplace

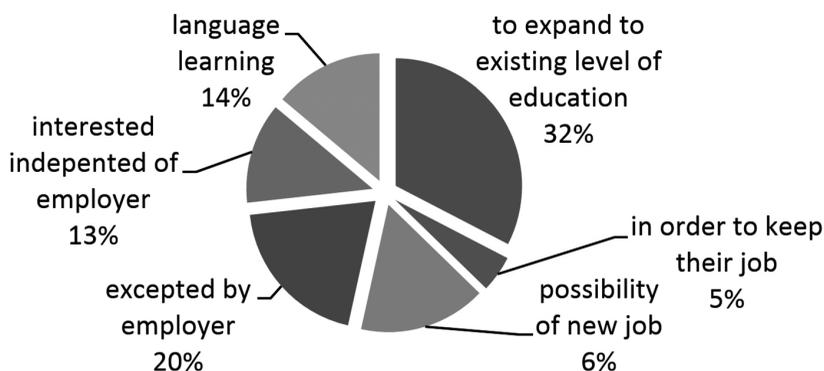
We supposed that applicants to the MA course are motivated and committed towards the conception of lifelong learning; this is why we wanted to know by the questionnaire, whether they have participated in education outside the school scheme (Figure 6):



**Figure 6 | Participation in outside the school scheme education (%)**

*Source: Private examination, 2012 (n=191)*

Our supposition was justified, as a considerable portion of the students have carried out different studies. Only 15% stated that they have not gained knowledge in organized frameworks after receiving their diplomas. An unusual learning activity was also indicated, since 19 respondents have participated more than three times in some kind of education. We have also deemed it important to reveal the reasons why graduates decided to take on the burdens of the additional training. Only those have entered into the analysis, who have accessed any kind of education (Figure 7):

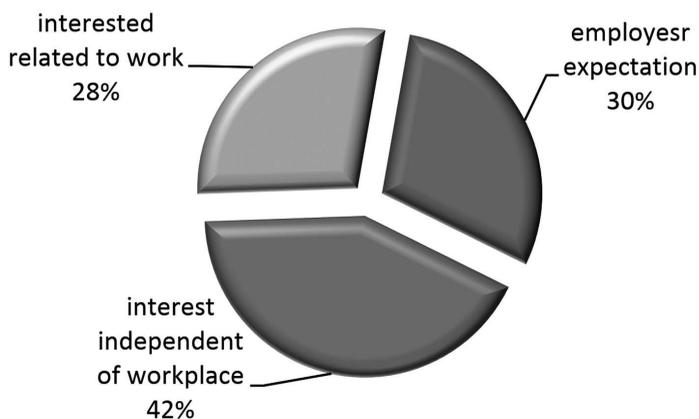


**Figure 7 | The aim of the outside the school scheme education (%)**

*Source: Private examination, 2012 (n=163).*

Data have proved that learning stands in a strong relationship with work. More than half of the respondents have stated that education not providing a professional qualification is closely connected to their job. 8 students claimed that participation in education was a condition for keeping their job. 33 students responded that laborers have declared a clear relevant expectation. We think it important to emphasize that the reason for almost half of the respondents participating in education was their awareness of the constantly changing economic environment and the importance of competences. This is why they enhanced their knowledge formerly and thereby created a better opportunity for them to get the additional job.

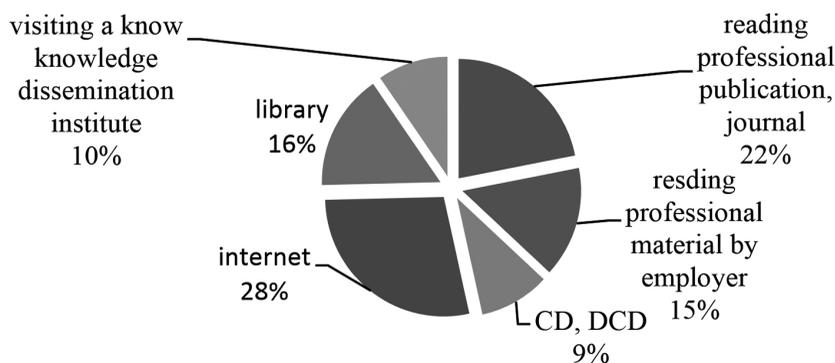
We also have asked students for the different learning forms in the questionnaire: the number of those is considerable who also identify the way to gain knowledge outside formal or non-formal frames. Half of the respondents (96 individuals) claimed that they usually train themselves in an informal way. The measured data has relevance considering our study when we reveal what motivation this learning form has. In the analysis, we have included the data of those students who have declared informal learning (Figure 8):



**Figure 8 | The explanation of informal learning (%)**

*Source: own examination, 2012 (n=96).*

The data corroborate that employee status plays an important part even in informal learning. For one-third of the students, the employer itself set up such requirements, which require constant learning and continuous readiness. Still, almost one-third of the respondents claimed they continuously try to develop knowledge and to possess up to date information owing to their professional interest, but without any obligation stemming from their employers (Figure 9):



**Figure 9 | The nature of informal learning**

*Source: Own examination, 2012 (n=96)*

Corresponding to the technical possibility of the age, most respondents gain knowledge on the Internet and the application of audiovisual devices is considerably neglected. 37% of the respondents read professional literature, which are either distributed by the employer or acquired privately.

Analyzing the data, we can declare: Human Resource Advisor students of the Faculty of Child and Adult Education, University of Debrecen have already been motivated to learn, 163 respondents have participated in education outside the school scheme education, and 96 students responded that they have learnt informally and this knowledge is also used at work. Keeping one's job or the chance to get a better job serves as a motivational factor to participate in organized trainings and informal learning. Students mostly prefer modern technical devices, i.e., the Internet, but the ratio of those who visit a library is also considerable.

#### 4. Summary

In our study, we attempted to identify the motivation and objectives of learning, together with the purpose motivating those sampled to pursue the gaining knowledge in various ways. Our results show that diploma having members of the sample possess a strong motivation to learn. Their particular characteristic is participation in education outside formal frames, which stands in strong connection to their employee status. Respondents actively prepare to meet modern job challenges and also pursue diverse competences, adequate language skills and a higher educational level. Their knowledge is enhanced in formal, non-formal and informal ways. Their employees quite often establish requirements demanding the constant study and reading of professional materials and also the application of modern technical devices (together with the Internet) in doing so. The concept of informal learning was familiar for the sample; it was obvious for them that this manner of learning provides them with considerable knowledge. This learning form is connected for many of them to their work. In its background lies the professional self-respect and the number of those is considerable who are purely studious to enhance knowledge. Mostly students motivated in education and intention to informally develop knowledge necessary for the workplace attend the MA course. This examination may not be considered representative, but correctly illustrates what

an important role continuous learning has in the life of adults possessing diplomas. Through the analysis of an examinational sample of mainly students of arts living in the surroundings of a rural city, we may declare that modern expectations considerably influence the respondents. In 2012, this layer is seen standing on numerous feet, with a wide scale of competence being important. They do not wish to follow, but to overtake and exceed, problems originating from change. Their solution is clearly access to the achievement of ever newer knowledge and competences.

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