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Accomplishment of the European Union Lifelong Learning Objectives in Poland

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Abstract: *One of the preconditions for the economic success of a country is education, which today should assume the form of lifelong and life-time learning-LLL). This condition is so important that it was first reflected in the the Lisbon Strategy goals and, subsequently, in the Europe 2020 strategy and its flagship initiatives. It is known that each EU Member State is obliged to achieve the common goals. Hence, this work undertakes to assess the degree to which the EU LLL goals have been accomplished in Poland. This work presents: the essence of LLL, the educational goals set out in the two abovementioned strategies, and the EU recommendations for Poland in this field. Selected indicators were used to determine the level of educational achievements in the country. The following research methodologies were applied for the purpose of this paper: desk research, indicator-based research and deductive research.*

Introduction

To meet the many economic and social challenges which arise in such fields as economic competitiveness and innovation, demographics, labour market or the standard and quality of living in Poland, an adequate education which would enable the people to acquire the necessary knowledge and prepare them to function in society and in the volatile labour market, is an indispensable precondition (Panitsidou *et al.*, 2012, pp. 548-553; Riddel *et al.*, 2012, pp. 151-168). It is especially important when knowledge is in great demand, and at the same time it quickly becomes obsolete. For this reason, learning must no longer be associated with one single period of one's life. It is necessary to be prepared to constantly develop one's competences, even after completing traditional formal education. This includes during adult life and at older age. Therefore, it is emphasised that not only lifelong learning, but also life-wide learning is a necessity. Learning is no longer an activity associated only with the school/university environment and it is oriented towards the development of the commonly recognised competences. The role of non-formal and informal education, which does not directly lead to the acquisition of the commonly recognised qualifications, has been increasingly appreciated. The growing role of the extracurricular education produces results, among others, due to its flexibility, which makes it possible to deliver knowledge at a place and time most adequate to particular needs (*Polska 2030*, 2009, pp. 220-221).

The situation in Poland is of a dual nature. On the one hand, we are a country with an educational boom, in which the number of university or college students has increased five-fold over the last 25 years. The enrolment rate for the group aged 19–24 has reached 48%, which is one of the highest levels in Europe. In addition, 500 students per 10000 inhabitants is the sixth highest rate in the world. This was accompanied by an increasing number of faculty members and more institutions of higher education. Unfortunately, the quantitative changes have not been matched by qualitative developments, which affects the graduates' competence level. We are also dealing with a specific paradox: being one of the most entrepreneurial nations in the world, the Poles do not see the need for lifelong learning. Poland is characterised by one of the lowest participation ratios in the area of informal and adult education, which is surprising since the bonus for education in our country is still increasing¹. It results from the growing demand

¹ In accordance with the CASE study of 2008, the so-called return from education, i.e. the increase in salaries resulting from each additional year of education was growing for the majority of occupations and it was, obviously, the highest for professionals performing work requiring the highest skills.

for employees with any qualifications in the labour market, which is a consequence of the technological transformations. Moreover, the relative productivity, i.e. the useful qualifications, of elderly persons are lower in the post-communist countries in comparison with the countries of Western Europe, which is a consequence of the failure to continue education after they have completed their formal education.

In the meantime, the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) experts estimate that by 2025 as many as 250–300 thousand new jobs in knowledge-based occupations will have been generated, which will constitute ca. 45% of the total new jobs. They will be reserved only for those oriented towards a constant development of their qualifications. This is why the low ratio of adult Poles who participate in the lifelong learning system is unsettling and constitutes a material development obstacle for Poland” (*Polska 2030*, 2009, pp. 221). It is essential to increase this ratio (including other educational indicators) both from the perspective of the LLL concept implementation (included in *the Lisbon Strategy* and *the Europe 2020 strategy*, which is based on adult education to a significant degree), and from the perspective of the economy and the society. To achieve positive results in this field, a specified policy and educational activities are required. Poland has taken adequate steps to achieve the educational goals set first in *the Lisbon Strategy* and, subsequently, in *the Europe 2020 strategy*. Some of them have been accomplished, while others have not. In this context, and considering the importance of the issue in question, this work has been written with the objective of assessing the degree to which the EU LLL goals were accomplished in Poland during the 2000–2013 period and to provide guidelines for further action in this field.

The following methodologies were applied to achieve this goal: analysis of documents, reports and literature regarding the field in question, analysis of the indicators of the most important educational achievements set out in the EU, and the national regulations, and deduction. As a result, it was possible to determine the degree to which Poland has fulfilled its obligations in the area of LLL.

LLL Essence, Goals and Principles

In March 2002, in Barcelona, the European Council approved the Education and Training 2010 work programme, by means of which, as part of the Lisbon Strategy, the framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training was established. It was based on the common goals with its main objective being to support the improvement of the quality of

the national education and training systems by means of the supplementary European instruments, learning from each other and the exchange of acceptable standards through the open coordination method (*Council Conclusions...*, 2009; Panitsides & Anastasiadou, 2015, pp. 128-142). It was accepted at that time that lifelong learning included individual development and the development of the social characteristics in all forms and contexts, in the formal, non-formal and informal educational systems, i.e. in schools and vocational education institutions, institutions of further and higher education and adult education institutions as well as in the framework of incidental education, i.e. at home, work and in the society. This education model emphasises the need to prepare and encourage all children to learn throughout their entire lives. At the same time, it points to the necessity of directing the actions in such a manner that various learning forms are available to all adult, employed or unemployed persons who need to be retrained or have their qualifications upgraded (Pluta-Olearnik, 2005, pp. 56-57).

The following were included into the main LLL objectives: to facilitate the free movement of persons who learn and work, to enable the improvement and transfer of qualifications, to promote creativity and innovation, to contribute to economic growth and the growth of employment. These objectives are still up-to-date.

LLL is founded on the following principles:

- a comprehensive learning approach, which consists of the appreciation of all forms of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) and involves the possibility to combine them, which brings the best results;
- valuing learning at all life stages: the need to adjust to the continuous economic, social and technological changes requires actions which make it possible to adapt the educational and professional careers fairly quickly and at all life stages;
- learning concerns all: irrespective of the existing divisions, with a special emphasis on the persons who have not been the main targets of the traditional educational policy so far, i.e. the economically active, the unemployed, the elderly and also young children at pre-school age;
- a partnership for LLL: i.e. recognition of the fact that learning concerns all and requires the partnership of many entities (public administration at all levels, educational institutions, employers, employees and non-governmental organisations);
- an open approach to qualifications² which consists in the recognition of the value of qualifications as such, irrespective of the place, manner and

² It is the main principle of the European cooperation in the area of qualifications (European Qualifications Framework).

time of acquiring them; it is based on a description and comparison of qualifications as learning outcomes, i.e. regardless of the context of their origin;

- a person-oriented LLL policy: the person who is learning is the main reference point in this policy, which means that education and training should be adjusted to the individual needs of the person. The effectiveness of the policy should be measured not only with indicators related to institutions and systems but, primarily, with those concerning the achievements of people;
- an efficient investment in learning: in the context of the policy oriented towards a learning person, especially an adult person, it is essential to redirect the models of financing the education and training tasks from the educational institutions and services to the needs of the persons in question (*Perspektywa...*, 2013; *2010 Update ...*, 2010; *The Future of Learning...*, 2011, pp. 23-30).

The implementation of these principles has been recognized as the most important policy objective in the area of education and training through 2020. On the other hand, the European Qualifications Framework, which is supposed to ensure more transparency and comparability of qualifications acquired in various EU sectors and Member States, has been recommended as one of the most important instruments to make the principles a reality (*Recommendation ...*, 2008). Poland is undertaking specific activities in this area, which will be confirmed by the achievements presented in this work.

Accomplishment of the Lisbon Strategy Educational Objectives

Education was not distinguished from the six basic monitoring areas of the *Lisbon Strategy*³. However, it was assigned a major role in the achievement of the strategy's main priorities, i.e. growth, employment and innovation. It is confirmed by the fact that out of the structural indicators, seven concerned education. For six of them, numerical European datum levels were determined to be achieved in 2010 (Table 1), and the seventh one, concerning the level of public expenditure on education, was not given any numerical value, but was recommended to be increased.

³ The main monitoring areas included: I. General macroeconomic situation II. Employment, III. Innovation and scientific research, IV. Economic reform, V. Social cohesion, VI. Environment.

Table 1. Accomplishment of the EU educational goals by Poland in comparison with the EU in 2010

No.	Education development indicators in the EU with the datum levels for 2010	EU goal by 2010	Status in the EU	Status in Poland
1	The rate of young people who are under-skilled in reading (in accordance with PISA study)	To decrease the rate by at least 20%	-17.0% goal not accomplished	-35.3% goal accomplished
2	The rate of young people who do not continue learning, i.e. persons aged 18-24 with lower secondary education (gimnazjum) at most, who do not participate in education or training	To decrease the rate to a maximum of 10%	14.1% goal not accomplished	5.4% goal accomplished
3	The rate of persons aged 20-24 with at least upper secondary or vocational education	To increase the rate to at least 85%	79.0% goal not accomplished	91.1% goal accomplished
4	The number of graduates with degrees in mathematics, natural sciences and engineering	To increase the number by at least 15%	+43.4% goal accomplished	+150.0% goal accomplished
5	The number of persons aged 25-64 participating in education or training (in the period of 4 weeks prior to the study)	To increase the number to at least 12.5%	9.1% goal not accomplished	5.3% goal not accomplished
6	The rate of children aged 4 to the compulsory school age participating in early childhood education	at least 90.0%	92.4% goal accomplished	69.2[2009/2010] goal not accomplished

Source: own work based on *Perspektywa...* (2013, p. 10); *Oświata i wychowanie* (2010); Eurostat (2015).

An analysis of data from Table 1 shows that Poland has achieved the first four out of the six *Lisbon Strategy* educational goals (and is one of the few EU states to have achieved the set benchmark values). In those four cases, the achievement indicators for Poland were typically two times higher than the average values for the EU. It should be noted that the indicators refer to the traditional education period in schools and in the institutions of further and higher education which includes persons up to 24 years of age. Moreover, on the basis of this data, it is possible to observe the following:

- In the analysed period, there was a significant increase in the scores achieved by the Polish 15-year-olds in the field of reading competency. Poland is the only OECD country, which over the last 10 years, has made progress from a level significantly below the OECD average to a level significantly above the average.

- Poland has one of the lowest rates of early leavers from education (after the lower secondary education level [gimnazjum]) and one of the highest indicators for the propagation of education above the lower secondary level among persons aged 18–24;
- The number of higher education graduates with degrees in mathematics, natural sciences and engineering increased several times; at the same time, in the analysed period, there was an increase (by 213%) in the number of persons with a higher education degree aged 30–34, which was the highest in the EU.

Goals five and six were not accomplished. In these cases, the national indicator values were typically about 1.5 times lower than the EU average. The indicator for the number of persons aged 25–64 who participate in education or training was one of the lowest in the EU. This was also true for the indicator of children enrolled in preschool education. It is not favourable from the LLL perspective (discussed also in: *Country Report on...*, 2010).

The level of public expenditure on education has also been monitored (cf. Sulmicka, 2014, pp. 185-207). In spite of the recommendations, the indicator rose only slightly. In Poland it increased from 4.89% of GDP in the year 2000 to 5.47% in 2005 and declined to 5.17% in 2010, whereas for the EU it went up from 4.88% of GDP in the year 2000 to 5.25% in 2010. The slight increase in the expenditure for education accompanied by a simultaneous considerable growth in the number of school and university or college students resulted in decreased quality of education, especially on the higher education level.

In summary, Poland made significant progress in the accomplishment of the educational goals in the LLL context in the years 2000–2010, but further activity in this field is still required. Therefore, the European Commission determined recommendations to be implemented which are in line with the subsequent European strategy presented in the following part of this work.

Poland's Performance of the Educational Obligations Imposed by the Europe 2020 Strategy

On the basis of the degree to which the educational goals adopted in *the Lisbon Strategy* were accomplished, the European Council formulated conclusions regarding further proceedings in this field, which concern *the Europe 2020 strategy* and all EU Member States (*Council Conclusions...*, 2009). It was concluded that lifelong learning should be recognized as the

key principle underpinning the entire cooperation framework. The cooperation framework, on the other hand, needs to be focused on the four strategic objectives: 1) implementation of the lifelong learning and mobility concepts, 2) improvement of the quality and efficiency of education and training; 3) promotion of equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; 4) enhancement of creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training. To develop the policy based on the obtained data and to verify the progress in the accomplishment of the set goals, it is essential to monitor it periodically. As a result, two groups of indicators were adopted. The first group are indicators with the datum levels which determine the average European result to be achieved in the years 2010–2020 (Table 2). The datum levels were partially based on the earlier arrangements set out in *the Lisbon Strategy* with some additions and modifications. The other group includes indicators without the obligatory datum levels, but with the established start levels (Table 3). Irrespective of their type, the indicators are useful to help measure the general progress and to present the achievements on the European level. At the same time, EU Member States, considering the common objectives, were given an opportunity to establish their country datum levels for the development of education based on their capabilities and internal conditions. Poland took advantage of the opportunity and adopted datum levels which slightly differ from the European ones. Three out of five datum levels are more ambitious than the EU ones (see: indicators 2, 3, 4 in Table 2).

Table 2. The indicators established to monitor progress in the accomplishment of the goals with the set datum levels for 2020 and the level achieved in 2013

No.	EU education development indicators with the datum level for 2020	Datum levels		Start level in Poland: available data from the years 2009-2011	Poland's achievements in 2013
		European	State		
1	The rate of children aged 4 to the compulsory school age who participate in early childhood education	at least 95.0%	at least 90.0%	71.8% [2010]	79% Positive trend
2	The rate of young people under-skilled in: reading mathematics and natural sciences (in accordance with OECD/PISA research)	below 15.0%	11.0% 16.0% 10.0%	15.0% 20.5% 13.1% [2009]	10.6% 14.4% 9.0% EU and state goal accomplished

Table 2 continued

No.	EU education development indicators with the datum level for 2020	Datum levels		Start level in Poland: available data from the years 2009-2011	Poland's achievements in 2013
		European	State		
3	The rate of early leavers from education	below 10.0%	4.5%	5.6% [2011]	5.6% EU goal accomplished
4	The rate of persons aged 30-34 who have completed some form of higher education	at least 40.0%	45.0%	36.9% [2011]	40.5% EU goal accomplished
5	The rate of persons aged 25-64 participating in education or training (in the period of 4 weeks prior to the study)	at least 15.0%	at least 10.0%	4.5% [2011]	4.3% Insufficient progress

Source: own work on the basis of *Perspektywa uczenia...* (2013, p. 46); *Kluczowe dane dotyczące...* (2014), *Program Międzynarodowy Oceny...* (2012); *Plan realizacji gwarancji...* (2014); *Polska 1989-2014* (2014).

An analysis of the data from Table 2 shows that Poland achieved the EU datum levels in three out of the five indicators monitored (no. 2, 3 and 4) as early as in 2013. In the case of indicator 2 (the rate of young people under-skilled in reading, mathematics and natural sciences), even the state goal has been accomplished. Indicators 3 and 4 also stand a good chance of being met. As far as indicator 1 is concerned (the rate of children enrolled in preschool education), we are observing an upward trend. If the average annual growth ratio for this index, which was 2.4%, is maintained, the goal will be achieved. In contrast, the results are not satisfactory in the case of indicator 5 (participation of adults aged 25–64 in education and training). If the activities supporting learning in this age group are not intensified, the adopted goals may still remain nothing more than plans.

Complementary to these findings is an analysis of the indicators monitoring the educational goals without the datum levels (Table 3). Unfortunately, due to the fact that some of the indicators are relatively new (in their statistical meaning) and that the research period is short in reference to the start level, the data is incomplete, which limits inference. One can only say that in 2013 positive trends were noticed in the scores achieved by the young people in reading, mathematics and natural sciences (which indicates improved quality of teaching) and in the economic activity index for persons aged 50–64 (which, among others, may be attributable to increased effectiveness of the public employment services, improved economic conditions or additional education in this age group which responded to the

needs of the employers). By contrast, a negative trend occurred in the unemployment rate among graduates and in the NEET indicator: both of them rose, which is unfavourable.

Table 3. The indicators established to monitor progress in the accomplishment of the goals (without the set datum levels) and the level achieved in 2013

No.	Indicator	Start level: data from the years 2009–2012	2013 status	
1	The level of children's basic skills at the end of the first three years of primary education (reading literacy in accordance with IEA/PIRLS study)	526 pts. [2011]	The next assessment in 2016	
2	Young people's scores in: reading, mathematics, natural sciences (in accordance with OECD/PISA study)	500 pts. [2009] 495 pts. 508 pts.	518 pts. 518 pts. 526 pts. [2012, assessments at intervals of several years]	
3	University or college student mobility: (1) Polish students studying in other EU or EEA Member States or EU candidate countries (2) Students from other EU or EEA Member States or EU candidate countries studying in Poland	1.6% [2011] 0.3%	-	
4	Unemployment rate among graduates	31.8% [Q III 2012]	32.3% [Q III 2013]	
5	Young persons aged 25-29 not in employment, education or training: NEET indicator	21.5% [2011]	22.1% [2012/2013]	
6	Economic activity rate for persons: (1) aged below 25 (2) aged 50-64	33.8% [Q III 2012] 54.2%	56.1%	
7	Level of key adult competences: literacy, numeracy (in accordance with OECD/PIAAC survey)	Started in 2011, first results in 2013	aged 16-65 267 pts. 260 pts.	aged 16-29 281 pts. 269 pts.
8	Number of qualifications included in the National Qualifications Framework	NQF was in the project stage, some of it is still being worked on	Part of NQF was implemented	
9	Employment level in technology and knowledge-intensive industries	2.7% [2011]	-	

Source: own work on the basis of: *Perspektywa ...* (2013, p. 46), *Informacja na temat wyników...* (2014), *Monitoring rynku pracy...* (2014), Wnuk & Teisseyre (2014).

Table 4. Implementation of the European Council's recommendations in the context of the strategic objectives

Part of recommendation: better adjustment of the education system to the labour market needs and enhancement of teaching quality in the context of LLL			
Main goals and their meaning for the recommendation	Activity	Legal/administration instruments	Status
Better adjustment of the vocational education system to the labour market needs	In the framework of vocational education reform: - new classification of vocational education occupations was introduced which included 252 qualifications to be confirmed with an exam; - the construction of the vocational core curriculum was changed; emphasis was put on practical skills in vocational schools (60% of education period).	Act of 19. August 2011 on an Amendment to the Act on the Education System and Other Acts (Journal of Laws, Dz. U. 2011, no. 205, item 1206); implementing acts to the Act	The abovementioned Act was drawn up and adopted, and education in accordance with the new standards began on 01. September 2012.
The creation of a strategic framework with guidance for the lifelong learning policy	Adoption of the strategic paper with guidance for the lifelong learning policy, including a better adjustment of the national qualifications system to the labour market needs. The policy is to facilitate all learners to raise their competences and acquire and confirm qualifications in accordance with their needs. It should encompass learning as a whole, in all aspects (formal and informal), on all life stages and on all competence and qualification levels.	Paper: "Perspektywa uczenia się przez całe życie"	The strategy paper was drawn up; it was adopted by the Polish Council of Ministers on 10. September 2013.
Promotion of a practical cooperation of entrepreneurs with the institutions educating their potential employees, universities and colleges and vocational schools.	The "Business for Education" included the organisation of an information-promotion campaign regarding the involvement of business in the organisation of formal education. Its purpose is to make the managers aware of the necessity to think of the human resources for their enterprises in the long term.	The "Business for Education" project as part of a Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP) system project (sub-measure 2.1.3 PO KL, Human Capital Operation).	The project was carried out in the years 2012-2014 and included 11 education programmes and 14 regional seminars

Table 4 continued

Main goals and their meaning for the recommendation	Activity	Legal/administration instruments	Status
<p>Better adjustment of education to the labour market needs</p>	<p>Implementation of the National Qualification Framework for higher education and drawing up the subject matter and institutional assumptions for the implementation of NQF and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning, as a result of which the final Polish Qualifications Framework will be drawn up.</p>	<p>Act of 18. March 2011 on amendment to the Act: Higher Education Law, the Act on Academic Degrees and Academic Title and the Art Academic Degrees and Title and on amendment to other Acts (Journal of Laws, Dz. U. 2011, no. 84, item 445); System project under the title: „Opracowanie założeń merytorycznych i instytucjonalnych wdrażania Krajowych Ram Kwalifikacji oraz Krajowego Rejestru Kwalifikacji dla uczenia przez całe życie”.</p>	<p>The abovementioned Act was drawn up and adopted; education in accordance with the new requirements for higher education began in the academic year of 2012/2013. The ongoing project <i>Budowa krajowego systemu kwalifikacji – pilotażowe wdrożenie krajowego systemu kwalifikacji oraz kampania informacyjna dotycząca jego funkcjonowania</i> is a continuance of the activities performed to modernize the National Qualifications System. The most important results of the works so far are: The Polish Qualifications Framework and the report adopted by the government in July 2013 entitled: <i>Raport referencyjny – Odniesienie Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji na rzecz uczenia się przez całe życie do Europejskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji.</i></p>

Source: own work based on *Council Recommendation...* (2012); *National Reform Programme...* (2013); *Budowa krajowego systemu...* (2015); *Raport referencyjny...* (2013).

In addition to the two indicator groups for measuring progress in the educational goals that have been mentioned, the European Commission also verifies the degree to which the States comply with the recommendations regarding this area formulated by the European Council on the basis of *the National Reform Programme (Council Recommendation...*, 2012). Table 4, which presents the degree to which the recommendations have been implemented, indicates that the majority of the most important activities underpinning the improvement of the achievements in the area of LLL implementation have been performed.

Conclusions

On the basis of the conducted research, the following conclusions may be formulated:

- Poland performs relatively well in reference to the accomplishment of the LLL goals, which is confirmed by the fact that it has achieved the datum levels of 2/3 of all indicators adopted to monitor both analysed strategies and that it meets the EU recommendations in this respect. The progress made in the area of education is mainly connected with the formal education period.
- 1/3 of the EU goals have not been accomplished. There are problems with the accomplishment of indicators connected with adult non-formal and informal education (low indicators for education and training, economic activity, employment rate in technology and knowledge-intensive industries, high NEET indicator and high unemployment rate among graduates). Both education forms are essential from the LLL perspective.

In consideration of these findings, it may be said that:

- Prompt completion of the works regarding the implementation of the national qualifications framework connected with the European qualifications framework is necessary to create more flexible education paths, including the facilitated transition to other education and training sectors, to ensure a more open approach to non-formal and informal learning and to increase the transparency and recognition rate of the learning outcomes.
- It is necessary to make further attempts to promote adult education, increase the quality of career guidance systems and to make learning more attractive in general, for instance by developing its new forms and by using new learning and teaching methods.

- It is essential to maintain the rate at which children aged 4-6 and those younger than 3 are enrolled in the preschool system.
- In the area of higher education, it is essential to strengthen the connections between universities and the business and to raise the flexibility of the offered courses to be able to adjust the qualifications of the graduates to the volatile labour market needs, and also to enhance the applicability and the quality of education with special emphasis on the private higher education institutions.

In summary, in order to make the LLL concept a reality, it is necessary to undertake both the activities increasing the population's awareness of the indispensability of lifelong learning in the current labour market conditions and the activities supporting such learning.

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