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LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION

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**THE VALIDATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES ACQUIRED IN NON-FORMAL
LEARNING CONTEXT IN HUNGARIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Summary of the PhD dissertation

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1. THE TOPIC AND THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE DISSERTATION

The topic of the dissertation is the validation of non-formal learning outcomes in Hungarian higher education.

Having gained importance over the past decades, lifelong learning can be defined as a cognitive process the foundations of which are formed in early childhood, lasting until the later stages of life, including formal education (educational institutions), non-formal learning (a mainly organized way of learning in a non-formal context, not resulting in certification), and informal learning (a way of learning that takes place in the family, at one's workplace or during voluntary work) (Harangi, 2009).

Due to the wide range of learning contexts, adults might take the opportunity to acquire knowledge in a number of areas throughout their lives, contributing to their success in the admission procedure to formal education/training programmes or in job application processes. While it is possible to certify learning outcomes acquired in formal settings by official documents (such as certificates or diplomas), one might find it especially difficult to demonstrate certain competences acquired in informal and non-formal learning contexts (throughout paid or unpaid voluntary work and cultural or recreational activities). However, there has been a growing demand for the recognition and validation of competences and learning outcomes that are not certified by documents for educational and working purposes (Derényi, Milotay, Tót, & Török, 2007; Tót, 2009; Kraiciné, 2010; Derényi & Tót 2011; the Council of the European Union, 2012; Móre, 2012; Farkas, 2014).

The concept of validation has become a key issue in educational development in Europe in the past two decades, which clearly proves the relevance of this topic. The European Union cooperates with the OECD and Cedefop to provide a number of developmental recommendations on validation as well as tools and projects (Council of the European Union, 2012; European guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning, 2009, 2015 European inventory on validation 2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014, 2016, 2018, Validation for inclusion of new citizens in Europe, 2017) aiming to improve the validation practices and arrangements of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Even the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning encouraged Member States accepting the same to enable their citizens to make their non-formal and informal competences be acknowledged (by means of partial or full qualification) by 2018 in the national validation system (Council of the European Union, 2012). Hungary also agreed to comply with the recommendations to establish its own validation system by 2018. Although the Hungarian Act on Higher Education includes the opportunity of the official assessment and validation of competences acquired through non-formal learning in formal educational contexts, Hungary does not have a national validation system based on a set of integrated principles and procedures (Tót, 2019).

Validation does not have a standard definition in Hungary. Act LXXVII of 2013 on Adult Education defines prior learning assessment as “a process during which an assessment is made whether individuals, who apply for training is capable of fulfilling the requirements for the completion of a certain curriculum during a training course based on their undocumented studies or practical experience as a result of which these individuals shall be exempted from their obligation to participate in certain parts of training courses providing that they adequately meet the requirements of these parts of the curriculum” (Section 2(8) of Act LXXVII of 2013 on Adult Education). No other laws or strategies include any definition or explanation concerning the concept of validation; neither has the topic been studied or discussed by Hungarian researchers.

The validation of non-formal learning outcomes proved to be essential in vocational and adult training too. However, in 2019, when the empirical research was conducted, higher education was the only sector in Hungary where the Hungarian National Qualifications

Framework and the introduction of qualifications based on learning outcomes had to be legally applied. In September 2017 ((Decree 18/2016 (05 August) EMMI of the Minister of Human Resources), higher education qualifications were classified on the basis of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes¹ are defined as follows:” „Learning outcomes means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence” (*Council of the European Union*, 2012:20). Qualifications in Hungary are described by the following 4 descriptors: knowledge, ability, attitude, and autonomy-responsibility. There are two main preconditions for the effective validation of non-formal learning outcomes: the output requirements of the qualifications should be described in learning outcomes, and the qualifications should be classified in the National Qualifications Framework. If such requirements are met, it will be much easier to compare competences formerly acquired through non-formal learning to the learning outcomes of qualifications.

Validation in higher education refers to the evaluation of non-formal learning outcomes that cannot be certified by official documents, including the comparison of thereof with the output requirements of qualifications, as well as the formal recognition of the same. During the validation process, “any learning outcome acquired previously, by a student (no matter how, when and where), shall be evaluated by the higher education institution, which shall compare its results to the learning requirements related to any part of the programme (e.g. a module, a lecture or a seminar thereof) formerly set by the institution; and in the case of overlapping results, the institute shall validate such a learning outcome in formal way, in proportion to the degree of overlapping, in the form of credits. During the validation process, non-formal learning outcomes acquired previously by students might be formally acknowledged by means of credit transfer” (*Kovács*, 2018, 14). The application of validation is based on the concept that competences and learning outcomes might also be acquired, apart from formal learning contexts, in non-formal and informal contexts, such as work and a number of incidental ways of learning (*Lukács & Derényi*, 2017, 21).

The process of validation might take place in two different steps: through self-assessment and external evaluation. In order to validate non-formal/informal learning outcomes, students first have to create a portfolio of the relevant competences acquired in a non-formal way on their own (or with the help of a validation consultant), including, if possible, all the necessary evidence related to the acquisition thereof (such as references, any photo documentation of the work, workpieces, recommendations or written self-reflection). Then, in the external evaluation phase, the higher education institution evaluates by means of various techniques whether a student is in possession of the competences listed in the portfolio. Validation is in fact a process which enables non-formal/informal competences and skills to be formally recognised.

The fact that validation increases the flexibility of training makes it increasingly relevant in the higher education sector. Furthermore, validation might also encourage students to find their own pathways to learning. The shorter the duration of the training, the faster students might be able to enter the job market. What is more, validation might also reduce the likelihood of higher education dropout.

There is an increasing number of students, even full-time students, who might choose to work while studying at a higher education institution, and a lot of students have work experience before enrolling in a programme. That is why it is especially important for such students to have their learning outcomes previously acquired in non-formal/informal contexts validated.

Act CXXXIX of 2005 on Higher Education, and later Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education offer the opportunity of the validation of students’ competences acquired through non-formal learning in higher education institutions. However, it can be seen that it is

¹ On the definition of learning outcomes, see: *Kennedy*, 2007, *Farkas*, 2015, *Győrpál és Szegedi*, 2015, *Derényi és Vámos*, 2015.

not widely spread among higher education institutions – with the exception of a few institutions - to officially guarantee the validation process for their students in regulated frameworks.

The aim of this dissertation is to introduce the theoretical background of the concept of validation, to analyse international practices, to explore how validation is carried out in Hungarian higher education, to discuss the results of the research conducted on the basis of information presented here, and to provide a description of the procedure and the outcomes of the (questionnaire) survey conducted among higher education teachers. The objective of the empirical research is to examine the teaching and evaluation culture of higher education teachers and how they see the validation of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal learning contexts, and to find more information about the current validation practices in the Hungarian higher education system.

2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation includes a secondary analysis of national and international literature and the discussion of results of the empirical research. The first chapter of the paper deals with the topicality and relevance of the theme. The second chapter focuses on the terminology and defines the main concepts related to the topic. This chapter is especially important as there is a lack of terminological consistency related to the topic of validation in the both the European and Hungarian professional discourse. The same chapter gives a summary of the different definitions used for formal, non-formal and informal learning as well as validation, focusing on the comparison thereof, too. The aims and relevance of validation is also discussed here, and the discussion includes the description of the possible steps of the validation process as well. The third chapter is devoted to the explanation of how validation has been approached in Europe to date on the basis of various education policy documents, which were written to harmonize education policies. The validation practices of a few countries are also examined here. The fourth chapter introduces the legal framework for the assessment and recognition of prior learning in Hungary. A number of Hungarian research projects related to the topic are also discussed here; what is more, this chapter deals with some systematic and unsystematic practices as well as the main criteria for the application of the validation process. The fifth chapter, which briefly introduces the current situation and the target group of Hungarian higher education institutions, mainly focuses on the goals and reasons of the validation of various learning outcomes taking place in higher education. The sixth chapter includes the description of the aims and outcomes of the research, the applied methods, the research questions and hypotheses. The results of the analysis of different documents and field research (interviews) are presented in the seventh chapter. The eighth chapter gives an insight into the goals and main questions of the large sample empirical research, as well as the same discusses the applied methods, the research sample, and the results of the survey (questionnaires). Finally, the ninth chapter summarizes the conclusions of the research, answers the research questions and offers some recommendations, too. The dissertation ends with conclusions.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The research questions and hypotheses are summarized in Table 1 below. The research questions were answered by means of the analysis of literature, the document analysis of the Academic and Examination Regulations- in Hungarian “Tanulmányi és Vizsgaszabályzat” (TVSZ) -of higher education institutions, the content and comparative analysis of semi-structured interviews as well as an online questionnaire.

Table 1: Research questions and hypotheses

	Title of research	Research question	Hypotheses
I.	The analysis of international validation practices (N=11)	Q1 What are the different validation practices are like in Europe? Are there common factors and conditions shared by most of the nations related to validation (e.g. legal and institutional framework, the steps of the process, methods, related services, target groups)?	H1. It is hypothesized that validation practices in the countries that were examined are the same in respect of the validation process and the applied methodologies.
II.	The analysis of all the Academic and Examination Regulations (N=65) of the Hungarian higher education institutions listed in Annex 1 of Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education	Q2 To what extent and in what ways is the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes regulated in the documents known as Academic and Examination Regulations of the higher education institutions?	H2. It is hypothesized that, according to Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education, the conditions and the process of the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are at least stipulated in the institutions' Academic and Examination Regulations documents.
III.	The examination of the higher education institutions (N=3) that have already put validation into practice	Q3 What kind of experience do those higher education institutions have that have already introduced the validation process? What are the main steps of the validation process? How is the process described? What kind of measurement tools are available for the institutions? Which are the main inhibitory and supporting factors in the validation process identified by the representatives of the higher education institutions that have already put validation into practice?	H3. It is hypothesized that analysis is to reveal the common features of the validation practices characterising the higher education institutions, such as the steps of the process, the role of information and the preparation of the portfolio. H4. It is hypothesized that students regard validation as a good opportunity and practice, having a positive attitude towards the same, whereas educators are less likely to consider the benefits of validation. H5. It is hypothesized that the potential inhibitory and supporting factors in the process are to be identified during the interviews.
IV.	The analysis of the interviews conducted with the main authorities (N=3) on the topic of the development of the validation system in higher education in Hungary (under Social Renewal Operational Programme (TÁMOP) - 4.1.3)	Q4 What are the main outcomes of the work carried out under Social Renewal Operational Programme (TÁMOP) - 4.1.3? How did the introduction of the validation of non-formal learning outcomes take place in practice in Hungarian higher education? What kind of inhibitory and supporting factors are identified by experts? Is validation relevant in Hungarian higher education in the present economic, social and legal framework?	H6. It is hypothesized that the main authorities on validation, who also worked on the pilot development of the Hungarian higher education validation system, can provide us abundant information about the inhibitory and supporting factors related to the operation and introduction of validation on a large scale.
V.	The analysis of the answers given to a questionnaire by the members of (N=1282) Hungarian state-certified	Q5 Which are the main teaching and assessment methods used by higher education teachers? Is there any correlation between the applied teaching assessment methods and the attitude towards validation? If an educator	H7. It is hypothesized that there is a correlation between the teaching assessment methods applied by educators and their attitude towards validation; furthermore, there is a correlation between the teaching and assessment culture of educators and the practice and spread of validation.

	Title of research	Research question	Hypotheses
	(state and non-state) higher education institutions (N=39)	<p>prefers traditional teaching methods, does that necessarily mean that the person will apply traditional assessment methods either?</p> <p>Q6 How well do educators know the learning outcome-based approach? Does the application of the learning outcome-based approach cause difficulties for educators (if yes, what kind of problems do they have to face)?</p> <p>Q7 What is the attitude of educators towards the validation process like? Is there any correlation between the educators' application of the learning outcome-based approach and their attitude towards validation? Do educators show different attitudes towards validation based on their sex, age, status, teaching status, training area, training structure, type of institution, maintainer or registered seat?</p> <p>Q8 How much knowledge do educators have in various higher education institutions of the extent of the validation system in practice?</p> <p>Q9 Which factors inhibit and support the operation of validation according to educators?</p>	<p>H8. It is hypothesized that there is a correlation between the application of the learning outcome-based approach in an institution and the extent and the way a validation system operates in an institution.</p> <p>H9. It is hypothesized that heads of institutions, faculties and departments have more knowledge of the learning outcome-based approach and are able to define the same more precisely than educators.</p> <p>H10. It is hypothesized that there is a correlation between an educator's attitude towards validation and the type of the higher education institution an educator works in.</p> <p>H11. It is hypothesized that there is a correlation between the extent a validation system operates in an institute and the members' attitude towards the validation process. In higher education institutions where the system of validation is more elaborate, members' attitude towards validation is more positive too.</p> <p>H12. It is hypothesized that there is no correlation between the credit cycle and an educator's attitude towards validation.</p> <p>H13. It is hypothesized that part-time educators in higher education are more supportive of validation.</p> <p>H14. It is hypothesized that in science institutions where learning outcomes are accurately measurable, such as in areas of science and technology, it is much easier to introduce a validation system than in arts institutions. In the former type of institutions, even educators are more supportive of validation.</p> <p>H15. It is hypothesized that educators working in higher education institutions located in the countryside are much more supportive of the validation process than educators working in higher education institutions located in Budapest. Moreover, it is hypothesized that educators working in higher education institutions located in the countryside are much more committed to the introduction of validation in their institutions.</p> <p>H16. It is hypothesized that the members of the higher education institutions of applied sciences are more open to the introduction of validation than members working at science institutions.</p> <p>H17. It is hypothesized that there is a correlation between the attitude of educators towards validation and the existing validation practices in higher education institutions.</p> <p>H18. It is hypothesized that higher education institutions located in the countryside deal with the validation of competences more effectively.</p> <p>H19. It is hypothesized that validation takes place in higher education institutions on the basis of an agreement between educators and students.</p>

4. THE APPLIED METHODS AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

Sample

In the research process, interviews were conducted with main authorities on the topic (N=3), the representatives (N=3) of the higher education institutions that have already put validation into practice, and members of (N=1282) Hungarian state-certified (state and non-state) higher education institutions (N=39) operating as universities.

The population involved in the study included members of state-certified (state and non-state) higher education institutions operating as universities and members of the state-run Eötvös József College² – according to data provided by the Higher Education Information System in 2018, the number of higher education employees was 14,577. The sample of the present research makes up approximately 9% of the population, which may not be considered representative due to its size. Weighting was used in order to apply the statistical results to the whole population. It was decided to limit the target group for the large sample empirical research, by means of interviews, for higher education teachers due to the fact that Benkei-Kovács & Vámos (2015) had claimed earlier that they might be seen as the main actors of changes taking place at universities, as the recognition of courses usually depend on their attitude.

When comparing the population and the sample in terms of sex, age and the type of institution, the distributions of the population and the sample by these categories prove to be similar. On the basis of the distribution by the type of institution, the sample is representative of the population (see Figure 1)

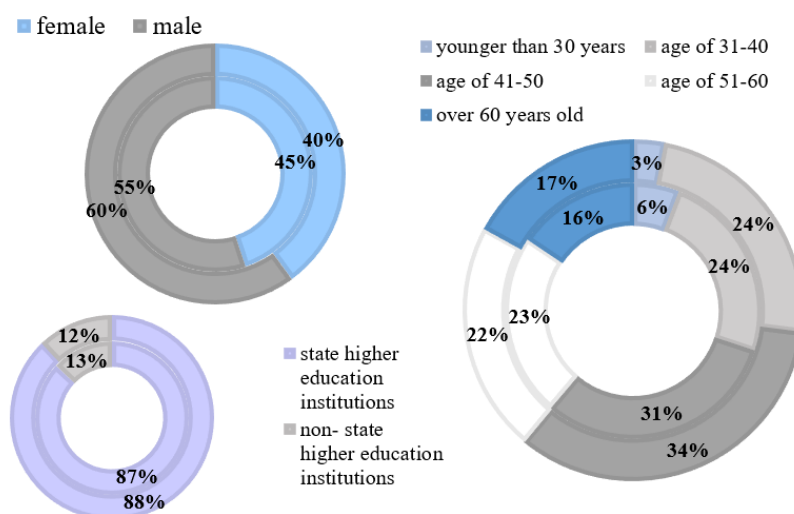


Figure 1: The distribution (%) of the population (outer circle) and the sample (inner circle) by sex, type of institution and age

Methods

This research, which employs deductive reasoning, is of exploratory and descriptive nature. In addition, this research is known as action research, an inquiry conducted to find solutions to complex practical problems. The dissertation is based on secondary analyses and the findings

² These are the higher education institutions listed in Annex 1 of Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education, effective since 01 July 2019.

of empirical research. Besides the review of the literature, the dissertation also relies on the content of documents, brochures, background materials, and academic studies on education policy published by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, its National Data Collection Programme (OSAP), OECD, EUROSTAT, Eurydice, and Cedefop, as well as European online databases. After the examination of international validation practices, the document analyses of the Academic and Examination Regulations (hereinafter referred to as ‘AER’) of higher education institutions were carried out in August 2017 and January 2019 in order to detect the changes having taken place in the establishment of a national validation system until 2018, the deadline that had been set forth in the Council Recommendation of 2012, concerning the rules and regulations of validation in higher education institutions as well as to examine the attitude towards the process. A survey questionnaire was compiled on the basis of prior qualitative interviews, which had revealed the main issues concerning validation in Hungary. The first step of the field research was to conduct semi-structured interviews about validation, based on a standardized draft, with the most competent representative of each higher education institution where regulations on validation exceed the legal requirements stipulated in the institution’s AER. Then interviews were also conducted with the main authorities on the topic of the development of the validation system in higher education in Hungary (under Social Renewal Operational Programme (TÁMOP) - 4.1.3 of 2015). The second step of the research was to design a questionnaire on the basis of the research directions that emerged during these interviews. After that, the questionnaire was conducted online among the population (members of state-certified (state and non-state) higher education institutions operating as universities and members of the state-run Eötvös József College). The questionnaire survey was conducted between 01 November 2019 and 31 January 2020. During this period three email notifications were sent to the higher education institutions to complete the questionnaires. The research methods are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Research methods

Source of data	Date	Method	Sampling	Sample
secondary	2015 – 2020	document analysis	-	Hungarian laws
	2015 – 2020	document analysis	-	EU documents on education policy
	2016	document analysis	simple random sampling	validation practices of 11 European countries
	2016	document analysis	-	isolated and systematic good practices in Hungary
	2017	document analysis	full-scale sampling	the Academic and Examination Regulations (N=65) of the Hungarian higher education institutions listed in Annex 1 of Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education
	2019	document analysis	full-scale sampling	the Academic and Examination Regulations (N=65) of the Hungarian higher education institutions listed in Annex 1 of Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education
primary	October 2017 – January 2018	semi-structured interviews: content analysis and comparative analysis	non-probability sampling/ expert sampling	representatives (N=3) of the higher education institutions that have already put validation into practice
	October 2017 – January 2018	semi-structured interviews: content analysis	non-probability sampling/expert sampling	key figures (N=3) of “Social Renewal Operational Programme (TÁMOP)- 4.1.3 for the

				recognition of prior knowledge and validation in higher education”
	November 2019- January 2020	online questionnaire survey	probability sampling	members of (N=1282) Hungarian state-certified (state and non-state) higher education institutions (N=39) institutions operating as universities listed in Annex 1 of Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education, effective since 01 July 2019

5. SUMMARY OF THE MAIN RESEARCH RESULTS

The findings of the studies making up the complex research are summarised in the following section separately.

The first research question focused on the characteristics of international validation practices, including the common features of the validation systems.

After studying the relevant international literature on the topic, it can be seen that there are existing common factors and conditions in most European validation systems. The following factors are shared by each validation system: a legal and institutional framework, the steps and the object of the process, the importance of the dissemination of information and consulting, the applied assessment methods, the outcome-based approach to learning, a national qualifications framework, national commitment and trust towards validation.

What the countries examined in the study related to validation have in common is that they all have certain laws and statutes regulating the validation process, and the institutional framework and the steps of the validation process are all regulated, too. Applicants in the validation process are first informed about the requirements. Then applicants have to prepare their portfolio, listing their competences. This is followed by the evaluation of competences, and the results are compared with a set of requirements defined previously. Finally, a decision is made concerning the extent of validation and the fact of the same. The object of the validation process, the importance of the dissemination of information and consulting and the applied assessment methods all appear in each validation system. The most important assessment methods are: the creation of a portfolio, observation, practical exams and the simulation of work situations (H1).

The second research question focused on the Academic and Examination Regulations of the Hungarian higher education institutions (N=65) listed in Annex 1 of Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education with special attention to the regulations concerning the extent and the ways of the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The findings of the content analysis of AER documents show us that learning outcomes acquired in non-formal contexts are usually regulated in the following ways: 1) the AER document is not accessible (4); 2) the AER document does not contain any information or regulation on validation (12); only the relevant section of law is cited in the AER document from the effective or previously effective act on higher education (41); 4) apart from the relevant sections of law cited in the AER document, validation is regulated in the document, but there is not any guide available on the process (3); 5) validation is regulated in detail in the AER document or in its annex (5) (H2).

The next set of questions was asked to reveal which factors might inhibit or support the introduction and the operation of validation according to the interviewees. On the basis of the answers given by higher education teachers, the implementation and the adoption of validation measures mainly depend on the interests and commitment of key actors in higher education; and the long-term operation of the validation process also depends on the fulfilment of some general conditions according to the teachers interviewed. The answers also reveal that the lack

of knowledge, interest and methodological knowledge on the part of higher education teachers might be the main factors that prevent the operation and spread of validation. On the basis of the answers given by higher education teachers, the most important blocking factors might be put into three groups: lack of knowledge, lack of trust, and lack of interest.

The higher education teachers' views corresponded with the answers given by the persons previously interviewed. On the one hand, it was underlined that both teachers and students have little information about validation. On the other hand, the assumption that validation largely depends on the interests of higher education actors proved to be true.

Lack of knowledge might be observed on the part of society, politics, higher education institutions, teachers as well as students. Validation is not widely known in society either. There are only a few professionals in Hungary who possess valid and relevant knowledge of validation, the validation process, its methodology and the assessment and recognition of learning outcomes. The aforementioned groups know very little about validation and the assessment and recognition processes. What is more, the spread of validation practices is also hindered by the fact that the learning outcome-based approach has not been widely known in Hungary. Furthermore, there is no significant engagement to validation at the political level either. There is no trust in not formally acquired knowledge. Neither higher education institutions nor teachers show interest in validation. As a matter of fact, with the current funding, validation is not important for institutions as it can reduce the time and costs of education. In addition to this, teachers, driven by the fear of losing their jobs, positions and knowledge and of undesired volunteer work, do not welcome the establishment of a validation system. On the basis of the teachers' answers, the introduction of the learning outcome-based approach, rise in students' interest and institutional engagement might support the operation and spread of validation nationwide (H3, H4, H5, H6).

The following section of the questionnaire concentrated on the teachers' teaching and assessment methodology culture, their knowledge of learning outcomes, the application of the learning outcome-based approach, their attitude towards the same, their knowledge of validation, their attitude towards the same and the validation process and practices of the higher education institution they work in.

Most of the interviewed higher education teachers (65.9%) choose lecturing. 29.4% of the teachers prefer small-group teaching, and the third most typical teaching method chosen by 27.8% of the teachers is explanation. It can be seen that higher education teachers even today prefer frontal instruction and other teacher-centred methods, and they are less willing to choose innovative or cooperative teaching methods. The most frequently used assessment methods are: tests, written examination papers, written assignments, essays, pop quizzes and written examination paper (36.1%), which are followed by oral examinations (presentation or answers given to questions), while the third group of popular methods includes individual presentation assignments (25.8%) and the demonstration of a project (25.7%). Just like in the case of teaching methods, teachers obviously prefer traditional assessment methods. The data also revealed that those who prefer tradition teaching methods will prefer traditional assessment methods too, and those who are open to the application of more innovative teaching methods are more likely to choose more innovative assessment methods. However, the hypothesis (H7) according to which there is a correlation between the teaching assessment methods applied by educators and their attitude towards validation has not been verified.

The data also revealed that only 48% (614) of the teachers are familiar with the concept of learning outcomes, out of which there are only 470 teachers who also apply the learning outcome-based approach. This approach has not been widely spread so far, which might be due to the fact that the description of qualifications based on learning outcomes still has not been introduced nationwide. Although there is a legal framework in effect specifying output requirements, based on the tool of learning outcomes, higher education institutions have not

been prepared for the implementation of such regulations. However, there have been conferences and workshops organised for higher education teachers about the introduction of the learning outcome-based approach, and methodological guidelines have also been issued on the topic, the dissemination of information has not been effective enough. The interviewed teachers also highlighted that the adoption of the learning outcome-based approach requires extra work on their part.

The findings of the research show that the majority (70.7%) of those teachers who have already adopted the learning outcome-based approach are in favour of validation, and only a small number is indifferent or in opposition to the validation process. In addition to this, it is also crucial to emphasize that most teachers know that validation is not an alternative to formal education, as it only complements it (H8).

Although with reservations, 62.7% of the teachers accept and support the application of the validation process. Nevertheless, a large proportion of the interviewed teachers (26.7%) is rather indifferent to validation and has little knowledge of the process. This indicates that a lot of teachers do not have any or enough knowledge of the concept of validation.

As for the type of institution, it can be stated that members of both state (45.7%) and non-state (50.9%) higher education institutions are likely to support validation. Based on the answers given to the questions focusing on the seat of the institution, the institutions with seats in Budapest seem to be less supportive (51.6%) of validation than the institutions with seats outside of Budapest (61%). 25.9% of the institutions with seats in Budapest and 19.7% of the institutions with seats outside of Budapest are indifferent to validation (H11, H12).

26.9% of the teachers completing the questionnaire believe that validation takes place between teachers and students on the basis of an agreement, which indicates that validation exists in Hungary, and it is not unknown to institutions and higher education teachers, but the problem is that it lacks proper regulation. These unregulated practices should be turned into a regulated system, which would set forth the main directions of the application of validation and at the same time would be flexible enough to enable each institute to create its own system based on its demands. The second most frequent answer among the respondents (25.8%) is that validation does not work at all in their institution. Finally, 16.5% of the respondents claim that there are detailed regulations concerning validation in their institution (H14).

It was also hypothesized that in the higher education institutions that are not seated in Budapest the validation of previously acquired competences that are not certified by documents works better than in other institutions. This hypothesis has been verified by data (with 31.5% claiming that validation takes place according to an agreement between teachers and students, 9.5% claiming that there are detailed regulations for validation at an institutional level, and 5.6% claiming that there are detailed regulations for validation at the department level) (H15).

On the basis of the research data, it can be stated that the distribution of men and women is equal among the teachers rejecting, rather supporting or totally supporting validation. 38% of the teachers who support validation are external lecturers. They are followed by 32% of the teachers who are full-time employees. 29.2% of the teachers not supporting validation fall into the category of part-time employees, while 21.5% of such teachers are full-time employees. When considering their status, it can be seen that 51.7% of the teachers supporting validation are college or university educators and 36.7% of them are master lecturers, whereas the ones rejecting validation are teaching assistants (24.1%) (H17).

On the basis of the research findings, most respondents (32.5%) supporting validation belong to the study field of humanities. In addition to this, respondents (47%) rather supporting validation come from the same field of training. The biggest proportion of the respondents (33%) who are in favour of validation teach in undivided training programmes. The proportion of teachers rather supporting validation is similar on each training level (H18).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE RESEARCH RESULTS

On the basis of the research results, the following recommendations are made to improve the validation system in higher education in Hungary:

- The findings revealed that although a legal framework and some strategies have been created for the introduction of validation in our country, the concept is not widely known, and only a few higher education institutions have implemented the validation process in line with the regulations. It would be essential for the relevant regulations to include and define the concepts of learning outcomes and validation, and such legislation shall also include guidelines for the operation of the validation process.
- Although pilot programmes were conducted in Hungary, educators, students and even society have little information about the process, the steps and the methods of validation. The lack of validation experts makes the situation even worse in Hungary. Difficulties caused by lack of information might be solved by the dissemination of general information through a number of forums, including trainings, retraining courses, and workshops. Much greater emphasis should be placed on the implementation of validation, too. There is a great need for the dissemination of knowledge to make social actors understand and accept the importance and the practices of validation. The findings of the research also proved that teachers might be counted on to contribute to the spread of the validation process, as the attitude of the majority towards validation is rather positive.
- The learning outcome-based approach is also recommended to be introduced in higher education institutions. Educators shall be informed about the opportunities lying in the adoption of the learning outcome-based approach in teaching, and also trainings and workshops shall be designed and offered to introduce the benefits of the adoption of this approach. The introduction of the learning outcome-based approach might improve teaching methodologies, assessments methods and the implementation of validation, too. Publications and methodological materials should be prepared to guide teachers through the steps of the introduction of the learning outcome-based approach in practice.
- One of the main conclusions of the findings of the empirical research is that it is inevitable to support educators to design and improve their evaluation and assessment methods. The results show that teachers tend to rely on the traditional, teacher-centred assessment methods; however, the validation of formerly acquired learning outcomes requires the use of a variety of assessment methods to be successful. It is obvious that if most teachers find written and oral examinations sufficient for checking learning outcomes, validation will not become more widespread either. Therefore, it is essential to provide trainings and retraining courses for higher education teachers in order to improve their assessment and teaching methodology culture as most higher education teachers do not even have a qualification in Pedagogy or Andragogy.
- There is a great need for further research and scientific studies on the topic of validation, and it should also be incorporated into educational and political discourse.
- The training of experts on validation methods and its evaluation and assessment methods should also be launched. The formal training of such experts would also promote the establishment of a national validation system.
- Building trust, which is a long-term process, is also fundamental to the operation and spread of validation. Even though trust is crucial for validation to spread on a national level, the lack of trust can be experienced in a number of areas, such in political discourse, where engagement to validation or knowledge acquired in non-formal ways should be much stronger. Therefore, more supportive political intervention might create trust required for the establishment of a validation system.

- The results of the research also showed that teachers are likely to have a distrust of each other's work and the validation process. A supportive environment is needed which would ensure the operation of validation and facilitate dialogue and co-operation among higher education institutions.
- Higher education institutions, the members of such institutions and teachers participating in validation should all be made interested in the process. Validation, on the one hand, requires extra work from teachers, which must be financially and professionally rewarded. And, on the other hand, it should not be a financial disadvantage to institutions either to recognise credits through validation.
- The learning outcome-based approach and assessment, as well as the topic of validation should be included in the curricula of teacher training and doctoral programmes.
- It would be advisable to join international projects (e.g. the strategic partnership known as Erasmus+ Key Action 2 or other European countries' higher education projects) in order to become more familiar with the validation experience and practices of other nations.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Both the scientific and service sectors might make use of the research results. Such data can serve as feedback for experts dealing with development, heads of institutions, maintainers and policy decision-makers.

In the early phase of this research, when the research questions were formed, it was not anticipated that the study would also go beyond the original scope of the research, providing a diagnosis of how higher education teachers look at higher education students, teaching, higher education and their own roles.

In conclusion, validation is still considered to be the main focus of the dissertation, but the additional information gained from the study will allow further conclusions to be drawn.

The relevance of the studies conducted here is verified by the fact that the research results and the findings of prior studies show similarities in several cases. The results of the large sample empirical research are also verified by the findings of the field research. The detailed content of the dissertation is based on the results of years of research work. Furthermore, the topic is considered to be undoubtedly relevant today. In addition to this, only few studies have been published on the topic so far in Hungary, and every new study expands our knowledge of the practices and attitude related to the issue, which is especially important as it is impossible to outline potential future developmental directions without clear and factual knowledge of the circumstances.

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