



**“LLLIGHT’in’Europe: Lifelong Learning, Innovation, Growth and
Human Capital Tracks in Europe”**

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LLLight Project Definitions of Lifelong Learning Categories

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Abstract

The empirical part of the LLLight project requires that an elaborate definition of lifelong learning categories is produced which enables an easy operationalization of learning variables. By combining existing definitions used in theoretical debates and empirical surveys, an attempt is made to provide a comprehensive set of criteria which allows the formulation of an explicit description of learning categories. These criteria are then used to justify the LLLight project's strategy of adopting the AES approach to measuring the level of an individual's participation in lifelong learning.

Background to the need for this position paper

The main objective of the LLLight project is to analyze the relationship between human capital, its sources and outcomes. Since lifelong learning is believed to be one of the key sources of human capital accumulation, a great part of the project's empirical analysis will be dedicated to investigating to which extent and through which mechanisms different forms of learning affect human capital scores at three levels: individual, enterprise and society. This kind of analysis in turn presupposes that there is an agreement among project members on how lifelong learning can be defined and which categories or types of lifelong learning exist and should therefore be included in the analysis.

This position paper aims at furnishing a clear definition of lifelong learning categories which can be used by the project for designing questions focused on identifying and measuring an individual's participation in learning activities undertaken throughout his or her life. The paper is structured as follows. In the first section, we provide definitions used by the key institutions/organizations which drive research in the field of lifelong learning. In the second section, we discuss conventional ways of operationalizing lifelong learning in the major surveys on education and human capital. Finally third, a choice of definitions most suitable for the LLLight project is made and the rationale behind it is discussed.

Definitions used by Cedefop, OECD, and the EU

Existent literature is relatively clear about the definition of lifelong learning but remains inconclusive with regard to the classification of learning categories. There are, however, three approaches provided by CEDEFOP, the EU and OECD which are prevalent in research.

The conventional approach to classifying learning activities, currently dominant in theoretical and empirical studies, is the one provided by **CEDEFOP** (CEDEFOP, 2000; COMMUNICATION, 2001). It distinguishes between three types of learning – formal, non-formal and informal. The classification relies upon two main criteria: the level of intention to learn and the structure in which learning takes place. Accordingly, the intention to learn explains the centrality of the learner in the learning process and the structure refers to the context in which learning is embedded (Colardyn and Bjornavold, 2004). The forms of learning are defined as follows: *Formal learning* refers to learning that occurs within an organized and structured context (secondary and tertiary education, initial vocational training) and that is designed as learning. It may lead to a formal recognition (diploma, certificate) and is usually intentional from the learner's perspective. *Non-formal learning* consists of learning embedded in planned activities that are not explicitly designed as learning, but which contain an important learning element. Similarly to formal education, non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view without, however, leading to certification (Hippach-Schneider et al., 2007). *Informal learning* is defined as learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is often understood as experimental or accidental learning. It is not structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time and/or learning support. Typically, it does not lead to certification and can be both intentional and non-intentional.

The European Union largely adopts the CEDEFOP typology of lifelong learning categories, but uses a different range of criteria for describing their main features. The conventional principles of intention and organization² are not used here for differentiating among learning types but rather to distinguish between learning and non-learning activities (European Commission, 2006). Instead, two features of learning referring to (1) whether or not learning is institutionalized and (2) whether or not learning leads to a qualification recognized by the National Framework of Qualification are viewed as the main criteria for defining lifelong learning categories (European Commission, 2006).

Therefore, *formal learning* is believed to be learning which is mostly institutionalized and takes on the form of courses with examinations and hence lead upon successful completion to a learning achievement that is possible to position within the National Framework of Qualification (European Commission, 2006). *Non-formal learning* is learning which are not institutionalized but still involves courses, albeit without examinations, and which does not lead to any recognized qualification.

² Intention is viewed here as a deliberate search for knowledge, skills and competences, while the principle of organization is defined as planned in a pattern or sequence with explicit or implicit aims.

Finally, *informal learning* is defined as learning which is not institutionalized and which does not involve any courses or examinations (European Commission, 2001).

OECD (OECD, 1998) provides a different definition of lifelong learning categories by expanding them to four groups and by teasing out learning at work place as an independent learning type. They seem to define their typology based on the type of education institution in which learning occurs and stage of life at which an individual engages into learning. Accordingly, *formal education* is perceived as learning at different levels which happens in early childhood, school-based compulsory education, tertiary education, adult education, etc. *Non-formal learning* is mainly enterprise-based training and public labour market training. *Experience acquired in working life* in different types of organization and through specific activities such as R&D. *Informal learning* includes learning which takes place in the more informal environments of, for instance, interest networks, families and communities. Despite the fact that the OECD typology of lifelong learning contains four groups, it does not contradict CEDEFOP classification. They overlap in the sense that learning at work place defined by OECD as experience in working life can be considered one type of informal learning. This definition is however incomplete since non-formal learning is limited to enterprise-based training and does not include participation of an individual in any kind of training which occurs outside their workplace and is initiated by an individual him/herself.

The difficulty with incorporating these approaches in the “LLLight in Europe” project stems from the fact that the definitions reported have not been developed according to international definitions per se but for a variety of purposes relating in large part to the monitoring of education and training systems. They are therefore very difficult to quantify, especially for survey questionnaires.

Definitions used by surveys

Surveys in turn provide rarely any definition or typology of learning. They are, nevertheless, very clear with respect to types of learning activities which an individual may undertake in the course of his or her entire life without linking them to specific learning categories. The main disadvantage of such surveys is, however, the fact that they use different approaches to viewing what should be considered elements of each of learning forms.

A brief overview of survey questions used by the main surveys related to education, income or human capital are provided below and summarized in Table 1.

IALS (IALSS, 2003) and **ALL** (ALL, 2003) distinguish between formal and informal education. According to their glossary, formal education refers to a person's number of completed years in formal studies at the primary, secondary or further education level. As informal they regard any form of learning which falls into one of the following broad categories: visiting fairs, professional conferences or congresses, short lecture, seminars, workshops or special talks that were not part of a course; reading manuals, reference books, journals or other written materials that were not part of a course, going on guided tours such as museums, art galleries, or other locations; using computers or the internet, video, television, tapes to learn but not as part of a course; learning by watching, getting help from or advice from others but not from course instructors, learning by yourself by trying things out, doing things for practice, trying different approaches to doing things; learning by being sent around an organization to learn different aspects of that organization. If a respondent answered yes to at least one of these questions, they are categorized as participating in informal types of learning.

LFS (Eurostat, 2011) uses a different approach to distinguishing between types of learning. It specifies two major categories - regular education and taught leaning - without linking them to the conventional typology of learning activities. Accordingly, regular education refers to learning which results in any kind of education leading to a degree, diploma or certificate. Taught learning encompasses learning activities outside the regular education system and may include among others: courses, seminars, conferences, private lessons or instructions.

PIAAC (PIAAC, 2010) uses a similar approach and distinguishes between formal and organized learning. The survey asks whether a respondent is currently studying for any kind of formal qualifications, which suggests that the term "formal qualifications" refers to formal education or formal learning. Another group of questions asks whether a respondent participated in organized learning which includes as follows: courses conducted through open or distance education, organized sessions for on-the-job training or training by supervisors or co-workers, seminars or workshops, courses or private lessons, not already reported. Therefore, PIAAC goes further than LFS by incorporating on-the-job training as one of the forms of organized learning.

Table 1: Examples of questions used in surveys for measuring the level of participation of respondents in different types of learning

	IALS	ALL	LFS	PIAAC	AES
Formal	<p>Which of the qualifications on this card is the highest you have obtained?</p> <p>During your lifetime, how many years of formal education have you completed beginning with grade one and not counting repeated years at the same level?</p>	<p>Did you take any education or training in last 12 months?</p> <p>Did you take any courses as part of a program towards a certificate, diploma, or degree?</p>	<p>Student or apprentice in regular education during the last 4 weeks</p>	<p>Which of the qualifications on this card is the highest you have obtained?</p> <p>Are you currently studying for any kind of formal qualification?</p>	<p>During the last 12 months, that is since <<month, year>> have you been a student or apprentice in formal education (full time/part time) ?</p> <p>In how many formal education activities you participated in during the last 12 months?</p>
Non-formal			<p>Did you attend any courses, seminars, conferences or received private lessons or instructions outside the regular education system (hereafter mentioned as taught learning activities) within the last 4 weeks ?</p> <p>Number of hours spent on all taught learning activities within the last 4 weeks</p>	<p>We would now like to turn to other organised learning activities you may have participated in during the last 12 months, including both work and non-work related activities. We will distinguish between courses mentioned on this show card.</p> <p>A. Courses conducted through open or distance education?</p> <p>B. Organized sessions for on-the-job training or training by supervisors or co-workers?</p> <p>C. Seminars or workshops?</p> <p>D. Courses or private</p>	<p>During the last 12 months have you participated in any of the following activities with the intention to improve your knowledge or skills in any area (including hobbies)?</p> <p>A. Private lessons or courses (classroom instruction, lecture or a theoretical and practical course)</p> <p>B. Courses conducted through open and distance education</p> <p>C. Seminars or workshops</p> <p>D. Guided on the job training</p>

Informal	In < month and year > did you do any of the following learning activities?	Participation in informal types of learning undertaken in last 12 months:	lessons, not already reported?	Other than the activities discussed earlier, have you deliberately tried since <<the beginning of the reference period of past 12 months>> to teach yourself anything at work or during your free time: A. by learning from a family member, friend or colleague B. using printed material (books, professional magazines, etc.) C. using computers (online or offline) D. by guided tours of museums, historical/natural/industrial sites E. by visiting learning centres (including libraries)?
	<p>A. Visit trade fairs, professional conferences or congresses</p> <p>B. Attend short lectures, seminars, workshops or special talks that were NOT part of a course</p> <p>C. Read manuals, reference books, journals or other written materials but not as part of a course</p> <p>D. Go on guided tours such as museums, art galleries, or other locations</p> <p>E. Use computers or the Internet to learn but NOT as part of a course</p> <p>F. Use video, television, tapes to learn but NOT as part of a course</p> <p>G. Learn by watching, getting help from or advice from others but NOT from course instructors</p> <p>H. Learn by yourself by trying things out, doing things for practice, trying different approaches to doing things</p> <p>I. Learn by being sent around an organization</p>	<p>A: Visit trade fairs, professional conferences or congresses.</p> <p>B: Attend short lectures, seminars, workshops or special talks that were not part of a course.</p> <p>C: Read manuals, reference books, journals or other written materials that were not part of a course.</p> <p>D: Go on guided tours such as museums, art galleries, or other locations.</p> <p>E: Use computers or the internet to learn but not as part of a course.</p> <p>F: Use video, television, tapes to learn but not as part of a course.</p> <p>G: Learn by watching, getting help from or advice from others but not from course instructors.</p> <p>H: Learn by yourself by trying things out, doing things for practice, trying different approaches to doing things.</p> <p>I: Learn by being sent around an organization</p>		<p>Please list the 3 most important subjects you taught yourself using those informal learning methods</p>

AES (Eurostat, 2007) broadens further the LFS and PIAAC definitions since it provides a very clear distinction of learning forms which is close to CEDEFOP three types of learning. There is a category of formal education which is regarded as education undertaken in formal education institutions. These include education institutions at any ISCED level which are providing education leading to a qualification recognized by the National Framework of Qualification. The glossary recognizes that it is possible that this type of institution also provides the non-formal education. The survey then isolates a group of learning activities which are similar to those of PIAAC organized learning and includes: private lessons or courses (classroom instruction, lecture or a theoretical and practical course), courses conducting through open and distance education, seminars or workshops, guided on-the-job training. The AES contribution consists, however, in isolating informal learning in a separate category and explicitly referring to it as informal learning. This category encompasses following learning activities: learning from a family member, friend or colleague, using printed material (books, professional magazines, etc.), using computers (online or offline), guided tours of museums, historical/natural/industrial sites, visiting learning centres (including libraries). The survey glossary also specifies that learning from a friends, colleague or member of the family can take place by instruction, observation or doing the activity with others.

Rationale for the LLLight Project's definitions

Combining the aforementioned typologies may allow us to select a classification of lifelong learning categories which can be utilized for designing DPS background questionnaire. As such, we define four criteria which will be used to identify the type of learning. These are as follows:

- 1) **Structure** refers to how structured leaning is, which describes whether or not the context of learning is structured, officially organized, planned and prepared
- 2) **Intention** refers to how intentional learning is, which measures the centrality of the learner in the learning process
- 3) **Control** refers to the level of control in learning process which includes a range of control mechanisms used by an educator to enforce learning process or check the attendee's performance or quality of her/his knowledge obtained as a result of participation in learning
- 4) **Coverage** refers to the level of topic coverage by a learning activity, which indicates how broad the range of subjects/topics covered by learning is.

Applying the four criteria to CEDEFOP lifelong learning categories may contribute to clarifying features of each type of learning:

Formal learning is hence learning which is structured, controlled, intentional and has a broad coverage of topics. This suggests that formal learning activities usually occur in a structured and organized context, with the participant being a center of the learning process. In addition, it presupposes the existence of clear mechanisms of control or measurement of the quality of an individual's performance, which acts as a basis for issuing a degree, diploma, certificate recognized as proof of qualification at national or international levels. Finally, formal learning usually has a broad coverage and hence includes not only one course or training but a sequence of related courses which cover different aspects of the main field of study, leading to the formation of encompassing and complete view about this field. Studying at a university for a master's degree or participating in the initial vocational training are clear-cut examples of formal learning.

Non-formal learning is learning happening in a structured context with centrality of the participant but which lacks the control mechanism and which has a narrow coverage. This suggests that non-formal learning is well organized, planned, and centered on the participant, but it does not put emphasis on measuring participant's performance in learning and hence rarely results in certification. In addition, the level of coverage is limited since non-formal learning usually focuses on in-depth coverage of a relatively narrow topic or a short introduction into a broad topic which cannot provide sufficient knowledge for a certified qualification or degree. Learning a foreign language in a language school, job-related courses undertaken during or outside work time either in the workplace or outside workplace, and participation in a conference are explicit example of non-formal education.

Informal learning is learning which is usually not structured or intentional, with no control mechanisms and a very narrow coverage spectrum. As it is often perceived, informal learning is rather learning taking place in everyday life, on the job, in the family circle or in leisure time by instruction, observation or doing the activity with others. Examples of informal learning can, for instance, be as follows: watching a documentary on TV, listening to a foreign language audio tape in the car or face-to-face instruction from a colleague on how to use a new tool at work.

Visually, this classification can be presented as follows:

Table 2: A juxtaposition of three categories of lifelong learning

	Formal	Non-formal	Informal
Structure	Structured	Structured	Not structured
Intention	Intentional	Intentional	Not intentional
Control	Controlled	Not controlled	Not controlled
Coverage	Broad coverage	Narrow coverage	Narrow coverage

If applying this logic to the existing surveys, one can say that formal learning is regular or formal education. Similarly, non-formal learning is learning which happens outside regular/formal education but still retains features of organized learning and can take place in an education, non-education institution/organization or at work place. Learning activities, such as private lessons or courses (classroom instruction, lecture or a theoretical and practical course), courses conducting through open and distance education, seminars or workshops, and guided on-the-job training, clearly represent different types of non-formal learning. Finally, informal learning is learning which takes place in everyday life or at work by instruction, observation or doing the activity with others. This type of learning may include: learning from a family member, friend or colleague, using printed material (books, professional magazines, etc.), using computers (online or offline), guided tours of museums, historical/natural/industrial sites, visiting learning centers (including libraries).

This approach to categorizing and classifying learning forms is clearly present in the Adult Education Survey in the most complete way. Hence, AES questions and response categories can be taken for DPS background questionnaire in order to measure the intensity of a respondent's participation in learning. They cover all possible types or forms of learning and hence are able to trace learning history of the respondent in an encompassing way.

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