

# THE IMPORTANCE OF KEY COMPETENCES IN THE CONTEXT OF LIFELONG LEARNING

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## Abstract

The key competencies are becoming increasingly important in today's world of business and education. The most significant is the meaning of the concept *the key competencies*, because here its personal factor that can be highlighted. There is no doubt that, firstly, the importance of key competencies is influenced by the changes of matured working system, requiring adequate professional knowledge and abilities. Secondly, broader knowledge and abilities guarantee higher adult employability, social security as well. And thirdly, it expands opportunities for adults' personal fulfillment. Their personal life becomes more meaningful and happier. This suggests that adult key competencies define the abilities, reflecting an individual performance and behavioral characteristics, what demonstrates that person is able to perform them properly. In this article eight adult key competencies are discussed, theoretical and analytical analysis is presented.

*The problem.* Aging population and the growing labor shortages require to find the new ways to help adults to stay longer in the labor market. These processes and economic globalization as well as the intensification of competition for jobs, require constantly adapt to the changes. Therefore, key competences are becoming a significant factor that determines the ability of adults to participate in the development of public welfare of the citizens, designing their career. The development of key competencies and mobilization are becoming an important task for citizens, business and states. However, there is a lack of research-based information on common competence mainstream status, challenges and opportunities in Lithuania.

The *aim* of the research is to perform theoretical key competencies mainstream and development researches at the national and international levels.

The following *methods* were applied in the research: analytic literature review, research sources and documents analysis and synthesis.

Keywords: Key competences, conceptualization, knowledge, abilities, lifelong learning.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The idea of Lifelong learning reveals that people are innately different. The differences are in their intellect, talent, emotional sensitivity, psychological insight. This is what the man himself can develop. In order for adult to create a successful his life and in case he could participate in the wealth creation, it is necessary to mobilize a lot of abilities. Therefore, key competencies are becoming a significant factor, that determines the ability of adults to participate in creation of the state welfare and also designing his own career. Development of key competencies becomes an important challenge for themselves. Key competencies are very important in the knowledge society in lifelong learning context, because they guarantee more flexibility in the labor market, adaptation to the constant change.

The **object** of the research presented in the paper is conceptualization of key competencies.

The **aim** of the research is to perform theoretical key competencies mainstream and development researches at the national and international levels.

**Methods** of the research is analytic literature review, research sources and documents analysis and synthesis.

## 2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND DEFINITION OF COMPETENCES

Key competences are the research interest and application object of many areas. Exploring key competences concepts and their application, it is impossible to eliminate education, psychology, ergonomics, economics, political economy.

Recent times in international scientific discourse rapidly evolving the economic and the political economy science, theoretical insights related to key competencies.

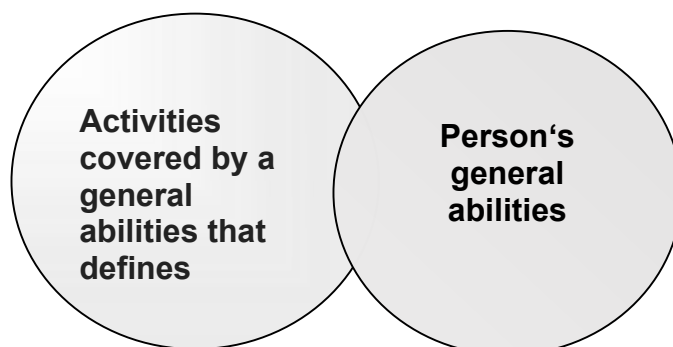


Fig 1. The expression of general abilities in fields in the context of lifelong learning

Green (2013) highlights one of the key skills and abilities related conflicts - whether (and how many) skills and abilities of the person's property or (and how) they can be seen as operating characteristics (see Figure 1)? What is the interface between the operating performance requirements for skills and abilities and their acquisition and expression activities? This issue is relevant to exploration for key competencies - the researcher according to that should clearly identify his point of view and the general concept of treatment capacity.

Competences means the set of knowledge, abilities and characteristics that allow a person to act. (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR), 2002; 2008).

In EU documents the concept of competency is understood as a common connecting concept associated with fully understandable personal potential and opportunities to adapt to the variable and targeted abilities based on knowledge and experience. In Lithuanian Republic Law on Education (2011) the competence is defined as the ability to perform a certain activity based on the knowledge, abilities and values. Key competences - there are competences, that can be developed in various study programs and adapted in different contexts.

"Competences" show educated particular ability: a certain action, activity or thing to do. The concept of competence defines personality behavior and express in a broad sense adaptive and effective functioning of the person in a certain situations.

In order for person to create his or her successful life and to participate in the creation of wealth, it is necessary to mobilize a lot of abilities. European Commission reference eight key competences: (see figure 2):

*Communication in the mother tongue.* It is every citizen's ability properly and correctly use vocabulary, grammatical written culture. To communicate competently using oral language, expressing their views, interviews and participation in discussions.

*Communication in foreign languages.* The duty of an everyone citizen, no matter of age, is to be proactive in intercultural communication. Ability to communicate in a foreign language expands human capabilities. However, foreign language proficiency level depends on what are your listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities.

*Mathematical competence and basic Competences in Science and Technology* signifies that every citizen should master the mathematical abilities such as number, measurement units, basic mathematical operations and actions in everyday life.

*Digital Competencies.* Living in the twenty-first century, for people are becoming more difficult to be an active participant in it. New social networks, as Facebook, Skype and others, information society

technologies helps citizens to communicate with each other, to share information, and finally to spend their leisure time. These abilities help individuals to enhance critical and creative thinking, to develop information literacy abilities.

*Learning to learn.* All competencies are interrelated. Learning to learn is a complex process in which we learning to analyze learning situations reflectively, trying to identify themselves. Therefore, in learning to learn, a citizen can identify their strengths and weaknesses, and thus to use learning strategies proper for him.

*Civil and Social Competencies.* All human life happens being and participating in society just in different functions. Therefore, this ability includes personal, interpersonal and intercultural abilities. Through the general abilities expression, a man reveals himself. Seeking this ability, a person learns to be tolerant, honest, confident, he learns to understand and evaluate their own and others' opinions, in a constructive communication and cooperation, creating a democratic, justice-based environment.

*Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship.* Through this competence displays human creativity, thrusting, the desire to be independent. This competence necessary for every citizen to be able successfully lead you to work in a competitive job market, trying to keep their job place or creating for them a job place setting up a business.

*Culture awareness and expression.* This competency refers to an individual's cultural knowledge. Culture, expressing the human world-view and world-picture, it's not just a phenomenon in its own nation. Cultural awareness is important for national and international orientation of cultural.

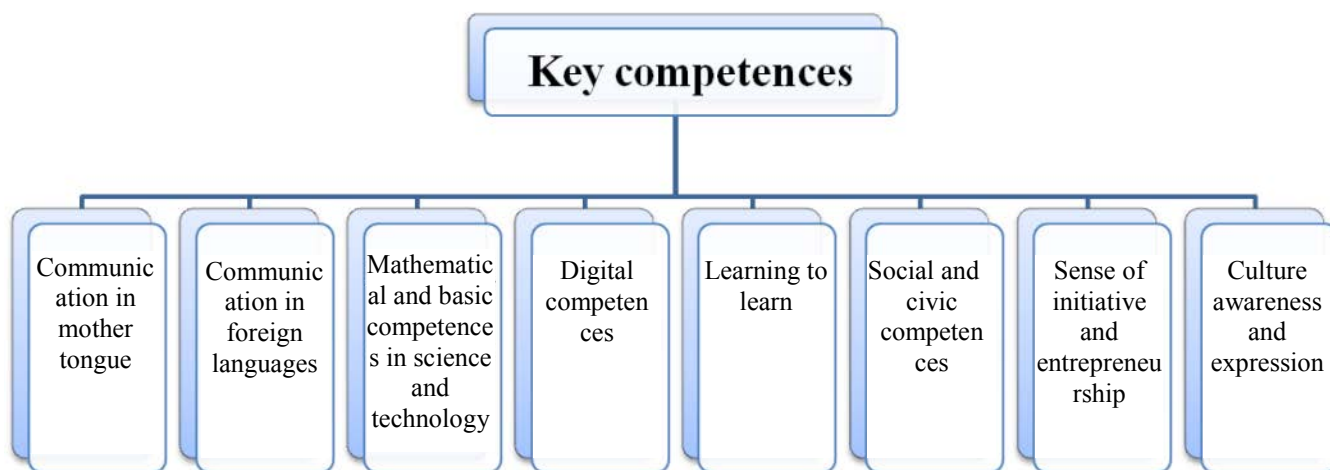


Fig. 2. Key competences. (Key competences for lifelong learning. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2006)

Lifelong Learning (LLL) guarantee competencies are considered particularly important in a knowledge society, because they guarantee more flexibility in the labor market, more adaptation to constant change. Self-competence also increases student motivation, attitude to learning and its uniqueness. (Key Competences for lifelong learning. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2006). Every citizen their abilities, knowledge should improve continuously, actively participating in social life and acting successfully in a changing labor market and the business world.

### 3 KEY COMPETENCIES CONCEPTUALIZATION PROCESS IN LIFELONG LEARNING CONTEXT

Aging population and the growing labor shortages requires to find ways how to help adults to stay longer in the labor market. These processes and an economic globalization as well, intensify the competition for jobs and requires constantly adapt to the change. General abilities and mobilization development is becoming an important task for citizens, businesses and the state.

The European key competences for lifelong learning abilities distinguishes eight key competences, which citizens require for their personal fulfillment, social inclusion, active citizenship and the ability to

work in the knowledge society. All these competencies are equally important for every citizen, because only they can help to orient to a knowledge society in lifelong learning (LLL) processes. These competencies are directly linked with each other, overlap and complement one another. (Key competencies for lifelong learning, European Reference Framework, 2007). General abilities close interaction with each other and the constant demand for general competencies inspired conceptualized eight key competencies. From the eight key competencies were developed significant competencies map (See Figure 3).

Each conceptualized competence contribute to active participation in society life, a successful operation and adaptability in the constantly changing world of work. Therefore, each of these significant competencies should provide added value for career designing, by reducing the gap between business and science in order to ensure the well-being of the aging population. Therefore, in order to respond to the aim of the study - perform general competencies analysis, to look at key competencies development process, to review the situation at the national and international level, it is very important to identify the each competences abilities which can help for every citizen successfully operate in the constantly changing world of work.

*Communication in mother tongue and in foreign language.* The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR), and (2002) is currently the most important document of language policies and the practical application areas. This document defined the concept of linguistic competence, the structure, areas of operation, language proficiency levels, language user competencies and aspects of the evaluation.

Communication in the mother tongue competence the main abilities is orally and in writing to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions and interact in various social and cultural environment. It covers speaking, reading, listening and writing, and requires knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, literary and non-literary texts of knowledge (Key competencies for lifelong learning, European Reference Framework, 2007, p.4).

Table 1. Native and foreign language

Competency	Abilities
Native and foreign languages	Native/foreign language dictionary and grammar knowledge The information transmitted in their native/foreign language oral and written comprehension Ability to read and understand the literary and non-literary texts Ability reasoned thought and opinion Ability to prepare written and oral text Ability to interact with others in constructive dialogue Ability recognize cultural diversity and intercultural communication and the need for cooperation

Communication in foreign languages broadly shares the main abilities as in communication in the mother tongue, but also calls for abilities such as mediation and intercultural understanding. Each person's level of proficiency depends on the four dimensions (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and of different languages, social and cultural background, environment, needs, and (or) interests. (Key competencies for lifelong learning, European Reference Framework, 2007, p.5). Communication in any language means that person should have a good knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and the different functions of language.

*Numerical and informational society technologies.* Digital competence, information society technologies requires a sound understanding and knowledge of the nature, role and opportunities of information society technologies (IST) in everyday contexts: in personal and social life as well as at work. This includes main computer applications such as word processing, spread-sheets, databases, information storage and management, an understanding of the opportunities and potential risks of the Internet, communication via electronic media (e-mail, network tools) for work, leisure, information sharing and collaborative networking, learning and research. (Key competencies for lifelong learning, European Reference Framework, 2007, p.7).

Table 2. Numerical and informational society technologies

Competency	Abilities
Numerical and Informational Society Technologies	Ability from memory to perform elementary calculations required for household Ability to think mathematically and logically in practical calculations in everyday life (the calculation of the apartment / house square footage, etc.). Ability to use electronic devices for mathematical calculations (calculators, cell. Handset) Ability to use IT tools for personal and / or business purposes (e-mail, Skype, Facebook) Ability to use IT for personal and / or business purposes (e-banking, voting in elections, purchase services, press, etc.). Ability to use the Internet for finding and selecting relevant information Process information using computer programs (Word, Excel, etc.).

*Learning, personality and citizenship: learning to learn.* Learning to learn competence is understood as a complex combination of knowledge, abilities, values, attitudes and dispositions assisting the lifelong learning, and by learning in formal and informal way. Learning to learn it is important because it leads to a purposeful learning. Within the framework of the European Commission's recommendations (2006) are inserted definition of the concept of learning to learn.

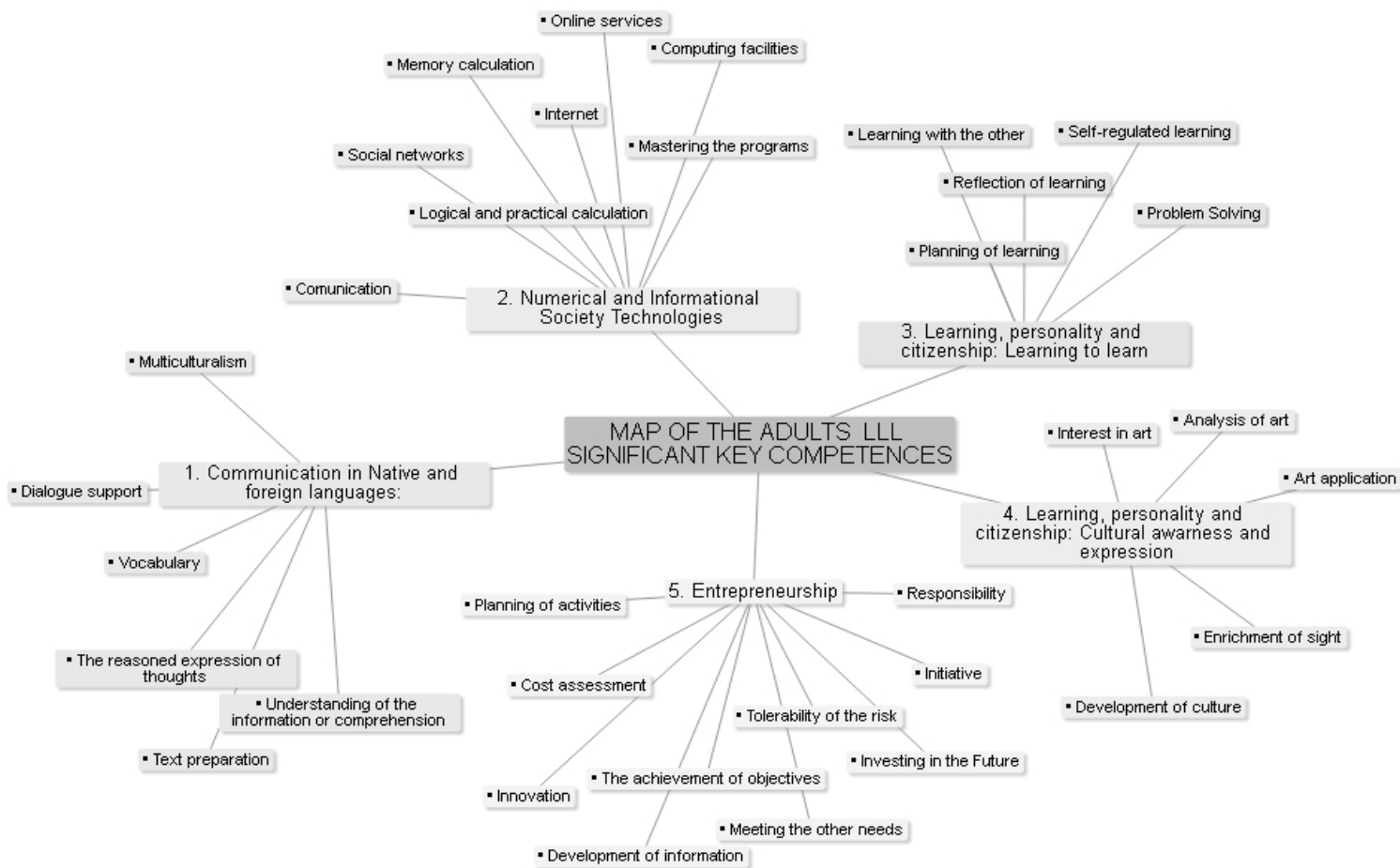


Fig. 3. Map of the adults LLL significant key competences

Table 3. Learning, personality and citizenship: learning to learn

Competency	Abilities
Learning, personality and citizenship : learning to learn	Ability to organize their own learning process Ability to learn and act independently Ability to learn and operate within a group Ability to solve problems Ability to discuss (reflect) their own learning and activities

"Learning to learn engages learners to build on prior learning and life experience to use and apply knowledge and abilities in in various situations - at home, at work, in education and training" (Key competencies for lifelong learning, European Reference Framework, 2007).

Table 4. Learning, personality and citizenship: Cultural awareness and expression

Competency	Abilities
Learning, personality and citizenship : Cultural awareness and expression	Interest in art, feeling the need of art (interest in selected art direction and areas of classical works and innovation) Ability to analyze and interpret works of art in their messages, evaluating its relevance (select for yourself interesting and socially relevant works of art, works of art critically evaluate the ideas proposed, their relevance to human society). Ability to apply creative artistic elements of work and everyday life (the ability independently perform simple acts of artistic creation or elements and adapt them at work and in everyday life). Ability to develop their cultural outlook and enrich it purposefully (critically evaluate works of art and cultural events in their own fitness-minded development, to decide on the most appropriate cultural and artistic events, etc.). Ability to communicate with other people of culture and arts, developing and enriching the cultural outlook (egg, participation in the artistic expression activities - clubs, societies, associations, arts and arts institutions).

*Learning, personality and citizenship: Cultural awareness and expression.* Cultural knowledge includes an awareness of local, national and European cultural heritage and their place in the world.

It covers a basic knowledge of major cultural works, including popular contemporary culture. (Key competencies for lifelong learning, European Reference Framework, 2007). Cultural awareness promotes personality improvement process: creating the role of the creative process and analysis of dramaturgy and understanding necessary for cognitive literature expands your circle of knowledge, develops the body, voice, acting technique, and communicating with colleagues, creative director, and other members of the group, accumulates inside the unique experience of learning from the experience of others.

*Entrepreneurial competency.* Entrepreneurial competencies comprises the ability to identify and act on opportunities as well as the ability to acquire and utilize resources need for transforming the ideas into fruition.

Table 5. Entrepreneurial competency

Competency	Abilities
Entrepreneurial	Orientation towards the achievements of the objective; Initiative - the ability to take the initiative; Responsibility for own and the other (egg, work group, team) actions and initiatives against the organization and society; Innovation - orientation towards the various innovation by establishing and deployment; Risk tolerance - Ability to assume the risks and to act rationally in risky situations. Ability to evaluate the cost and the current (potential) added value Ability to plan own work and other short-term and long-term Ability to refuse to meet the current needs of investing in the future. Ability to understand others (consumers') needs Ability to communicate conclusively and formally to convey to others the ideas and data.

One of the priority competencies focus on the European and Lithuanian educational purposes – Entrepreneurship competence. Its abilities and development is associated with a high level of independent quality of life (Gevorgianienė. V., A. Galkienė, Grincevičienė V., 2008). Entrepreneurship is an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk-taking, and the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives "(Key Competences for lifelong learning. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2006).

An entrepreneurial attitude is characterized by initiative, proactivity, independence and innovation in personal and social life, as much as at work. It also includes motivation and determination to meet objectives, whether personal goals, or aims held in common with others including at work. (Key competencies for lifelong learning, European Reference Framework, 2007).

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

1. Theoretical analysis revealed that the general abilities are understandable not only as personal characteristics, but also how certain characteristics of the activities.
2. Key competencies in terms of knowledge and abilities are important for every individual of the knowledge-based society. They provide added value in the labor market, social cohesion and active citizenship, by offering flexibility and adaptability, satisfaction and motivation. Therefore, they should be regularly educated in both international and national levels.
3. The eight key competences are also thought of as five conceptualization competence and are integral with each other. In each case the focus is on critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem solving, risk assessment, decision-making, and constructive management of feelings.

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