EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENT FACTORS OF UNIVERSITY LECTURERS

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Abstract. *In the context of the knowledge society the university teachers face increasing challenges. They are required a wide range of education as well as a constant desire for improvement fallowing up and applying innovations in their work. This article examines the teaching of a university lecturer in a non-formal or an informal way in order to find out what factors lead by representatives of this field trying to improve their competencies as the knowledge creator and disseminator. The survey was conducted by interviewing university lecturers during a semi-structured interview. The results of empirical research have shown that non-formal or informal learning for teachers is an integral part of their professional activity and they tend to pursue their personal interests in the most part in gaining knowledge or new experience to satisfy their curiosity, to satisfy students or to overcome certain challenges. In the professional environment, the impetus for learning is felt through the improvement of the quality of students and lectures, the desire to be equal partners in science to their colleagues and the perception that the teaching profession requires multidisciplinarity. Continuous learning has also been identified as a condition for pursuing a career or simply to maintain a job and meet the high academic requirements of the teaching profession.*
Keywords: university, lecturer, learning.

Introduction

The importance of the continuous learning and teachers' attitudes towards lifelong learning are often discussed and analyzed in scientific literature (Dautaras & Rukštelienė, 2006). It should be emphasized that the features of teachers' training are studied most often and only few researchers review university lecturers' learning, the importance and the significance of acquiring new competencies for the higher education system. According to Laužackas (1999), the improvement of the university teachers' qualification is one of the adult education parts.

As the education system changes, the university teachers are not able to avoid new challenges. They have to not only be proffesionals in their fields with an interest in only their scientific area, but also to be able to pass on the knowledge to the young generation as well as to interest and direct them in the right direction. According to Bélisle (2007), the usual teaching methods are no longer enough to

interest a student and digital technologies are necessary. Teachers themselves have to want and seek to know these technologies, but if they are not proficient IT (information and computer technologies) users, they would have to improve and practice these skills themselves. This way lecturers are able to engage in a non-formal or an informal learning.

According to the established order in today's universities, university lecturers' activities are evaluated according to their work results, for example, carried out researches, the number of scientific publications and written monographs. However, lecturers' duties also include giving lectures, supervising master's and doctoral theses, providing services at and outside the university, but the professional improvement is also important (Jatkauskienė, 2010). There is still no unified system of how these activities are defined and evaluated and no system of motivation exists. For these reasons, it is not clear what factors lead teachers to learn and improve in order to do their job as best as possible (Tidikis, 1998). Moreover, the teacher has to constantly derive knowledge and learn new things in order to adapt to the changing education system and its needs. This shows today's situation – a lifelong learning. The teachers engage in this by a non-formal or an informal way, for example, participating in projects, internships or individually searching for various kinds of material.

The specificity of the university lecturer's work is exeptional because the representatives of this field, compared to specialists working in other educational institutions, have more autonomy, for example, they are able to independently make decisions conserning their professional activities and careers. Lecturers have the opportunity to decide for themselves how much strength, time and effort they will devote to complete one or another of their activities and how much attention they will pay to their professional improvement. This article analyzes the problem – what external factors encourage lecturers to engage in a non-formal or an informal learning which would help to improve as professionals.

The aim of the research is to identify the external factors which encourage university teachers to engage in a non-formal or an informal learning. The literature analysis and an interview with university teachers are used in the research. The content analysis method is used for the data analysis.

External development factors of university lecturers learning in a non-formal or an informal way

According to Jatkauskienė and Boterf (2012), to answer the question what factors determine the professional level of univeristy lecturers (is it only the number of publications? a degree? pedagogical name? participation in conferences and projects? a positive feedback from students?) what is the structure, areas and functions of university lecturers' activities, typical situations

which are known to many university lecturers, competences necessary to cope with specific situations, ways to become a professional lecturer (learning from the experience, for example, can a person become a professional blacksmith by forging iron from morning till night?) and others, is very difficult. Moreover, researches about lecturers' level of proffesionality is rare in Lithuania and Europe. According to the authors, in today's working world the requirements for a professional became a common feature of the modernity as every employee has to be a professional. However, it is becoming more and more difficult to understand the meaning of the term *professional* because a professional is no longer related to only an emplyee who is qualified, independent, reliable, responsible, creative and enterprising (Jatkauskienė & Boterf, 2012). Therefore, the relevant question is how higher education teachers seek to become professionals in their field, what kind of strategies they use, how much motivation they have and what factors encourage them to seek this goal.

This article analyzes university lecturers' learning in a non-formal and an informal way which are related to each other (Figure 1)
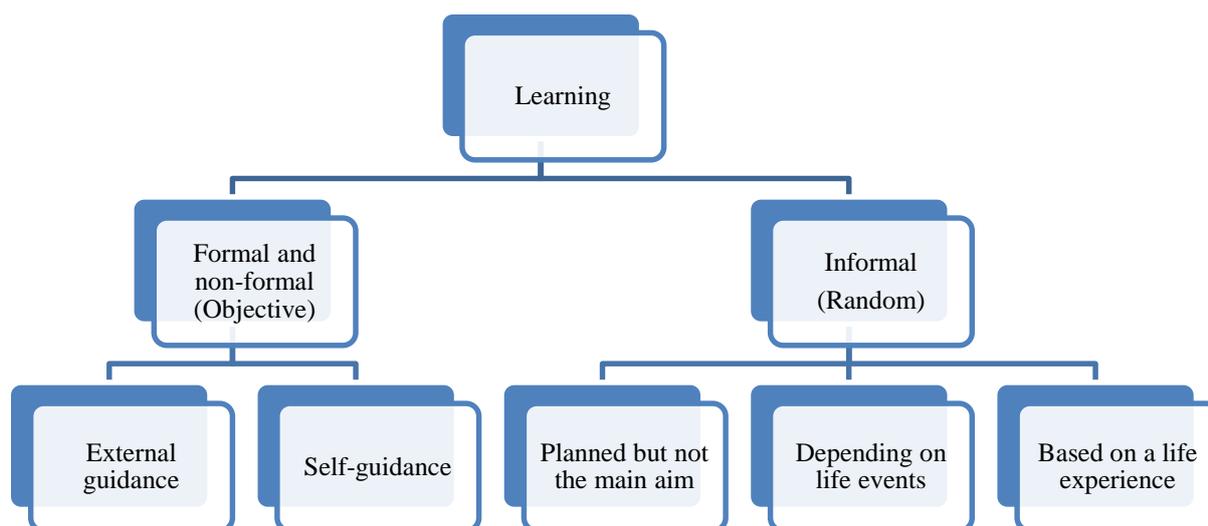

Figure 1. **The connection of formal, non-formal and informal learning**

According to Laužackas, Stasiūnaitienė and Teresevičienė (2005), learning can be targeted, i.e. planned and with an external guidance (requests from friends and family, workplace requirements) or as a result of a self-guidance (for career, for interest). This means that learning can be encouraged by external or internal motivation. Furthermore, the authors claim that learning can also be random, unplanned and then it can be calculated but not become the main aim. The authors point out that the random learning can influence or become targeted learning. However, the targeted learning always contains features of the random learning. This means that the informal learning can be a part of the formal learning. In

addition, there can be difficulties differentiating a non-formal and an infomal learning (Laužackas, Stasiūnaitienė, & Teresevičienė, 2005).

The non-formal learning, according to Bjornavold (2009), is a learning which takes place during activities which are not specifically designed for this, but are planned (learning objectives, time and professional assistance). It is a conscious process for the learner (Cedefop & Glossary, 2008). Werquin (2005) claims that this type of learning has no specific objectives, the scope of time and resources. The non-formal learning is specific for fields, such as the professional, personal improvement (Stasiūnaitienė, Fokienė, & Kaminskienė, 2010) or the qualification improvement (Zuzevičiūtė & Teresevičienė, 2008). According to the data analysis of Schwier (2010), features of a non-formal learning are:

- Defined but unrestricted learning environment;
- Learning is not random but conscious;
- The structure of learning is systematic;
- The learning activities are organized by a responsible person;
- Learners set and control aims;
- Learner are responsible for the learning process.

Concerning the non-formal learning activities, Schwier (2010) distinguishes professional improvement groups where learning contexts are often described as sharing of professional experience and knowledge among group members as well as in learning communities.

The *informal learning*, according to Werquin (2005), is a learning which takes place during every day activities or work, at home or during leisure time. This learning is not organized or has a specific program with established objectives or scope of time. This is often referred to as just an experience.

Laužackas, Stasiūnaitienė and Teresevičienė (2005) describe the informal learning as a natural, every day learning process which can be unplanned, less organized or structured. This learning can also be motivated by life events, circumstances and family and for this reason even individuals who improve their skills and gain knowledge can misinterpret this type of learning. The authors also claim that informal learning is related to an individual initiative, personal experience, hobbies and community activities. Moreover, this learning is based on meeting personal, professional, social and family needs (ibid.).

Stasiūnaitienė, Fokienė and Kaminskienė (2010) distinguish the basic forms of informal learning:

- Reading of books, coursebooks, specialized journals and other publications;
- The search of information on the internet and the analysis of the information;

- Watching educational television programs and video tapes, listening of educational audio records;
- Going to libraries, training centers and other institutions where a person can gain knowledge.

The informal learning is often characterized as unorganized, non-systematic and often unintentional (Schwier, 2010). This type of learning is a lifelong learning process where a person gain and store knowledge, skills, attitudes, insights and wisdom. The informal learning is always motivated by person's needs or curiosity (Schwier, 2010). According to Rupšienė's (2000) monograph about researches on learning motivation and motives, various factors, which can encourage university leacturers to engage in a non-formal or an informal learning, are described in the following table (see Table1).

Table 1 **Factors that determine learning**

Characteristics	Criteria	Indicators
Factors encouraging to learn	**External motives** (Butkienė, Kepalaitė, 1996)	**Wide social** (duty, responsibility, the perception of the significance of social learning) (Podlasyj, 1999);
		Social collaboration (the strengthening of the self-role in the team, orientation into various cooperation with other people ways) (Podlasyj, 1999);
		Public (work for the sake of society and the progress of humanity) (Putkiewicz, 1971);
		Pressure and constraint (from an employer, collegues, society, family) (Rosenfeld, 1974);
	Internal motives (Butkienė, Kepalaitė, 1996)	**Narrow social** (seeking a certain position in the society, to be recognized, to receive an appropriate reward) (Podlasyj, 1999);
		Wide cognitive (interest in the environment, satisfaction of the learning activities) (Podlasyj, 1999);
		Educational cognitive (orientation into knowledge acquisition methods, understanding of learning programs) (Podlasyj, 1999);
		Self-education (orientation into additional knowledge acquisition) (Podlasyj, 1999);
		Practical-professional (the desire to climb the career ladder, have good wage, avoidance of physical work) (Putkiewicz, 1971);
		Learning to succeed and avoid failure (Rosenfeld, 1974);

Table 1 shows that Butkienė and Kepalaitė (1996) indicate two main motives which are influenced by an individual's personal-internal position or by an environment-external position. These motives can include not one component, i.e. a factor. They can be various types and, according to many authors, coinciding but are described differently.

To sum up, Abramauskienė and Kiriliauskienė (2008) claim that internal and external learning factors are very important and they are determined by previous learning experience (successful or unsuccessful), supply or competition, geographical and family position etc. Moreover, in *the Lifelong Learning Memorandum* (2001) it is stated that individual learning motivation and various learning opportunities are essential for successful life long learning process.

University lecturers' opinion about the motivation to improve

The scope of the research includes six university lecturers, working at X university, who were randomly chosen. In order to have more accurate results, the respondents had to meet these criteria: 1) to be a university lecturer; 2) to have at least a doctor's degree; 3) to have no less than three years experience working at a university. According to these criteria, two lecturers with doctor's degree, three associate professors and one professor have been interviewed. Their work experience vary from 5 to 29 years.

The research data was conducted through a semi-structured interview which is based on Knox (1960), Lipinskiene (2002) and Rupšiene (2000). This interview includes ten open questions, the first five of which aim at clarifying respondent's opinion and perception of professional development; other four questions explain the impact of a non-formal and an informal learning on the quality of work, personal development or the career prospects; the last question clarifies respondent's perception of what is a non-formal and an informal learning and how it manifests in the professional lecturer's environment.

The research reveals that university lecturers comprehend the basic principles and mission of their work. Although the official work requirements do not indicate that it is obligatory to personally look for additional information and keep up with the latest news, the specialists of this field feel personally obliged to improve in order to justify their and other people's, who will further be discussed in the research, expectations.

The majority of the respondents claim that their decision to engage in a non-formal or an informal learning is often influenced by the following external factors:

- Professional aspects;
- The influence from the environemt;

- Career perspectives (formal requirements);
- Conditions of the work place;
- Financial stimulus.

The professional activity, reaching from the fulfilment of the lecturer's mission to the necessity of knowledge of new programs (see Table 2), encourages professional development.

Table 2 **Professional aspects which influence a non-formal or an informal learning**

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Professional aspects	The need to maintain the quality of work	If lecturers do not improve, are not interested in anything, they will just be boring. That is all. That is the end of the quality of teaching (R2).
	The need of broader approach	You have to have some broader view and not only think about the subject that you are teaching. And because our lectures are about culture, society, human relationships that means that everything applies to us (R3).
	The fulfilment of the work requirements	Our projects are not just monograph writings but are also adapted for public and the promotion of science. So, you have to teach if you want to or not (R3).
	Regularly updated scientific information	Probably, if you stop improving <…> then you loose the opportunity to understand the latest researches, trends and when you do not have this kind of information you just fall down into a bigger or smaller hole.
	The variety of work activities	Well, students, if you have to supervise their researches and they choose topics which you have to search information for in order to be able to supervise and say something according to the topic. So, in this way students encourage you to broaden your view of life (R5).
	The introduction of new teaching systems	Another thing is that Moodle system makes us think about the latest trends. You have to search for new recordings, examples, submission ways and for this you need to study and know quite a lot (R5).
	The perception of the profession	The fact that you have a doctor's degree is your qualification testimony and nothing more. You are qualified to do the job but that does not mean that you are so good that you wouldn't need to improve anymore (R4).
	The assurance of professional image	We are lecturers and we have to be a step further than our students. But we can do that not in all areas. In some of the fields their competencies are bigger but we need to try.

It is important to emphasize that concerning the category of work factors, which have an influence to lecturers' decisions about learning in a non-formal or

an informal way, the lecturer's profession is very complex and includes not one duty. However, the representatives of this field often engage into other additional activities which motivate them to get better, find or learn something new. Jezerskytė (2014) analyzes the variety of lecturer's activities and claims that the multiplicity of lecturer's work is more often emphasized because a modern university lecturer has to be able to work in various educational and learning environments, to carry out educational, expert, teaching activities, to spread new ideas and scientific knowledge to the society. This means that the area of lecturer's activities is wide, multifaceted and requires complex knowledge. The aim to maintain the work quality and have a wider approach to the profession, which the respondents distinguished as factors motivating to learn, are also discussed by such authors as Tijūnėlienę (1998), Drūteikienė (2010), Juceviečienė, Stanikūnienė (2003), Lekavičienė (1992), Yiyi, He, Munyengabe (2016) and Solis (2015). The fulfilment of professional requirements, which also demand additional knowledge, is described in Tidikis' research (1998). The author studies one of the problems of the higher education gaps in the didactic assessment of lecturers and this problem is still relevant nowadays. Lecturers who carry out the didactic work are not trained for that as this is considered as their own responsibility. This way, which is revealed in this research, lecturers engage in a non-formal or an informal learning.

Furthermore, the installation and implementation of inovations are not news to lecturers. These changes or constantly updated information encourage lecturers to seek additional knowledge which can help them to face these challenges. Tierney (2014) provides the latest information and states that the universities have to be institutions which install new inovations first and it is important for the lecturers to be able to respond to this quickly and apply the information in their work. Regarding the informational and computer technologies (further IT), Jakštienė and Janiūnaitė (2014) argue that IT competence is necessary for todays' lecturer even if not used in the classroom. In addition, it is emphasized that the ability to properly use IT enriches the teaching process.

The factors, such as the influence of the authorities or communication with inspiring people, family support and students' evaluation, are the most prominent factors in the environmental impact category. The impact of these factors on person's desire to learn are described by the researcher Jovaiša (2001). The author describes these factors as social with emphasis on the fact that close relationship with the family can have a positive influence on the desire to learn. The influence of the changing time was emphasized by one respondent and this factor is not discussed more widely in scientific literature.

Table 3 **The impact of environment on a non-formal or an informal learning**

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Enviromental impact	Family support	I always had my family's support. This was never an obstacle throughout my entire academic career wherever I travelled (R2).
	Students' evaluations and seeking for recognition	The same topics of the lectures are being improved every year or at least we should improve them, not just stay in one place. Students then complain that the topics are old (R3).
	The influence of the changing time	No one is interested in these talking heads. <…> What was interesting twenty five years ago is not fascinating anymore and you cannot avoid the development (R3).
	The influence of the authorities	The authorities are authorities because they are followed by others who want to reach their level. This is the positive side as you get the motivation to learn and improve (R5).

Another category of factors found in the research is career perspectives. Lecturers who are determined to stay in the academic community are often motivated to climb the career ladder and they carry out scientific activities in order to defend a higher scientific degree. For this reason, individuals have to make an additional effort to be interested in the information relevant to their work, to attend various training courses, conferences and to complete internships in different universities from all over the world. This way lecturers engage in a non-formal or an informal learning which can improve the ability to receive a higher scientific degree. The career perspectives for university lecturers are defined quite clearly. However, lecturers claim that the implementation of the scientific activities demands the additional learning. This helps the respondents to maintain their job, approapriatly fulfill the work requirements and can guarantee success. The impact of persuit of the career on the desire to engage in a non-formal or an informal learning in the scientific context is explained by Putkiewicz (1971) and Trakšelis (2012).

Another category of factors that influence the lecturers to engage in additional learning is the conditions in their work place. The usage of modern technologies in a university actually has a number of functions. One of these functions, which is mentioned by the lecturers, is the opportunity to use the distance teaching. This type of teaching provides the additional motivation for lecturers to attend conferences, seminars etc. The transfer of lectures into a distance teaching space solves a number of problems, for example, students do not fall behind from the curriculum and the lecturer can simultaneously improve and engage in the core activities. According to Barila (2011), the impact of

information technologies on the university is externally apparent through the services provided. However, this also influences the academic community and this is proven by the research on the opportunities for lecturers to travel and teach through distance learning space. One more important aspect is to get the approval and encouragement from the workplace to learn and improve. The respondents in this research unanimously state that they always receive a significant encouragement and support in the academic environment to broaden their knowledge. Organizations, including universities, increasingly rely on a non-formal adult learning, which is unstructured, unplanned and easily adapted to specific situations, in order to develop skills and encourage the employees to keep up with the innovations (Robbins, 2003).

An important aspect found during this research is the funding opportunities for a non-formal learning. The research reveals that only very small part of the lecturers consider the funding when engaging in a non-formal self-improvement, however, they are searching for opportunities to get sponsorships.

Moreover, some lecturers receive some financial bonuses for their additional learning and this can be considered as a stimulus to engage in these activities. One of the respondents claims that the bonus does not always cover all the costs but that does not reduce the desire to further engage in a non-formal learning.

Conclusions

The results of the research suggest that the nature of the activity is the most prominent external factor encouraging university lecturers to improve. A higher education lecturer has to keep up with the innovations and this is one of the very important factors influencing the improvement. The changing formal requirements for lecturers and the versatility of the professional activities also create opportunities for development. The social aspects, such as students' education, how they evaluate lecturer's work and family support, are also mentioned as factors encouraging to learn. Lecturers who persue a career have to meet certain requirements and their fulfillment is inevitably related to improvement. Not only the macroeconomics are changing but also the internal requirements of the organization and the lecturer, in order to remain active or persue a career, has to meet these requirements and the changes are necessary. The financial terms are not mentioned often as a factor, however, it can also have an impact on the university lecturers' development in a non-formal or an informal way.

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