

## CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS IN IMPLEMENTING LIFELONG LEARNING IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Prof. Dr. Ali YAZICI  
Atilim University  
Ankara- TURKEY

Prof. Dr. Alipaşa AYAS  
Bilkent University  
Ankara- TURKEY

### ABSTRACT

Knowledge took 1,750 years to double for the first time, counting from the start of the Christian era; and it is projected that by 2020 knowledge will double every 73 days. Humanity faces a new challenge in coping with this rapid change in knowledge and consequently, adopting himself/herself to this directly affected society. Lifelong Learning (LLL) seems to be the only tool to satisfactorily reply to this challenge. This article aims at discussing the main issues in LLL including Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), using the approach in the European Union countries. In addition, challenges in Turkey's recently completed European Union (EU) project "Promoting LLL in Turkey" are discussed. Based on these cases a roadmap and a set of recommendations for LLL in developing countries are given.

**Key Words:** Life Long Learning, LLL, e-Learning, RPL, Distance Education, Models of LLL.

### INTRODUCTION

LLL is defined as all learning activities undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences, within a personal, civic and social and/or employment-related perspective (MEGEP, 2006). Learning process can take three different forms: formal, informal and non-formal learning. *Formal* learning takes place, in most cases, in school settings where there is a curriculum and a sequence of planned teaching and learning activities are carried out with students at a certain age at primary and secondary stages. *Non-formal* learning is undertaken in a certain environment with a curriculum and planned activities but the age of participants may be quite different. There can be very young and even very old participants taking the same activity or course together to have a new skill. *Informal* learning occurs in cases where there is no pre-defined curriculum and activities on paper. It can happen during the daily life conditions. In other words, Informal learning occurs as a natural outcome of everyday work, community based activities and everyday life experiences. That is to say, we are constantly learning regardless of time and place.

The idea of LLL was introduced by UNESCO about 50 years ago. In 1996, the OECD Education Ministers agreed to develop strategies for "lifelong learning for all". Policy-makers in many OECD countries are now and have been trying to develop strategies to use all the skills gained "from cradle to grave" (OECD, 2014).

LLL covers all modes of learning throughout life: formal, non-formal or informal. At first LLL as a policy concept belonged only to the most developed countries around the world. In the last two-three decades it has a widening acceptance and area that something has to be done in developing and less developed country contexts. For example, a middle income country like Turkey spent major efforts for transformation of society as well as the skills of individuals. Bangladesh is an example among less developed countries which spent considerable time and effort for LLL (Arthur, 2009). OECD, despite its name and charter about economic development, takes a keen practical and applied interest in LLL to establish among its members a wider social inclusion, social capital and equity dimension (OECD, 2007). It is often believed that lifelong learning if undertaken seriously it has direct economic impact to the development of country.

This paper will address some of the key issues in lifelong learning. In the next section basic concepts in LLL is discussed and the need for LLL is emphasized followed by an overview of LLL in Europe. Then, the fundamental components of a LLL system are outlined. EU project on “Promoting Lifelong Learning in Turkey” and its implementation strategy is given. The main issues in Recognition of Prior Learning are discussed next. Challenges in the implementation of the project are summarized followed by a section giving a roadmap for designing LLL in developing countries. Some concluding remarks are made in the final section.

### LLL CONCEPTS

Knowledge took 1,750 years to double for the first time, counting from the start of the Christian era; and it is projected that by 2020 knowledge will double every 73 days (Bernheim and Chau, 2003). Humanity faces a new challenge in coping with this rapid change in knowledge and consequently, adopting himself/herself to this directly affected society. Knowledge, also known as accumulated, analyzed and digested data/information, needs to be organized, stored, managed and utilized efficiently and effectively for its proliferation and for the well-being of humanity.

LLL seems to be the only tool to answer to these challenges. LLL is defined as “all learning activities undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences, within a personal, civic and social and/or employment-related perspective (MEGEP, 2006)”. LLL is not only a matter of economic necessity and, access to it is also essential for inclusion [5]. Basic literacy and basic IT and communication skills are often no longer sufficient for a better career, and as a result citizens with only basic skills are at increasing risk of social exclusion. Strengthening LLL within the system of education and training can support the people in rural areas, those individuals without literacy skills, people without an education, children and adults with special educational needs, and those without work and so on to gain the skills and/or qualifications they require for a more productive and fulfilled lives.

LLL Education/Training is implemented in one of the three forms, namely, formal, non-formal and informal education. The formal education refers to the education in the schools leading to a diploma, the non-formal education refers to the education/training most of the time leading to a diploma and/or qualification recognized by the related establishments, and finally, the last one is the education/training inquired by the people for self-satisfaction, career change, and hobby and so on. In Table 1 below, this classification is elaborated.

Table 1: Forms of LLL

Education	Place	Organized by	Diploma/Certificate
Formal	Schools	Public/Private Sector	Diploma
Non-formal	Schools, establishments, training centers	Public/Private (national, international) sector	Diploma/Certificate
Informal	Home, establishments, training centers	Municipalities, private sector	Possible

### LLL SYSTEM COMPONENTS

In the developing countries LLL activities are conducted in an ad hoc manner in which LLL education and training programs are widespread and conducted in an unorganized fashion. Moreover, the majority of the citizens are unaware of such activities run by the municipalities, NGOs, universities and so on.

Consequently, for a successful implementation of LLL, a system needs to be established within a country which plans and coordinates set of activities of public and private organizations. The aim of the system must be to set up effective processes of planning and coordination to support individual learner to access the learning opportunities they need in their lives (Project for Promoting LLL in Turkey).

Such a system should include the following interrelated components:

- Policy and legislation
- Strategies and action plans
- Courses and course providers
- Trainers
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and certification
- Guidance and counseling
- Research
- Information and support

Each of these components is equally important for the design and implementation of a LLL system.

### LLL IN EUROPEAN UNION

The European Commission (EC) issued a Memorandum of Lifelong Learning in 2000 which provides a set of strategies for implementing lifelong learning in Europe. In 2001, a plan of action was published (European Commission, 2001) to help countries modernize their LLL systems.

The priorities for developing lifelong learning systems were identified by the EC (EC, 2002) as:

- Providing access to lifelong learning opportunities for all, regardless of age, including specific actions aimed at the most disadvantaged persons, those not participating in education and training, as well as migrants, as a means of facilitating their social integration
- Providing opportunities to acquire and/or update basic skills, including the new basic skills, such as IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills
- The training, recruitment and updating of teachers and trainers for the development of lifelong learning
- The effective validation and recognition of formal qualifications as well as non-formal and informal learning, across countries and educational sectors through increased transparency and better quality assurance
- The high quality and broad accessibility of target group specific information, guidance and counselling concerning lifelong learning opportunities and their benefits
- Encouraging the representation of relevant sectors, including the youth sector, in existing or future networks and structures, working in this area.

The 2001 plan of action was revised in 2009, and adopted the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (EC, 2009). It sets four objectives for LLL in Europe:

- Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship
- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

A set of seven (EC, 2012) benchmarks have also been developed and countries are monitored in terms of progress towards these. The aim is that these targets are to be reached by 2020:

1. At least 95% of children between 4 years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education
2. The share of 15 year olds with insufficient reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%
3. The share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%
4. The share of 30-34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40%
5. An average of at least 15% of adults (age group 25 to 64) should participate in lifelong learning
6. At least 20% of higher education graduates and 6% of 18-34 year olds with an initial VET qualification should have had a period of study or training abroad
7. The share of employed graduates (20-34 years old) having left education and training no more than three years before the reference year should be at least 82%

As part of its commitment to LLL, the EU adopted the European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. The framework defines eight key competences that citizens require for their personal fulfillment, social inclusion, active citizenship, and employability in the EU's knowledge based society as follows (EU, 2006):

1. Communication in the mother tongue
2. Communication in foreign languages
3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
4. Digital competence
5. Learning to learn
6. Social and civic competences
7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
8. Cultural awareness and expression

Within the context of the *Europe 2020* Strategy and its commitment to strengthening systems for lifelong learning, the EU defined a renewed European agenda for adult learning (EU, 2011).

In Figure 1 below, percentage of population aged 25-64 participating in LLL is shown in the year 2013. From this figure, one can easily depict that about 50% of the EU 27 countries is above the EU 27 average of 10 percent and the rest is below the average participation rate. And, the high participation rates in the Scandinavian countries are noticed. For EU to be successful in LLL all of the member states should perform equally well in order to ease the mobility and RPL issues among themselves.

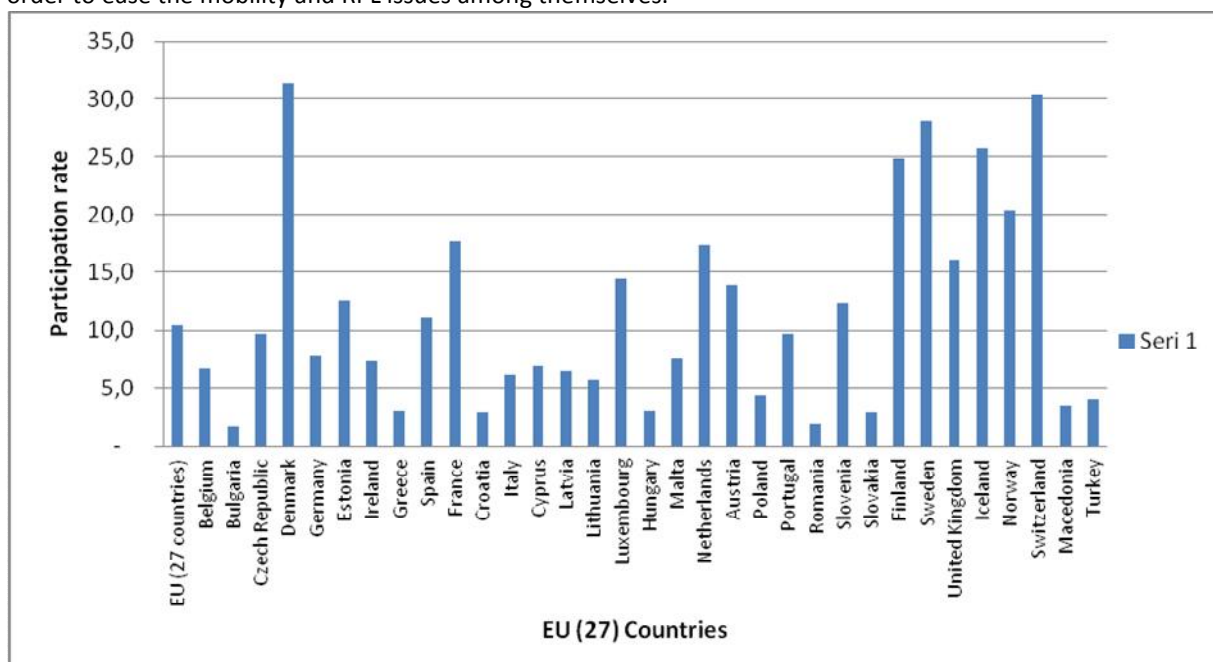


Figure 1: Percentage of population aged 25-64 participating in LLL (2013) (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/>)

### CHALLENGES IN THE TURKEY'S LLL PROJECT

Project for Promoting LLL in Turkey (Draft Policy Paper, 2012) made a huge impact to set a target of achieving adult learning participation rates of 8% (from 2.6% in 2012) by 2015. Achieving this goal will require the involvement of all stakeholders in the lifelong learning system including public and private providers, NGOs and foundations, enterprises, worker organizations and employer bodies.

Turkey and other developing countries faces a number of challenges that must be addressed if an effective LLL system is to be developed. These include the need for:

- Greater public awareness of LLL
- Improved coordination and governance of LLL

- Improved data on lifelong learning and better monitoring and evaluation
- Improved career guidance
- A national qualifications framework to support LLL
- Improved quality assurance of delivery of LLL
- A system for recognition of prior learning (RPL)
- Adequate and effective financing of lifelong learning
- Improved linkages between education and work
- Improved levels of school attainment to create solid foundations for lifelong learning

EU member states are encouraged to develop national LLL strategies in which they define priorities for action that will lead to improvements in the lifelong learning system and help progress towards meeting the EU benchmarks. In Turkey, the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2018 was developed in 2013 and is currently being implemented (Ministry of Education, 2014). The Strategy includes actions in all parts of the education system to improve the performance of the system and address the challenges identified above. The strategy also includes several activities to strengthen the non-formal education and vocational training system and to improve its quality. The development of a LLL system is essential for Turkey's economic and social development. Turkey is pursuing a course of development aligned with EU policy and set out in the National Strategy. For this purpose, as stated in the strategic plan, the priorities should be given and policies should be set out for the following issues:

- Increasing LLL culture and awareness within the society
- Increasing LLL opportunities and provision
- Increasing access to LLL opportunities
- LLL guidance and counselling
- Monitoring and evaluation of LLL activities
- RPL

#### **RPL IMPLEMENTATION**

RPL describes a process used by institutions offering education to public (e.g. adult learning centers, human resource professionals, employers, training institutions, colleges and universities) to evaluate skills and knowledge and competencies acquired by a person from any learning platform. In other words, RPL is process through which knowledge, skills and competencies can be recognized regardless of where they were acquired (Lenaghan, 2014). RPL is conducted under national vocational education and training systems since the late 1980s and continues to evolve as different VET systems evolve in Europe and around the world (Lafont and Pariat, 2012).

RPL allows people to demonstrate that they are capable of undertaking specific tasks or working in certain industries based on evidence of skills and knowledge gained throughout their life. RPL is a criterion-referenced assessment because skills and knowledge are assessed against a certain criteria. Each vocation or a specific skill for a job is described before and it is used as a standard or learning outcome to be achieved as a result of the learning or training activity for testing or assessment.

RPL is a new form of certification in Turkey as it is the case for most of the developing countries. Therefore promotion and awareness raising are two required actions to increase public awareness and understanding of RPL. A promotion campaign need to be implemented to explain what RPL is, how it works, where people can access RPL services, where they can get more information about RPL, and the opportunities that RPL may offer. This type of campaign will hopefully make the public become aware of the opportunities gained through an effective implementation of RPL (Draft Policy Paper, 2012).

There are many benefits to RPL. For learners, formal recognition of existing knowledge and skills may mean that learners do not have to spend more time going through training for things they already know and can do. Formal recognition for existing knowledge and skills can also improve adults' opportunities in the labour

market. Certificates gained through RPL may enable entry to further learning, and the RPL process itself can be valuable in identifying key gaps in knowledge and skill that need to be addressed.

To implement an RPL system Voc-Test Centres has to be established. The first step after establishment of Voc-Test Centres is the determination of competencies as part of learning outcomes described in qualifications, and the second is the establishment of systems to register RPL assessors and RPL advisers.

RPL also has benefits for the lifelong learning system as it can contribute to more efficient use of the resources. For example, employers would not have to train people who already have required knowledge and skills, and providers can adapt training programmes to respond to actual skills gaps.

### **A ROADMAP FOR A SUCCESSFUL LLL IMPLEMENTATION**

A successful implementation of LLL will be required to overcome the challenges listed in Section 4 above. However, before this step a wider acceptance and awareness of LLL in public need to be established. As seen in Figure 1 there is wide discrepancies among the EU countries in terms of participating LLL activities between ages 24-64. The U.S. data, however, showed higher participation rate than EU countries in the past decades. The participation rate in the US is about 46 percent of adults who had enrolled in a course during the preceding twelve months, an increase from 32 percent in 1991(Bond 2015). That shows how the development level of a country is related participation rate to LLL activities.

It is obvious that there is no universal strategy in implementing LLL for every country. That is to say, there is a clear need for each country to develop their own way to deal with issues in LLL implementation. However, there are four common steps to be taken as suggested in the literature (Bengtsson, 2013):

- Governments, social partners, civic society, and the education and research communities should establish a close cooperation
- A common roadmap should be accepted by all relevant stakeholders
- An adequate provision of Basic Skills training (BST) for adults especially for those with low qualifications should be provided
- A set of indicators need to be developed to track the implementation of LLL

Based on above ideas a roadmap for an effective LLL implementation is necessary. Then the question to be raised is “what should a LLL implementation roadmap include for developing countries in general?” The following can be used as a basic model:

1. Develop a structure of LLL: To do this a close collaboration among the stake holders need to be established. In centralized educational systems this can be a unit at the capital city and sub-units can be in local areas. To develop a strategy to increase public awareness of LLL: To use mass media and social forums to introduce advantages of LLL for adults.
2. Develop a framework to be used for vocation competencies for each job or skill: To do this a unit should be established as “Vocational Competency Development Unit”
3. Develop a strategy for recognition of prior learning: In order to increase public participation a way should be developed for recognition. In this process test centers (Voc-test Centers) should be established as indicated above.
4. Develop an accreditation system to monitor the LLL activities: A quality management office should be established to collect data from all parts of the system and suggest alternatives for further development of LLL implementation.

The above steps are not for a full establishment but rather it provides an idea for the basis of the LLL process in a country where there is a new attempt or just started actions on LLL.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

LLL is a terminology used over the last five decades. It is now widely accepted by almost all countries, from developed to the least developed one. Since knowledge growth rate and its transformation into technology

and its inevitable effects on the society are so high, LLL approach would be unavoidable for every country. At the same time, because of the globalization upsurge, no country can stay aside from this cycle. However, as indicated above, there is no straightforward recipe for the countries to adopt in developing and implementing LLL in an effective manner.

It is known that as public awareness increases about LLL activities and their benefit for finding or changing ones' job from the existing to a better one; it can always positively affect better implementation of LLL in a developing country. The US and EU figures provide supportive evidences for this idea. That is the reason when a country starting to establish an LLL system, it should start rising public awareness first as Turkey did recently in the LLL project (Draft Policy, 2012).

LLL, if developed with the ideas stated in Section 6 above, its beneficiaries will be able move around the globe easily and possibly develop better career opportunities in the job market. There are good examples noticed among EU countries as they developed a framework (EU, 2011) for LLL and tools for mobility within EU borders. Developing countries including the Arab States should use the experiences that the developed countries have gained during the development of a unique system. As mentioned above Arabic states still have very little progress towards a sound LLL system. Following the successful implementations in the world, a developing country can develop its own LLL system based on the existing tools, and considering the cultural and regional constraints.

As a final word, we argue that the roadmap presented above could be used as pillars of a new LLL system for developing countries. The most important initial step is to establish a joint platform which includes representatives from the business market, trade unions and syndicates, municipalities, government representatives as well as educators and other key figures in the society. Such an approach will hopefully contribute to developing countries to establish and implement their own LLL system.

**IJONTE's Note:** This article was presented at 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on New Trends in Education - ICONTE, 24-26 April, 2015, Antalya-Turkey and was selected for publication for Volume 6 Number 3 of IJONTE 2015 by IJONTE Scientific Committee.

#### BIODATA AND CONTACT ADDRESSES OF AUTHORS



**Prof. Dr. Ali YAZICI** is a full-time Professor and the Chairman of the Software Engineering Department at Atilim University, Ankara, Turkey. He received BS (1972), and MS (1974) degrees in Mathematics from the Middle East Technical University (METU), Ankara, Turkey. He has completed his PhD dissertation (1983) at the Computer Science Department, Waterloo University, Canada. His research interests include Parallel Computing, Cloud Computing, Big Data, and e-Topics. In the last 30 years he has been affiliated as a full-time academic staff with Middle East Technical University, TOBB University of Economics and Technology, and Atilim University (Turkey), Yarmouk University (Jordan), and Sultan Qaboos University (Oman). During his academic career, he acted as thesis supervisor of more than 30 MSc and PhD students. He is the author/co-author of more than 100 articles, books and research reports in the field of Computing and Informatics. Among many others, he is involved in "Promoting Turkey's LLL" EU project between 2010-2012 as a consultant and trainer. He is a founding member of Turkish Mathematics Foundation (1990- ) and Turkish Informatics Foundation (1990).

Prof. Dr. Ali YAZICI  
Atilim University, Department of Software Engineering  
06836 Incek, Ankara- TURKEY  
E Mail: [ali.yazici@atilim.edu.tr](mailto:ali.yazici@atilim.edu.tr)



Prof. Dr. Alipaşa AYAS is a fulltime Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey. H received undergraduate degree from Karadeniz Technical University Faculty of Education in 1985. His graduate degrees are MS from Karadeniz Technical University, Master in Education (Curriculum and Instruction-science education) from University of New Brunswick, Canada and PhD in Education (Curriculum and Instruction-science education) from Southampton University, U.K. He has had administrative roles at KTU, which includes 6-year deanship in the Faculty of Education. He has involved in several research projects including National Education Development Project, Basic Education Support Project (Effectiveness of Public Education Centers), MEBGEB Project and LLL Development Project for Turkey. He was a member of Turkish National Teacher Development Committee for three years. He is head of Association for Accreditation of Education Programs in Turkey. Also, he was a member of curriculum development committee in chemistry for 2013 and material development process for chemistry at secondary level. He published over 100 articles, co-authored several books and supervised 22 PhD and 30 Master theses.

Prof. Dr. Alipaşa AYAS  
Bilkent University, Graduate School of Education  
Bilkent University, 06800 Bilkent, Ankara- TURKEY  
E. Mail: [apayas@bilkent.edu.tr](mailto:apayas@bilkent.edu.tr)

## REFERENCES

- Arthur, J. (2009). Interim Report, *Recognition of Prior Learning: Mission 2*. TTVET Reform Project, Bangladesh.
- Bengtsson, J. (2013). *National strategies for implementing lifelong learning (LLL) – the gap between policy and reality: An international perspective*, Int Rev Educ. 59:343–352. DOI 10.1007/s11159-013-9362-4.
- Bernheim, C. T. and Chaui, M. de Souza (2003). *Challenges of the university in the knowledge society, five years after the World Conference on Higher Education*, Unesco Forum Occasional Paper Series Paper No.4.
- Bond, J. (2015). “Lifelong Learning - Evolution of the Lifelong Learning Movement, Implementation of Lifelong Learning, Ongoing Issues in Lifelong Learning, Conclusion”.  
<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2181/Lifelong-Learning.html> Accessed: 6 March 2015.
- Draft Policy Paper (2012), *Project for Promoting Life Long Learning in Turkey*, TR07H2.01-01/001, Ministry of Labor, Turkey.
- EC (2009). Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) OJ C 119, 28.5.2009 p2-10. Brussels.
- EC (2012). Education and Training Monitor EC: Brussels.
- European Commission (2001). *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*.
- EU (2006) Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Framework. Annex of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on key competences for lifelong learning published in the Official Journal of the European Union 30 December 2006.
- EU (2011). *Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning*. Official Journal of the European Union. 2011/C 372/01) 20 December 2011.  
<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/> Accessed: 8 March 2015.



Lafont, P. and Pariat, M. (2012) *Review of the RPL in member states in Europe* <http://www.adam-europe.eu/prj/9626/prd/4/1/Report-Review>. Last access date: 5 March, 2015.

Lenaghan, M. (2014). *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): does it provide a second chance for unemployed people?* Paper presented in National Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Conference, 23th – 26th February 2014. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

MEGEP (2006). *Driving Force for the Success of Turkey. Lifelong Learning Policy Paper*. Ankara. October 2006.

Ministry of Education (2014), Directorate of LLL:  
[http://hbogm.meb.gov.tr//meb\\_iys\\_dosyalar/2014\\_12/23105226\\_hbostratejibelgesi\\_2014\\_2018.pdf](http://hbogm.meb.gov.tr//meb_iys_dosyalar/2014_12/23105226_hbostratejibelgesi_2014_2018.pdf)  
Accessed: 7 March 2015.

OECD (2007). *Qualifications Systems, Bridges to Lifelong learning*.

OECD(2014). retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/recognitionofnon-formalandinformallearning-home.htm>, Accessed: 4 March, 2015.

Project for Promoting LLL in Turkey, Project Report TR07H2.01-01/001.