

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE AND ITS ACADEMIC STATUS IN ECONOMIC STUDIES

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Abstract: Practical experience represents an essential element in the development of students' professional competencies in the field of economics, ensuring the connection between theoretical knowledge and its application in real work contexts. The paper analyzes the academic status of the professional experience acquired by students during their employment, with a focus on European and national regulations that stipulate the conditions for its recognition as a non-auditory academic activity – “specialized practice.” The study examines the regulatory framework, documentation tools, and assessment methods of competencies, as well as the challenges related to standardization and formal recognition. The results highlight the discrepancies between educational policy intentions and their actual implementation in the university environment, while the conclusions emphasize the need for an integrated approach oriented towards digitalization and collaboration between universities and the business sector.

Keywords: practical experience, professional competencies, academic recognition, standardization, objective evaluation, formal knowledge.

JEL classification: I23, I20, M53.

Introduction

The training of specialists in the economic field requires a close correlation between theoretical preparation and practical experience. While theory provides students with the conceptual tools necessary to understand economic phenomena, practice enables them to apply this knowledge in solutions adapted to professional environments.

In a global context marked by accelerated changes and complex economic interdependencies, universities are called upon to combine traditional academic training with concrete opportunities for experiential learning. From this perspective, the role of higher education institutions is not limited to organizing internships but also includes the academic recognition of professional experience already acquired by some students. This process involves complex stages of identifying and documenting experience, assessing competencies, validating results, and issuing official certification, ultimately allowing the exemption from certain internships and their acknowledgment as a non-auditory academic activity – “specialized practice.”

Although the academic recognition of professional experience is practiced in universities with an economic profile, the regulation and organization of the process remain subjects of debate, especially regarding the methodology for correct identification and objective assessment of acquired competencies. The central issue lies in the absence of clear mechanisms for the standardization and equivalence of practical experience in relation to the formal academic pathway.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze European and national regulations regarding the recognition of practical experience and to highlight the challenges and perspectives for developing this dimension within economic education in the Republic of Moldova.

Methodology / Analytical Framework

The research is based on:

- a comparative analysis of European normative documents (EQF – European Qualifications Framework, ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, ESG – Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, the EU Council Recommendation of 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning) and national regulations (Education Code of the Republic of Moldova: no. 152 of July 17, 2014; Government Decision of the Republic of Moldova approving the National Qualifications Framework, no. 330 of 31.05.2023; Framework Regulation on internships in higher education, approved by the Ministry of Education Order no. 203 of 19.03.2014; university regulations of ASEM, USM, UTM, ULIM concerning *practica de specialitate*);
- synthesis of the specialized literature on the integration of practical experience in economic education;
- examination of European best practices (Germany – the dual system; France – apprenticeship contracts) in comparison with the situation in the Republic of Moldova.

This approach allows for both a theoretical and normative foundation and the identification of implementation gaps within the national context.

Results and Discussion

The European Perspective. The results of the analysis of the European framework demonstrate that the recognition of professional practical experience is an integral part of the modernization process of higher education. The key documents developed by the European Union establish principles and instruments that ensure the integration of non-formal and informal learning into the academic pathway.

A first fundamental instrument is the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which stipulates that all forms of learning—formal, non-formal, and informal—can be recognized if concrete outcomes can be demonstrated in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences (European Parliament and Council, 2008). Therefore, professional experience acquired outside the university may become part of a validated academic trajectory.

In addition, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) facilitates the equivalence of outcomes achieved in professional contexts with academic credits. This system, based on transparency and comparability, has become essential for student mobility and for the convergence of study programs within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (European Commission, 2015).

Another central document is the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG), which require higher education institutions to create transparent mechanisms for the assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (ENQA, 2015). In this regard, the ESG place the recognition of professional practical experience within a quality assurance framework, ensuring that the process does not become purely formal, but instead meets rigorous standards.

The comparative analysis, however, shows that although these instruments are generally accepted, their practical implementation differs from one country to another. In states with a flexible university tradition, such as France (through the system *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience – VAE*), the recognition of professional experience has reached an institutionalized and functional level (Ministère du Travail, 2019). In other countries, the process remains limited and often optional.

For the economic field, these developments have significant implications. Professional experience is recognized as an authentic source of competences—particularly in decision-making, market analysis, accounting, and financial management. Nevertheless, the diversity of professional

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experiences generates methodological difficulties: it is challenging to establish uniform criteria for equivalence among different experiences, even when they all belong to the economic sphere.

Thus, at the European level, the results of the analysis reveal a fragile balance between the need to valorize professional experience and the academic rigor of the recognition process

Adaptation to the Context of the Republic of Moldova. The situation in the Republic of Moldova only partially reflects these European trends. From a normative standpoint, the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova no. 152/2014 enshrines the principle of recognizing learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal contexts (Parlamentul Republicii Moldova, 2014). At the same time, the National Qualifications Framework is harmonized with the EQF, which creates the necessary premises for equating professional experience with academic results (Guvernul Republicii Moldova, 2023).

However, the results of the analysis show that practical implementation remains limited. Universities have developed certain internal regulations regarding the recognition of prior studies and competences, but actual application is sporadic. In many cases, procedures are reduced to the acknowledgment of employment or professional training certificates, without a systematic evaluation of professional experience directly accumulated in the workplace.

In the field of higher economic education, this situation generates several difficulties:

normative fragmentation. The lack of unified procedures means that universities decide individually on the mode of recognition, which reduces comparability across institutions.

- *formalism of evaluation.* Professional experience is often equated solely on the basis of supporting documents (employment contracts, job descriptions), without an actual assessment of the competences acquired.

- *lack of involvement from the economic sector.* The validation process remains predominantly academic, without the systematic participation of employers or professional organizations.

On the other hand, there are also significant opportunities. National strategies on education development and European integration promote alignment with EHEA standards and with European practices for validating non-formal and informal learning (Guvernul Republicii Moldova, 2014). In addition, the activity of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) includes, among its objectives, the development of mechanisms for recognizing professional competences (ANACEC, 2022).

Therefore, the results indicate that the Republic of Moldova is in a transitional phase: the legal and institutional framework exists, but coherence in practical application is lacking. The discussions highlight that the economic field could become a privileged testing ground for recognition mechanisms, given the applied nature of the competences required by the labor market.

In conclusion, the academic recognition of professional experience in the Republic of Moldova should not be regarded as a mere procedural addition, but as a strategic element in the modernization of higher economic education. For this, it is necessary to establish a mixed institutional framework—universities, the business sector, and ANACEC—that ensures rigorous and relevant validation of competences acquired in professional environments.

Conclusions

The analysis carried out shows that the academic recognition of professional practical experience constitutes an indispensable process for the modernization of higher economic education. At the European level, the EQF, ECTS, and ESG instruments provide the necessary framework for validating learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, including professional ones. In the Republic of Moldova, although the legal framework has been harmonized with the European one, practical implementation remains fragmented and insufficiently structured. To avoid formalism and ensure academic prestige, recognition must be

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based on rigorous evaluation mechanisms, carried out through the collaboration of universities, the business sector, and the relevant authorities.

Added Value

The contribution of this study lies in:

- highlighting the parallelism between European regulations and their limited application in the Republic of Moldova, with an emphasis on the economic field;
- providing a critical analysis of the risks and opportunities associated with the process of academic recognition of students' professional practical experience;
- emphasizing the necessity of a mixed institutional framework, including universities, the economic sector, and the relevant authorities, as a prerequisite for the credible validation of professional experience.

Thus, the article brings an integrated perspective on a phenomenon insufficiently explored in the local literature and offers practical guidelines for the development of educational policies.

Future Research Directions

This study was built on a documentary and comparative analysis. To deepen the research, several directions are required:

- empirical investigations through questionnaires and interviews with students, teaching staff, and employers, in order to identify perceptions and expectations regarding the recognition of professional experience;
- international comparative analyses between countries with advanced validation models (e.g., France, Germany) and the Republic of Moldova, in order to adopt best practices;
- study of the economic and social impact of introducing academic recognition mechanisms, in terms of professional insertion, mobility, and competitiveness on the labor market.

By exploring these directions, future research will be able to substantiate applicable recommendations for educational policies and university practice, contributing to the strengthening of the role of professional experience in the training of specialists in the economic field.

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