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Quality Assurance and the Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning

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Abstract:

Quality assurance in higher education extends beyond the boundaries of formal learning to encompass the recognition of non-formal and informal learning experiences. Non-formal and informal learning play a significant role in individuals' acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies. Recognizing the value of these alternative learning pathways and ensuring their quality is an essential aspect of quality assurance in higher education. This essay explores the significance of quality assurance in relation to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and its impact on lifelong learning, access to education, and overall educational quality.

Keywords:

Quality assurance - Higher Education - Informal Learning – Learning - Academia

Introduction

Quality assurance in higher education extends beyond the boundaries of formal learning to encompass the recognition of non-formal and informal learning experiences. Non-formal and informal learning play a significant role in individuals' acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies. Recognizing the value of these alternative learning pathways and ensuring their quality is an essential aspect of quality assurance in higher education. This essay explores the significance of quality assurance in relation to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and its impact on lifelong learning, access to education, and overall educational quality.

Understanding Non-formal and Informal Learning

Non-formal learning encompasses structured learning experiences that occur outside the formal education system. These experiences are intentional and designed to meet specific learning objectives. Examples of non-formal learning include workshops, training programs, professional development courses, and community-based learning initiatives. On the other hand, informal learning is spontaneous and unplanned, arising from daily life experiences, interactions, and self-directed learning. Informal learning occurs in various settings, such as workplaces, communities, and personal interests.

Recognizing non-formal and informal learning acknowledges the diverse pathways through which individuals acquire knowledge and skills. It acknowledges that learning is not limited to formal educational institutions and that individuals can gain valuable competencies through a wide range of experiences. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning promotes inclusivity by validating the knowledge and skills individuals acquire outside of traditional academic settings.

Understanding the nuances of non-formal and informal learning is crucial for quality assurance in recognition processes. Institutions must differentiate between these types of learning and develop appropriate frameworks for assessing and recognizing the learning outcomes associated with each. By doing so, institutions can ensure that individuals' achievements in non-formal and informal learning are acknowledged and valued, contributing to a more comprehensive and equitable educational landscape.

Ensuring Quality in the Recognition Process

Quality assurance plays a pivotal role in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning to ensure that the learning outcomes and competencies gained through these experiences are

valued and acknowledged appropriately. Establishing robust quality assurance mechanisms is essential to maintain the integrity and credibility of the recognition process.

One key aspect of quality assurance in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is the establishment of clear and transparent assessment criteria. Institutions need to define and communicate the learning outcomes and competencies that are eligible for recognition. This clarity ensures that the recognition process is consistent and fair, providing individuals with a clear understanding of what is expected and assessed. Assessment criteria should be aligned with industry standards and validated by experts in the field to ensure that the recognized learning outcomes are of high quality and relevance.

In addition to assessment criteria, quality assurance mechanisms should include reliable and valid assessment methods to evaluate non-formal and informal learning. Institutions may employ various methods, such as portfolio assessments, interviews, practical demonstrations, and work-based assessments, to assess individuals' knowledge and skills. These assessment methods should be designed to effectively capture and evaluate the learning outcomes and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal learning experiences. The assessment process should also involve trained assessors or evaluators who possess the necessary expertise to evaluate the quality and relevance of the recognized learning outcomes.

Furthermore, quality assurance in the recognition process should ensure consistency and comparability. Institutions need to establish mechanisms for reviewing and moderating assessment decisions to ensure that they are fair and consistent across different contexts and assessors. This ensures that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning maintains its credibility and is seen as a valuable credential by stakeholders, including employers and other educational institutions. The comparability of recognized learning outcomes allows for the transferability of credits or qualifications, facilitating individuals' educational and career mobility.

[Promoting Lifelong Learning and Access to Education](#)

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning supports the principles of lifelong learning and enhances access to education. Lifelong learning recognizes that individuals continue to learn and develop throughout their lives, and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning validates and encourages these continuous learning experiences.

Recognizing non-formal and informal learning promotes inclusivity by acknowledging diverse learning pathways and experiences. It allows individuals to gain recognition for their prior learning, regardless of how or where it was acquired. This recognition opens doors to further educational opportunities and facilitates individuals' progression in their educational and

career journeys. It provides a more comprehensive and holistic approach to education, valuing individuals' full range of knowledge and skills.

Moreover, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning promotes access to education by removing barriers and recognizing the learning individuals have already acquired. It acknowledges that individuals may have acquired relevant knowledge and skills through work experience, volunteering, or personal pursuits. By recognizing these learning experiences, institutions can offer flexible pathways for individuals to access higher education, reduce duplication of learning, and promote efficient use of resources. This inclusivity and flexibility contribute to widening participation in education and creating a more equitable and accessible educational landscape.

The promotion of lifelong learning through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning also encourages individuals to engage in continuous self-improvement and skill development. It emphasizes the value of lifelong learning as a tool for personal growth, career advancement, and adaptation to a rapidly changing world. By recognizing individuals' non-formal and informal learning experiences, institutions foster a culture of lifelong learning and empower individuals to pursue their educational goals throughout their lives.

Conclusion

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning is an integral part of quality assurance in higher education. It acknowledges the value of learning acquired outside of formal educational institutions and ensures that these learning experiences are recognized and valued. By establishing robust quality assurance mechanisms, institutions can ensure the integrity and credibility of the recognition process. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning promotes lifelong learning, facilitates access to education, and contributes to overall educational quality. By embracing and recognizing the diverse learning pathways of individuals, higher education institutions foster inclusivity, enhance educational opportunities, and create a more comprehensive and responsive educational ecosystem.

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