



Individual perceptions on the participant and societal functionality of non-formal education for youth: Explaining differences across countries based on the human development index



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore the extent that country-level developmental characteristics can explain perceived functionalities of local non-formal education. A literature-based distinction is made between participant functionality (inward focused) and societal functionality (outward focuses) of non-formal education. An empirical test is conducted for the international scouts and guides movement based on a sample of 2735 respondents from 68 countries. The results of a multi-level regression analysis suggest a crowding-out relationship between developmental capacity, quantified by the human development index (HDI), and societal functionality. In contrast, participant functionality remains constant despite differences between countries for the HDI.

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1. Introduction

Like for many terms including 'non', challenges still remain with respect to defining what non-formal education is rather than what it is not (Romi and Schmida, 2009). Such 'non'-terms often merely serve as an abstract umbrella term for cases that have to be classified outside of mainstream categories (Garrido, 1992). However, recent contributions have focused on exploring the typifying characteristics of various forms of non-formal education (Farrell and Mfum-Mensah, 2002; Madjar and Cohen-Malayev, 2013; Romi and Schmida, 2009). In particular, contributions focusing on the benefits of non-formal education compared to formal education are valuable as they pin-point the substantial value of non-formal education for young people (Hansen et al., 2003; Madjar and Cohen-Malayev, 2013; Morton and Montgomery, 2012).

With respect to the academic literature that has dealt with non-formal education, an interesting observation can be made. Early policy-oriented contributions have focused on how non-formal education can be a means to an end for reducing the gap between the poor and the rich (Coombs, 1976; Iredale, 1978; La Belle, 1981; Lall, 2011). From this perspective, non-formal education is often discussed for its value that it can have in society as a whole. More recent contributions have built on this notion where non-formal

education initiatives can be a way to "empower and embolden" rural communities and marginalized groups in society (Mfum-Mensah, 2004, p. 142; Mfum-Mensah, 2011; Wong and Balestino, 2001). However, various other forms of non-formal education can be found in developing countries, although (1) they might not be widespread known, (2) they are seldom the subject of scientific research, and/or (3) they are often denoted with context-specific names (Farrell and Mfum-Mensah, 2002). As a result, it remains unclear from the current literature to what extent all non-formal educational initiatives have this societal focus in developing countries.

In contrast, another stream of literature has focused, from a more educational and psychological perspective, on the individual benefits for participants in non-formal education (Madjar and Cohen-Malayev, 2013; Romi and Schmida, 2009). In contexts where formal education is well developed, these contributions focus relatively less on the societal benefits of non-formal education as a whole, but more on the specific skills and capabilities that participants can gain relative to what is learned in the formal educational system (i.e., the participant functionality of non-formal education).

Hence, at least two functionalities of non-formal education can be distinguished, that both have been focused on in particular contexts. Noteworthy exceptions are some recent qualitative studies that have outlined how societal (or community) functionality is inherently intertwined with participant benefits (Arkorful, 2013; Mfum-Mensah, 2009). For the context of Ghana, these studies document how participants can learn skills, while the

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community and other stakeholders are simultaneously empowered through collaboration in a non-formal educational initiative. Another remarkable and more quantitative study conducted in Bangladesh finds significant positive individual differences regarding personal basic skills for children involved in non-formal education compared to children from formal education and children without education (Nath et al., 1999). Such studies show that it would be hard to assume that particular functionalities are inherent or typifying for particular contexts. In contrast, the following proposition could be elaborated and investigated: The extent that functionalities are prevalent depends on the needs and available resources in a particular context.

Starting from this proposition, this study aims at clarifying how the perceived functionalities of (a particular form) non-formal education are related to contextual country characteristics. Answering this research question can give relevant insights for both academics and practitioners. From an academic point of view, such analysis can provide a better understanding of the relative importance of context when studying singled-out cases and/or contexts of non-formal education. From a practical point of view, it can create an insight in the context-specific opportunities and/or challenges that organizations encounter to increase their educational impact.

This study looks at the international scouts and guides movement as a mainstream form of non-formal education. The human development index (HDI) is used as a country-level variable to see how contextual characteristics relate to individual perceptions on the functionalities of scouting and guiding as a form of non-formal education. Hence, in this study the HDI is used to express the observable difference across countries regarding available resources (income) and regarding available infrastructure for formal education and healthcare, rather than to express ideological differences (Anand and Sen, 1994; Tikly, 2004). From this perspective, a distinction can be made between high-HDI countries and low-HDI countries, and it quantifies the relative extent that particular types of infrastructure are in place in a country. Therefore, in the context of this study, developed countries are defined as countries with a relative high HDI value, while developing countries are defined as countries with a relative low HDI value. Furthermore, as it is arduous and ambiguous to make a strict divide between two types of countries, i.e., developed versus developing countries, the continuous nature of the HDI gives a more nuanced and relative view on the infrastructure in place. Therefore, when developed versus developing countries are contrasted with each other in this study, it regards two ends of a continuum, in which many in-between options are possible.

2. Two functionalities of non-formal education

Non-formal education distinguishes itself from formal education and from informal education (Tuijnman and Boström, 2002). Compared to formal education, non-formal education is less focused on the general and overall public needs of large groups in a society. Non-formal education, is therefore often seen as a complementary “[. . .] educational activity carried on outside the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children” (Tuijnman and Boström, 2002, p. 97). Compared to informal education, which contains all acquiring of knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from any kind of experiences that one encounters in life, non-formal education happens in an organized and structured way. This distinction is relevant as non-formal education thus (1) requires a minimal level of resources to support an organizational structure, (2) can be applied to focus on a particular group of people or niche activity, and (3) can be strategically managed in order to reach particular educational goals for such a targeted group. As an example, Mfum-Mensah

(2003) and Mfum-Mensah and Friedson-Ridenour (2014) discuss how community initiatives are managed for a targeted group of rural areas in Ghana. Consequently, non-formal education, as it is currently mainly provided by civil society and/or non-profit service organizations, can fill the gap between what is left open by formal education (private or public) (Frumkin, 2002; La Belle, 2000) and what is naturally transferred through social interaction in one's cultural context (Duke, 1986; Tuijnman and Boström, 2002). Furthermore, given its organizational structure and the specific target group, it can be actively managed to provide educational solutions for concrete and tangible problems (Farrell and Mfum-Mensah, 2002).

Within this overall functionality of non-formal education compared to other forms of education, multiple sub-areas or dimensions can be identified. In the context of this study, a twofold distinction is used: an inward or participant functionality and an outward or societal functionality. The inward or participant functionality of non-formal education focuses on achieving goals and gaining benefits for the individuals joining in the non-formal education. These benefits have been the focus of attention in the educational and psychological literature and regard internalization of pro-social norms, identity formation, skills acquisition and building an experience repository (Hansen et al., 2003; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2008; Madjar and Cohen-Malaye, 2013; Morton and Montgomery, 2012; Madjar and Cohen-Malaye, 2013; Morton and Montgomery, 2012). In contrast, the outward or societal functionality regards the goals and benefits for the community or society in which a non-formal educational program is deployed. These benefits are more commonly dealt with in policy and macro-sociological bodies of literature and regard widespread democratization, minority empowerment and institutionalization of multifaceted learning (Bock, 1976; Hoppers, 2011; Paulston, 1980).

Such dual functionality is at the origin of several management challenges of organizations providing non-formal education. Both the participant and societal functionality have to be taken into account for decisions regarding attracting and allocating resources, addressing potential participants, involving stakeholders, setting up management structures, etc. In many nonprofit organizations the organizational mission often combines multiple goals that can complement each other with respect to achieving a larger impact, but that also have to be traded off when scarce resources have to be allocated. As a result, the organizational processes for delivering non-formal education have to be set-up in such a way that an optimal outcome is achieved through combining and trading-off the different functionalities.

However, these necessary trade-offs are in fact paradoxical in nature when taking into account country-level characteristics, such as local needs and availability of resources. In developed countries (i.e., a context where a sustainable infrastructure is in place and many potential resources for non-formal education are available) one could expect that functionalities are well developed due to the availability of means. Therefore, a crowding-in relationship might be likely where the availability of infrastructure and resources is positively related with the provision of non-formal education (e.g., similar to the processes described in Ahmed and Miller, 2000 and Ziemek, 2006). Over time such crowding-in relatedness implies an increase of non-formal education provision when countries further develop the infrastructure for economic activities, formal education and healthcare.

In contrast, in developing countries, where fewer resources are available, the needs for non-formal education might be higher (Farrell and Mfum-Mensah, 2002; Hoppers, 2011). Consequently, the need for non-formal education might be reduced in developed countries as economic development, formal education, and healthcare services already provide solutions for many needs. This would indicate a crowding-out relationship, where the

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