Role of Formal and Non-Formal Modes of Education in Promoting Learning Experiences

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Abstract

Both formal and non-formal modes of education play a significant role in promoting learning experiences of an individual. Due to flexible nature of non-formal education it can provide learners lifelong opportunity to learn, develop skills required for employability or to start own business etc. Formal education is characterized by structured curricula, institutional settings, and standardized assessments that have traditionally been the dominant mode of knowledge transfer. The non-formal mode of education is viewed as more effective for developing practical skills and real-world applications, while formal education is seen as essential for academic knowledge and intellectual depth. These findings suggest the need for a deeper examination of how learners perceive and value these two educational approaches.

Keywords: Formal education, non-formal education, learning experiences

I. Introduction

Education plays a vital role in shaping individuals and society. It is the bedrock of human development. It provides the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes for personal growth and active participation in society. While traditional education has been primarily delivered in formal settings like schools and universities, non-formal education systems have emerged, offering flexibility, practicality, and accessibility for lifelong learning and skill development. Formal education is characterized by structured curricula, institutional settings, and standardized assessments that have traditionally been the dominant mode of knowledge transfer. However, the growing prominence of non-formal education, which is more flexible and tailored to specific needs, has led to a re-evaluation of its role in the broader educational landscape.

Non-formal education is often considered more flexible and able to quickly address learning needs. According to Rogers (2021), it allows learners to engage in self-guided, hands-on learning, which encourages independence and continuous learning. A comparative study by Mahoney (2019) found that non-formal education is viewed as more effective for developing practical skills and real-world applications, while formal education is seen as essential for academic knowledge and intellectual depth. These findings suggest the need for a deeper examination of how learners perceive and value these two educational approaches.

II. Objectives of the study:

1. To study the strengths and weaknesses of both formal and non-formal mode of education.

2. To study both formal and non-formal mode of education in a comparative way.

III. Methodology of the study:

III.1 Sources of data

To meet the objectives of this study the investigators used secondary sources like books, journals etc. and e-material from internet such e-journals, e-Library and different free educational website.

IV. Delimitations of the study:

a. The study is delimited to secondary data only.

V. Discussion

Education has undergone major changes and expansions, with both structured and unstructured approaches playing vital parts in enabling learning. A comparative analysis of learners' perspectives on both formal and informal modes is vital for comprehending how each contributes to enriching learning experiences. Extensive research has explored how students view these two interconnected yet different types of education. This review summarizes studies on learners' perspectives on formal and informal education, focusing on learners' perceptions regarding the effectiveness, adaptability, relevance, and outcomes of each.

Formal Education: Its perceived strengths and weaknesses

Formal education is defined by its structured environment, adherence to curricula, and recognized certification, often delivered in traditional settings like schools and universities. It is typically characterized by a structured curriculum, organized learning environments, and clearly defined goals. Learners often associate formal education with academic achievement and professional advancement, as it provides recognized qualifications worldwide. It provides learners with a sense of direction through clearly delineated stages of education, from elementary school through higher education (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). According to OECD reports (2018), learners in formal institutions tend to trust the content delivered by certified educators and value the accreditation that comes with completing formal education, which makes it the preferred mode for those seeking credentials for higher education or professional careers (OECD, 2018).Several studies suggest that learners appreciate the credibility and structured nature of formal education. According to Simpson (2020), formal education provides students with essential foundational skills and qualifications that are recognized by employers and society. This accreditation provides a clear advantage, as learners often see formal degrees and certifications as key to career advancement and social mobility (OECD, 2018). Learners also value formal education's consistency and well-established frameworks, which help standardize the knowledge and skills being taught. The presence of trained teachers and fixed curricula is seen as beneficial for acquiring deep academic knowledge and discipline (Schugurensky, 2018).

Despite its advantages however, studies have highlighted perceived drawbacks of formal education. Several studies point to its rigid structure as a significant limitation. Formal education is often perceived by learners as inflexible, leaving little room for creativity or

personalized learning paths (Billett, 2021). The focus on standardized testing and examinations, for instance, has been criticized for promoting rote learning rather than encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Mulenga & Marbán, 2020).Moreover, the curriculum is often seen as too theoretical, leaving learners with limited opportunities to apply their knowledge to real-world scenarios (Schugurensky, 2018). This theoretical orientation can result in a mismatch between what students learn and the practical skills needed in the workforce.

Non-Formal Education: Its perceived strengths and weaknesses

Non-formal education operates outside the rigid structures of formal education and includes a wide range of learning activities such as workshops, vocational training, community-based learning programs, and online courses (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Non-formal education is often seen as more adaptable to learners' individual needs and schedules, making it an appealing option for those seeking practical skills or personal enrichment.

Learners perceive non-formal education as highly flexible and relevant to their immediate needs. Research by Billett (2021) suggests that non-formal education is favoured by adult learners and professionals because it allows for self-directed learning and accommodates individual schedules. This flexibility is particularly valuable for learners with work or family commitments, as it enables them to balance their responsibilities while pursuing education. Non-formal education is viewed as more inclusive for those who may not have access to traditional schooling due to time, money, or location constraints. Learners appreciate the flexibility in pace, content, and delivery, which allows them to integrate learning into their personal and professional lives (Billett, 2021).

Another notable advantage is the practicality of non-formal education. Learners often report that non-formal programs are directly applicable to their real-world professional or personal lives (Simpson, 2020). Learners pursuing professional development or technical skills through non-formal means often find it provides immediate, practical benefits applicable to their work or interests (Schugurensky, 2018). Non-formal education helps connect academic knowledge with practical application in daily life (Schugurensky, 2018). This practical orientation is one of the primary reasons why non-formal education is increasingly popular, especially in areas such as technical skills training, professional development, and personal hobbies (Means et al., 2020).

Continuous learning and personal development are increasingly crucial as people recognize that education does not end with formal schooling. Non-formal education plays a vital role in promoting lifelong learning by providing ongoing opportunities for skill development and personal growth. Experts highlight that learners view non-formal education as a crucial part of lifelong learning, especially in a time of rapid technological changes and evolving job markets (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020) . Non-formal education offers paths for learners to engage in personal enrichment, professional skill-building, and community involvement long after completing formal education. This contributes to a more dynamic and adaptable workforce, as individuals continuously refines their skills to respond to emerging trends and challenges (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

However, studies also highlight some drawbacks of non-formal education. One of the primary limitations is the lack of formal accreditation, which can reduce the perceived value of the learning experience in comparison to formal education (Schugurensky, 2018). Since non-formal education programs are often not formally recognized by employers or educational institutions, learners may struggle to leverage these experiences for career advancement (Simpson, 2020). Additionally, there are concerns about the quality control of non-formal education, especially in contexts where programs are not regulated or standardized (Billett, 2021). This can create inconsistencies in the depth and scope of the learning content provided, leading some learners to question the overall effectiveness of non-formal education. Despite these concerns, non-formal education remains increasingly popular due to its focus on the learner's needs and flexibility.

Comparative perceptions on both formal and non-formal approaches

- Formal education is valued for its structured approach, which provides learners with a sense of direction and purpose. However, non-formal education offers flexibility that is particularly appealing to adult learners or those balancing multiple responsibilities (Means et al., 2020).

- Formal education's recognized accreditation is essential for career advancement and social mobility, while non-formal education excels in providing practical, hands-on learning experiences (Schugurensky, 2018).

- Formal education's standardized curricula ensure consistency but can be limiting in terms of personalizing learning experiences. Non-formal education allows learners to tailor their learning paths to their specific needs, fostering a sense of ownership over the educational process (Simpson, 2020).

The literature reveals that learners appreciate both formal and non-formal modes of education for different reasons. Formal education's structured and accredited nature makes it a valuable foundation for academic and professional success, but its rigid structure and theoretical focus may not meet all learners' needs. Non-formal education, on the other hand, offers flexibility, practicality, and relevance, though it lacks the formal recognition that some learners require for career progression.

A comparative analysis of learners' perceptions underscores the importance of integrating both formal and non-formal modes of education. By doing so, educators can offer learners a more comprehensive and flexible learning experience that meets the demands of the modern world. As the boundaries between formal and non-formal education continue to blur, blended learning models that combine the strengths of both modes are likely to become the norm in promoting lifelong learning and skill development.

Integration of formal and non-formal modes (Blended learning)

Blended learning combines both formal education and non-formal modes of learning. Learners appreciate this approach as it allows them to benefit from both structured formal education and the flexibility of non-formal learning. Studies have found that learners in blended programs report higher engagement and satisfaction compared to those in solely

formal settings. A study by Garrison and Kanuka (2018) found that learners involved in blended learning programs reported higher levels of engagement and satisfaction compared to those in purely formal settings. The integration of online non-formal courses, internships, and community-based programs into formal education creates more opportunities for learners to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings (Garrison & Kanuka, 2018).

Learners increasingly favour blended models that integrate the structured and accredited nature of formal education with the flexibility, relevance, and learner-centred focus of non-formal education (Means et al., 2020). Blended learning approaches allow learners to obtain formal qualifications while simultaneously engaging in self-directed, practical learning activities. This hybrid model is particularly appealing in the context of lifelong learning, where individuals need to continuously develop new skills to remain competitive in a rapidly changing job market (Garrison & Kanuka, 2018).

However, challenges remain in implementing blended learning effectively, particularly due to potential technological barriers. Learners have expressed concerns about the potential for technological barriers, especially in low-resource settings where access to online learning may be limited (Means et al., 2020). Additionally, there is a need for better alignment between formal and non-formal educational standards to ensure that learners can receive adequate recognition for their achievements in both realms (Means et al., 2020).

Learners have different views on formal and informal education, as each offers unique benefits and drawbacks. Formal education is seen as valuable for its structure, certification, and standardized learning goals, while informal education is appreciated for its flexibility, relevance, and accessibility. As educational needs evolve due to societal and technological changes, there is an increasing acknowledgment of the need for a combined approach that leverages the strengths of both formal and informal education. This blended approach not only supports continuous learning but also offers a more comprehensive and personalized learning experience for individuals.

VI. Conclusion

This study shows the distinct benefits and limitations of both formal and informal education in promoting learning experiences. Learners recognize the value of formal education for its structure, consistency, and accreditation, but they also appreciate the flexibility, relevance, and accessibility of informal education. Learners prefer a combined approach, combining the strengths of both types of education, to support their lifelong learning needs. Based on these findings, educators and policymakers should consider developing more flexible and inclusive educational models that incorporate both formal and informal learning opportunities. This could enhance learners' experiences and better prepare them for the dynamic and ever-changing demands of the modern world.

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