

The Management of Non-formal Education in Romanian Learning System

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Non-formal education can be defined as a form of education implemented by school in partnership with different educational institutions, using extracurricular activities, to help students deepen knowledge acquired in schools. Its' importance consist in fact that non-formal education help pupils to better understand the knowledge that they learned during the compulsory classes and have the opportunity to develop some skills like cooperation, trust, respect, communication, self-confidence and so on. The aim of this research was to analyze the impact of the non-formal education upon students and teachers from Bihor County, Romania. The instrument used was a questionnaire with 18 questions. The sample consisted of 156 teachers from pre-primary, primary, secondary and high schools from Bihor County, Romania. The results show that the majority of respondents understand the importance of non-formal education in pupils' development and accept to involve them in different extracurricular activities such as trips, visits, exhibiion, sports, other competition and so on.

The problem

The problems facing the knowledge society are becoming more and more complex and cover the areas of economy, social, politics, culture, demography, human rights etc. Postmodernism and globalization have made these problems go beyond national boundaries and become specific to the whole world. In these circumstances, education plays a fundamental role in human preparation to meet the challenges of the contemporary world. Formal education from school is very important, but is not enough to satisfy the peoples huge need skills. Therefore, the role of non-formal and informal education is to assist the formal one and together, by a holistic approach, to contribute to building a harmonious and creative personality of today's students, tomorrow's active citizens of society (Maroama Marinescu, 2013).

Non-formal education (NFE) includes a combination of structured, organized and institutionalized activities implemented outside the

classroom or offered as optional educational activities. NFE completes the formal one and it consists of an extremely large range of flexible activities, which are better adjusted to the needs and interests of individuals. Certain radio and TV programs that focus strictly on training a certain segment of the population can also be included in the category of NFE. As a result, the target group of NFE is extremely large and can include pupils, students, adults, people facing difficulties etc., while the providers of NFE can be educational institutions, parents' associations, children and youth organizations, non-governmental organizations and so on (Blândul, 2008:21).

Considering the definition of non-formal education proposed by literature, according with whom it is achieved through organized activities outside the formal school curriculum, we can understand why non-formal education is interesting form and other agents / organizations who have other duties too. We could refer here, for example, to media whose basic role is the dissemination of information to the public, but in the same time, should educate those people who are informed. Another example might be the church, having role in promoting faith, culture and traditions of a people, but also in achieving Christian moral in citizens' education. Non-governmental organizations operating in different domains (social, cultural, political etc.), but, in the same time, contribute for increasing the education both their members and beneficiaries. Perhaps more people would be tempted to believe that even the family is a basic factor of non-formal education. Indeed, the family has a great educational role, but rather aimed at the informal sphere, unorganized, unstructured, without specific purpose and methods well-developed, but with a significant impact in shaping the personality of students. So as we said, non-formal education take place out of the classroom' rigors, but otherwise, respect the same rules specific for any other teaching activities. Thus, non-formal education should be carried out by the specialized structure, with qualified personnel in the field and proper logistics intended purpose. We note also that those mentioned factors act in an interdependent way, building a really educational system (Bradea et al., 2012).

Depending on the organization, the main forms of extracurricular activities specific to non-formal education can include the following ones (Ezechil, 2012:70-75):

- *Walk* – 1-2 hours in the village, the students get information about traffic laws, the place they are visit, people, customs etc.;
- *Tourist visits* – must be prepared in advance by obtaining the necessary approvals and a competent and well inform guide;
- *Hiking* (2-4 hours) – are required careful selection of the route, providing appropriate equipment, constant speed

(about 3 km/h), the dosage of personal effort, 10-15 minute breaks per hour;

- *Trip* – travel on foot or by public transport, with an educational aim, recreation or tourism. Trips can be county or inter-county study;
- *Expedition* – tourist activity which has objectives of research, with a duration of 10-14 days on a particular theme. Type of expedition: geological, geographical, biological, historical, ethnological, mixed and so on;
- *School competitions* – promoting the idea of competition and performance for a students with high skills and special interests in science, art crafts, arts, civic, sports, etc. School competitions emphasize cultural values and fundamental ethical and fair-play spirit of the competitors.
- *School circles* – are complementary for scholar curricula and scholar syllabi, these activities are optional, which means that can participate all students who are interested in the topic discussed;
- *School celebrations* – festive events are organized on the occasion of important moments in the the school staff or community' life. Frequency of such celebrations are found, predominantly, in preschool and primary education and less in the secondary one.

Of course, teachers have complete freedom to choose any of these extracurricular activities. Expressed preferences should take into account the pedagogical objectives, specific of pupils' age and personality, their interests, existing human and material resources, the availability of educational agents to be involved in the development of such events, the geographical and socio-cultural particularities of local area etc. Moreover, these extracurricular activities could be introduced into an optional scholar curriculum, according to which, each institution is free to turn them into interesting courses (see, for example, school discipline entitled "*History of Jazz*" that Romanian Ministry of National Education wants to introduce in optional curricula in primary school). Such information can successfully complete those received through formal education and can contribute to a global vision of the students on the environment (Haar-Muhonen et al., 2011).

The objectives

Based on these considerations, the main aim of this research was the identification of teachers' perceptions about the status and role of non-formal education in students' personality development. Specifically, the objectives of our research were: (1) identify the level in which teachers conceptualize non-formal education; (2) analyzing the main characteristics (advantages and limitations) of this form of education and (3) establishing the main extracurricular activities that teachers realize or would like to implement in the context of non-formal education. We believe that they should be the most important dimensions that make up the profile of non-formal education in teachers' projection.

The subjects

The sample of the research consisted of 156 people (N = 156), all of them teachers from early childhood to secondary educational institutions in Bihor county, Romania. The people included in the sample belonged to the following categories: according to gender 62.8% females and 37.2% males; according to the school stage: preschool – 16.9% / primary school – 31.2% / secondary school – 43.8% / high school – 8.3%; according to urban-rural classification: from urban area – 63.8% / from rural area – 36.2%. The simple random sampling procedure was used for choosing the people of the sample.

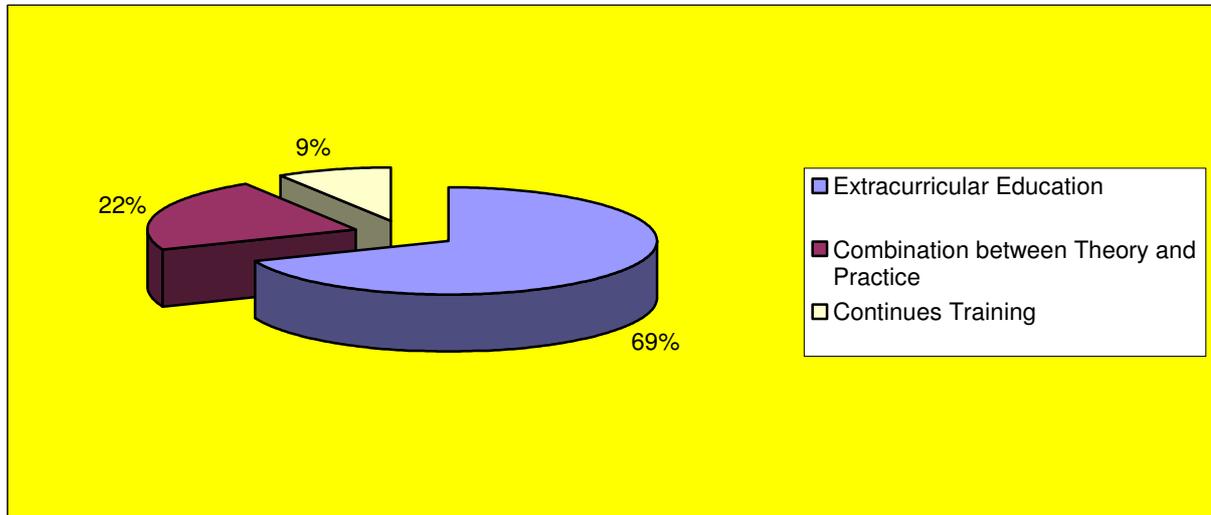
The methodology

The instrument used in this research was a questionnaire that consisted of 23 questions, with 12 close-ended questions and 11 open-ended ones. The questions referred to the following indicators: defining the concepts specific to NFE, establishing the main advantages / limitations of the NFE program, identifying the most interesting activities offered within the NFE program and the pupils' participation rate in them, as well as suggesting ways to optimize the NFE program. The questionnaire was updated to the Internet and it was filled out in academic year 2014. The quantitative interpretation of results was represented by computing the statistic frequency of answers and was presented in 5 pictures.

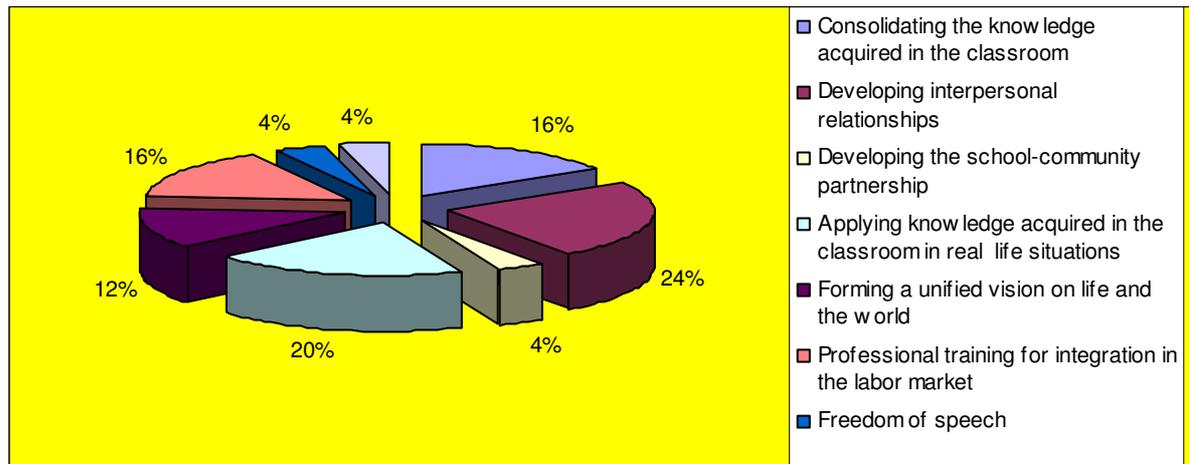
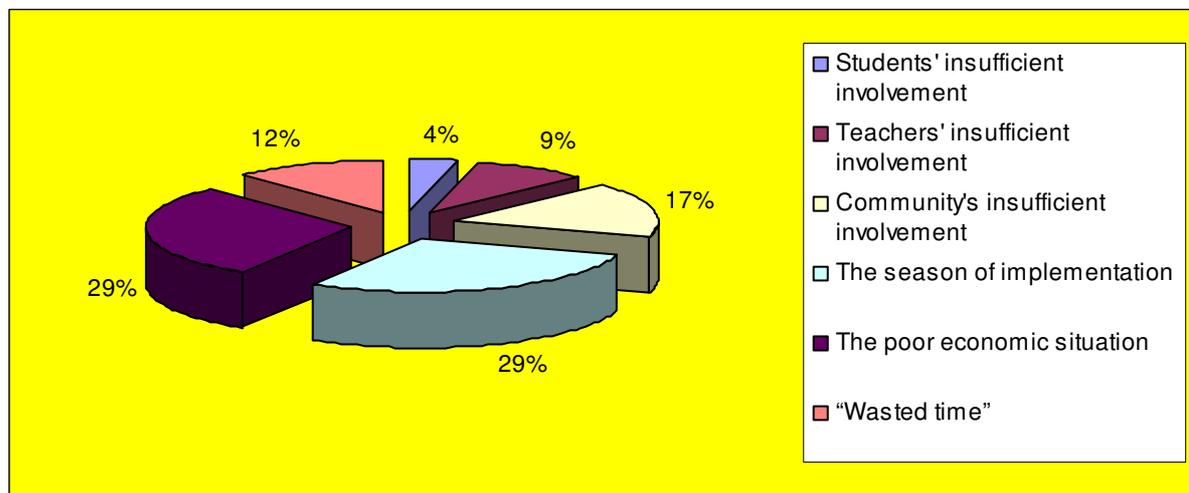
The results

The obtained results are very interesting and can be present in the following pictures.

Picture 1. *Definition of Non-Formal Education*

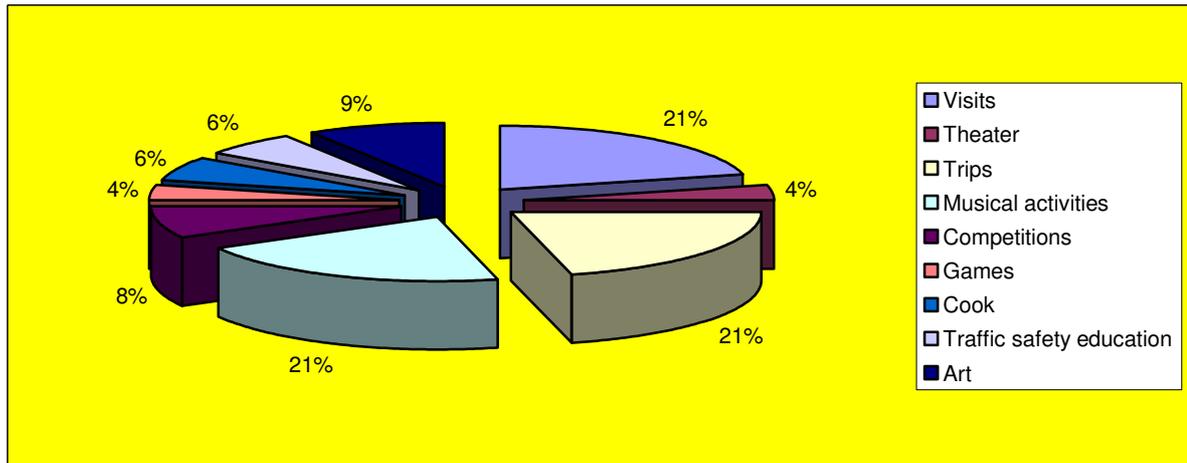


A first aspect of this research note is to analyze the level of non-formal education conceptualization by the teachers (Picture 1). Thus, although the items that require the definition of "non-formal education" was a open ended one (with free answers from teachers), most of them have demonstrated that they understand the correct meaning. In this sense, 69% of respondents felt that non-formal education is that form of education that takes place outside school through extracurricular activities, 22% considering it a form of education that combines theory with practice and 9% a seen as a form of continuing professional development. Although they didn't know a proper definition of NFE according with literature, most respondents can define it through their features and usefulness. In fact, we believe that such an approach is not wrong, as long as the proposed definition contains all specific characteristics of non-formal education.

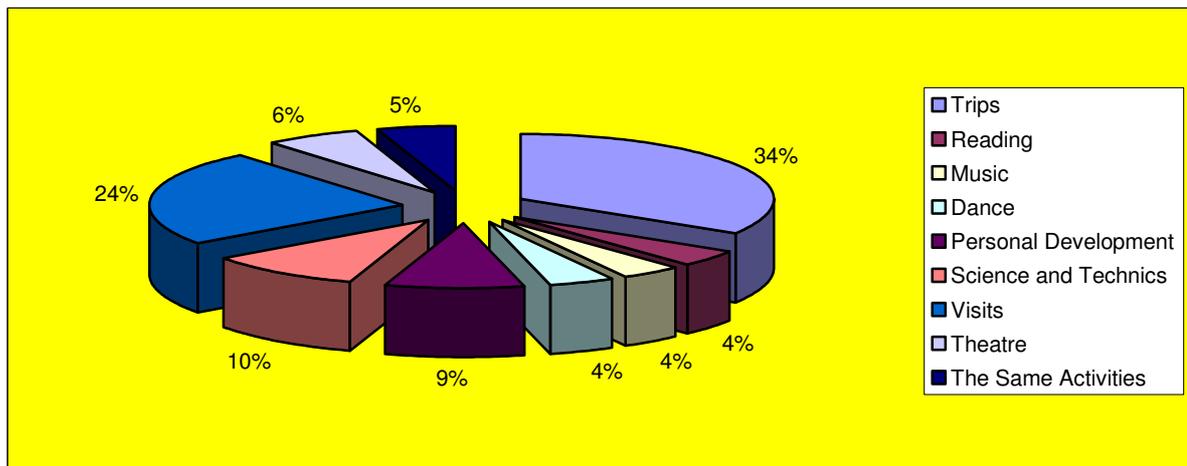
Picture 2. *The Main Advantages of Non-Formal Education*Picture 3. *The Main Limitations of Non-Formal Education*

Analyzing the Picture 2 and 3, we can see that, according to the respondents' general opinions, the main advantages of the "To know more, to be better!" program are: developing interpersonal relationships between the educational factors involved, consolidating knowledge acquired in the classroom, as well as applying this knowledge in real life situations and professional training for integration in the labor market. On the other side, the main limitations of the program include those of economic nature, choosing a season in which the weather conditions are inappropriate for outdoor activities, as well as the modest support given by communities for schools. It was surprising to see that 12.5% of the respondents consider this program a "waste of time", which suggests that these people do not understand the importance of NFE in the development of students.

Picture 4. *The Main Extracurricular Activities Carried Out in Non-Formal Education*



Picture 5. *The Main Extracurricular Activities that Could be Carried Out in Non-Formal Education*



From Picture 4 we can observe that the extracurricular activities carried out by the teachers within different programs of non-formal education program center around visits to various places of interest, trips, as well as musical activities. Picture 5 shows what teachers would like to implement if their disposal resources would allow. Thus, we see that all the options are polarized around visits and trips, but there are other preferences such as: scientific and technical activities, self-knowledge and personal development, performing arts (theater and cinema, dancing) etc. However, 5% of respondents do not want other activities than those already implemented, which could be explained either by the lack of ideas and resources needed to implement new activities, either by the fact that what is done in school is good and not be changed, either by professional sufficiency that these teachers demonstrate. We believe that increased creativity

is required for identification of new extracurricular activities in which students participate with pleasure.

Discussion

Literature (Mellado et al., 1999; Berthold et al., 2012; Mariana Marinescu, 2013, etc.), the results of different research and common sense tells us that, in secondary education, the most frequently chosen extracurricular activities in non-formal education programs are: visits, excursions and artistic activities. Motivation seems quite simple and is related to the tradition that was established around preferences for these extracurricular activities and relatively affordable costs posed by such events. On the other hand, if resources allow them, many teachers would diversify their options for organizing various extracurricular activities, including the traditional visits and trips, but, also, scientific and technical activities, reading clubs and literary creation, self-knowledge and personal development elements of theater and cinema, sports etc. Certainly, the organization of such activities is more complex and requires bigger effort from teachers, but the effects are very important for students, helping them to develop cognitive and affective-volitional processes, aesthetic sense, the ability to interact in a positive way, the self-confidence to discover their talents, so on (Ezechil et al., 2012:75). In these circumstances, we believe that is necessary to create a legal framework to encourage teachers to organize as many and as diverse extracurricular activities, increasing in this way the efficiency and effectiveness of students.

Another aspect that deserves discussion is that of the factors that can influence the students' participation rate in extracurricular activities. The specialized literature (Feldman & Matjiasko, 2007; Stearns & Glennie, 2010, etc.) mentions some of them, such as: the results obtained by students in the compulsory courses, the school's size, level of organization and position within the educational network, the students' background, their character traits etc.. The students' participation rate in NFE is high when they benefit from family support, have good school results, are open to new challenges, study in a well-known and well-organized school, are involved in various community associations etc. Moreover, we can add one more factor to those already mentioned: the psycho-pedagogical experience of teachers, which is strongly connected to the level of their professional training. Thus, the teachers with a longer teaching experience possess a much larger range of resources to properly organize and manage NFE extracurricular activities. Being offered a rich educational offer, students can get involved much more

responsibly than in the case when the activities offered consist of only a few options. On the other hand, teachers acquire this kind of experience both through their every day activity in the classroom and through continued professional training. Unfortunately, quite often these training courses address superficially the issue of NFE, which results in poor psycho-pedagogical training in this respect. Therefore, developing a continued professional training program in the field of NFE is utmostly needed in order to optimize the quality of this form of education, which, in turn, will significantly impact the development of the students' personality.

Conclusion

A first conclusion would be that most teachers understand the correct meaning of "non-formal education", regarded as a form of education achieved outside the formal school curriculum. Even if a definition can not produce in a very high academic level, teachers have success to correctly identify a specific notes, advantages or limits non-formal education.

Options for extracurricular activities that can be performed in non-formal education are based on the tradition of the school, the human and material resources available and the ease of their implementation. The most frequent organized extracurricular activities are: visits, excursions and artistic activities, but teachers would like to implement still other activities such as: technical and scientific ones, self-awareness and personal development etc. It was found that the participation rate of students in extracurricular activities also increase when educational offers is rich, well-structured and well-grounded methodological and psycho-pedagogical.

To optimize non-formal educational programs, we believe that os very important to allocate material resources necessary to create the possibility of organizing and participation of students in a large number at extracurricular activities specific NFE. This aspect can be achieved by the accumulation of experience in the department due to daily activities carried out by students and teachers by attending various training courses in the field of non-formal education . Whatever option is chosen, we believe that the priority is to increase the quality of education, so that the main beneficiary is the student able to effectively integrate into the society in which hey lives.

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