

## The Influence of Student Participation on Non-formal Educational Activities on their School Performance

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### Abstract

*Students' participation in structured non-formal education activities, organized in educational units, is an important element because it contributes to the development of their personality, and helps students to form positive skills towards learning, acquire skills, and problem-solving strategies. According to Feldman & Matjasko (2007), non-formal education activities have positive effects on students through better school performance; lower dropout rate; better psychological state, increased self-esteem, less worries about the future; reduced feeling of social isolation; and low level of delinquent behaviors. The present study aims to analyze whether the development of a program of non-formal educational activities, designed, organized, and carried out by teaching staff in close collaboration with other educational partners such as parents, and NGOs, contributes to increasing the school performance of students from primary. The value of the Pearson correlation index confirms that in the case of students who participate in non-formal activities in the formal space, the school performances, and qualifications in the subjects MEM, M, CLR, and LLR, are superior to those who do not participate in these activities.*

**Keywords:** education, non-formal activity, school performance;

### Introduction

The psychological basis of non-formal education is identified in constructivism (Taylor, 2006). The initiators of non-formal education establish the structure of social teaching and its epistemological principles, which represent conditions for learning by participating and encouraging the community. From the constructivist perspective, learning takes place through such interactions between participants, students, learners and teachers, instructors, facilitators, and animators. Participants construct knowledge about their world by interacting with their environment (Ornstein & Levine, 2006).

Cognitive learning theory implies that different learning processes can

be explained by analyzing mental processes. By engaging effective cognitive processes, learning is easier, and new information can be stored in memory for a long time. On the other hand, inefficient cognitive processes lead to learning disabilities, which can be observed at any time during an individual's life. In human-environment interactions, human beliefs, ideas, and cognitive skills are influenced by external factors, such as parental support, stressful environments, or warm climates. In peer interaction, a person's cognitive process will affect their behavior; In addition, performing this behavior can change their way of thinking. Actions affect and change the environment. For effective and positive learning to occur, an individual must possess positive

personal characteristics, exhibit appropriate behaviors, and remain in a supportive environment.

The major sociological principles of non-formal education include multi-sectoral activities, close community relations, and economic development at either the individual or societal level.

The interrelationship at the level of non-formal educational activities contributes to improving the social well-being of the community of which we are a part. Thus, active participation through the involvement of community members is impetuously necessary for the achievement and success of these activities. Individual involvement in the planning and management of every aspect of the program of non-formal educational activities creates a sense of ownership among participants and increases the relevance of these activities to their needs. The participation of individuals in non-formal educational activities allows the integration of education in the procedural and social structures, in which they are engaged in daily activities (Riezen, 1996).

Nonformal educational activities are directly influenced by the formation of students' social competence. Their social experiences, as well as the motivational, cognitive, behavioral, and social value components of social competence, can influence the successful implementation of the proposed non-formal activities.

Students' social relationships following participation in non-formal educational activities are extended into relationships dependent on reciprocity, those relationships in which the participants rely more and more on each other. These actions

emphasize similarity in attitudes, needs, and values, relying on social interactions that involve an exchange of information or goods, not just on the possibility of two individuals interacting (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978).

In social psychology, we note a distinction between two forms of social relations (Clark & Mills, 1979): common relations, which describe affiliations with friends, colleagues, and family members, and exchange relations, which include all the others. In a joint relationship, the student's behavior is oriented toward the well-being of the partner.

In an exchange relationship, the learner's behavior is guided by the reciprocity of the benefits received or anticipated. Participants have no obligation to each other than to ensure their partner's well-being, which results from their social interactions. Thus social exchange means social interaction.

The term reciprocity is not used in describing social relations, although it represents a social interaction that involves giving and returning or repaying what one of the interlocutors has received.

According to Younis (1980), reciprocity has two forms:

- symmetrical reciprocity (situations in which two students make the same contribution to a social exchange or collegial relationship);

- complementary reciprocity (situations in which the contributions of the two students are not equivalent, but are compensatory or complementary);

Berndt (1977) argues that the underlying structure of students' collegiate friendships is always recognized as reciprocity, and his

notions of reciprocity involved in friendship change as a function of interest, matching of emotional and psychological states, and reciprocity or collective concern (Selman, 1980).

Social relationships are characterized by the quality of interactions between people within a society. People with active social relationships tend to be more satisfied and happy with their lives. This positive role of social relationships on personal well-being can be explained by the benefits it brings. First, social relationships are a key component in affirming an individual's sense of self, satisfying the basic human need for belonging, and are a source of positive affirmation (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

The student's level of well-being increases with the number of people he can trust, with whom he can discuss problems or matters important to him. On the other hand, this level of well-being decreases in the presence of adults or strangers (Taylor et al., 2001).

The presence of social relationships has a positive impact on a child's mental and physical health, contributing to their overall well-being, while the absence of social relationships increases their susceptibility to suffering.

As in many relationships, friendship between students depends a lot on the opportunities encountered, it is determined by social values and the decision to establish a certain bond of friendship. This indicates that friendship is often related to positive interpersonal relationships that are important and meaningful to the child.

The management of the non-formal education process is the responsibility of the facilitator or the

resource person who designs and organizes these activities, effectively using the available resources. At the same time, this process involves the implementation of a monitoring and evaluation system that examines the effectiveness of the non-formal learning process and regularly reviews the results to prioritize improvement actions.

In the school institution, the facilitator of non-formal activities is the teacher. It is his responsibility to motivate and inspire both the students and the local community in an effective partnership.

According to the report of the Institute of Education Sciences on "The valorization of non-formal learning experiences in building key skills" (Căpi ă, 2011), the diversity of non-formal educational activities proposed by teachers depends on a multitude of factors, among which we mention:

- students' motivation and their ability to make choices that positively influence their personal development within the school;

- the ability of teachers and teachers to propose stimulating problems in which the situation is real (not a fictional context), with effective consequences in the life contexts that the students experience;

- The ability of teaching staff to analyze the training needs of students, identify their centers of interest, and to stimulate cooperative learning;

- The school's ability to build educational partnerships with operators from the local community or other institutions providing non-formal education;

- The openness of the collective of teachers and the managerial team to educational alternatives, the degree

of receptivity of the school institution as a whole to the new education.

The teaching staff, as manager of non-formal activities, has the responsibility to create and implement a strategic plan, which identifies appropriate priorities and objectives for improving student learning. It ensures the management, financing, organization, and administration of the non-formal framework in the school institution, monitors, evaluates, and reviews the effects of non-formal activities, and takes necessary measures to improve them.

### **Forms of organization of non-formal activities**

As forms of organization of non-formal education activities, we distinguish visits, excursions, thematic celebrations, contests, cultural and artistic activities, partnerships, etc.

Cristea & Constantinescu (1998) identified two main "pedagogical circuits", through which non-formal behaviors and influences support and complement the didactic-educational approach, carried out in the classroom:

a) The didactic circuit outside the classroom: art shows organized by the school, competitions, and other activities;

b) Didactic circuits located outside the school institution, including two types of activities:

- extracurricular, extracurricular activities, especially during free time: trips, visits, clubs, school camps, watching shows and exhibitions, using modern training resources (video library, media library, computers, etc.);

- Extracurricular, extracurricular

activities, institutionally organized, in the socio-professional environment of the individual, to ensure improvement, recycling, permanent education, etc.

Starting from the criterion of the place where non-formal education activities are carried out and the institution that manages them, we can classify them into:

- non-formal education activities carried out in educational institutions, but outside the classroom and the lesson;

- non-formal education activities carried out outside educational institutions, but under their influence;

- non-formal education activities carried out in educational institutions, by other institutions with educational functions;

- non-formal education activities carried out outside educational institutions, by other institutions with educational functions.

Non-formal education activities carried out outside the educational unit, but with the approval of the school staff, can be short-term, for example: trips, hikes, expeditions, or long-term, such as educational or sports camps (Lazăr & Cărășel, 2007).

Depending on the targeted target group and its size, non-formal education activities are:

- activities with the whole class of students;

- activities carried out by groups of students;

- individualized activities.

The intended purpose of non-formal education activities sub-groups them into activities with a predominantly informative



character and activities with a predominantly formative character.

The main aspects highlighted in non-formal education are its voluntary character on the one hand, but also the fact that it is based more on practice than on theory. Although everything is done in an organized way, the person in question voluntarily chooses to get involved, without expecting financial rewards or rewards specific to formal education in return: the grades. Also, no punishments are applied, such as marking absences, lowering the grade for behavior, and others.

The option of students to participate in non-formal educational activities proposed by the school was debated based on the variables that influence students' choice to participate in non-formal educational activities in schools or other educational institutions. Starting from the premise of student-centered education, the first variable will be the student's interest in the proposed topic. Many students associate non-formal activities with exercise, seeing it primarily as a form of relaxation and then as a way to improve physical fitness. While students' interests must be respected, in some cases they should be advised to choose activities not only based on their immediate satisfaction but also on their readiness for long-term success.

Another variable to consider when choosing non-formal activities in a school is the educational conditions of the school. Therefore, the non-formal education provided by the school is significantly affected by the size and level of the school organization, human, educational, and financial resources, and the quality of the education and

teaching process (Stearnes & Glennie, 2010). In their research, Feldman and Matjasko (2007) determined that the following areas of non-formal activity are more common in schools: sports activities, elective courses, performing arts, environmental protection, and interdisciplinary activities.

The third important aspect is the influence of informal education on the development of student's personality. There are different opinions between the belief that non-formal education is extremely effective in achieving real and complete learning and the lack of a rigorous methodology in the implementation of activities. On the other hand, research has shown (D. Okamoto, D. Herda, C. Hartzog, 2013) that among students with good school performance, the proportion of non-formal activities is higher. The impact of non-formal education is beneficial for all the above indicators, contributing to the optimization of school performance, increasing the participation of students, or NGOs in school organizations, and reducing deviant behaviors inside or outside school.

In addition to the factors that affect students' choice to participate in nonformal educational activities, given their level of professional training, teachers can enhance their experience of psychological education. In the face of abundant educational resources, students can participate more responsibly if the proposed activities are limited to a few options. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate a plan for continuous professional training of teachers in the field of non-formal education to increase the quality of this form of education, with a significant impact on the

development of students' personalities (A. Bradea, 2012).

Another study that captures the level of student performance according to their participation in extracurricular activities, concludes the following: (J. S. Eccles & B. L. Barber, 1999):

Participation in all types of non-formal education activities correlates with an increase in school results;

Participation in sports, administrative-school activities, and school clubs registers a higher probability that students will enroll in college by the age of 21;

participation in prosocial activities correlates with a lower delinquency rate among participating students.

Feldman & Matjasko (2005) mention the positive effect of non-formal education activities on self-esteem among students who take part in them. Receiving appreciation from others improved the teenagers' perception of their abilities, which increased their level of commitment to the respective activity.

Starting from the statement of the American pedagogue Bruner (1970), that any child, at any stage of development, can be taught successfully, in an appropriate intellectual form, any topic, if methods and procedures appropriate to the respective stage of development are used, if the matter is presented in a simpler form, so that the child can progress more easily and more thoroughly towards a full mastery of knowledge, we appreciate that non-formal education activities represent a major opportunity to transmit knowledge.

### **Research Methodology**

The participants of this study are

the 2nd and 3rd-grade students from 2 educational institutions in the municipality of Arad, between the ages of 7-11, and they were selected using class samples. From the total number of the sample of subjects (N=196), the control group includes 96 students (48.97%), and the experimental group 102 students (52.03%).

The design and organization of non-formal activities involved:

10 organizational meetings between teachers for primary education, parents, and representatives of educational partners;

Meetings and organizational discussions between the teacher for primary education and the students of the class he leads (organization of activities in working groups, monitoring of the fulfillment of responsibilities, preparation for face-to-face activities between classes);

13 non-formal educational activities carried out in the formal space.

### **Hypothesis**

The frequency of non-formal activities in the formal space has a moderating effect on the increase in school performance of students.

### **Analysis and interpretation of results**

To verify the hypothesis, we made a correlation between the students' participation in the program of non-formal activities organized and carried out in the formal space and the school performance (experimental sample), and the recording of the differences between the school performance of the students who did not participate in the organization and carrying out of the non-formal activities (sample of

control). The disciplines that were chosen, and which are conclusive in the evaluation of the student's performances for the 2nd grade, are CLR (Communication in Romanian) and MEM (Mathematics and environmental exploration), and for the 3rd-grade LLR (Language and Romanian literature) and M (Mathematics).

The value of the Pearson correlation index ( $r=0.324$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) confirms that in the case of students who participate in non-formal activities in the formal space, school performance, grades in CLR and LLR subjects are superior to those who do not participate in these activities.

Correlations			
		Non-formal activities	MEM
Students participation at the non-formal activities	Pearson Correlation	1	.324*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	97	97
MEM	Pearson Correlation	.324**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	97	97

\*\* .Correlations significant at the level 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table No. 1. Pearson correlation between students' participation in the non-formal activities program and grades in the mathematics and environmental exploration discipline

The situation is similar in the case of the Mathematics discipline for students in the 3rd grade, where the value of the Pearson coefficient is  $r=0.303$ ;  $p<0.01$ .

Correlations			
		Non-formal activities	Mathematics
Students participation at the non-formal activities	Pearson Correlation	1	.303*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	99	99
Mathematics	Pearson Correlation	.303**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	99	99

\*\* .Correlations significant at the level 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table No. 2. Pearson correlation between students' participation in the program of non-formal activities and grades in Mathematics

The value of the Pearson correlation index ( $r=0.321$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) is higher in the CLR discipline, which certifies the fact that the school performance of the experimental sample acquires ascending values through their participation in the program of non-formal activities organized and carried out in the formal space:

Correlations			
		Non-formal activities	CLR
Students participation at the non-formal activities	Pearson Correlation	1	.321*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	99	99
CRL	Pearson Correlation	.321**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	99	99

\*\* .Correlations significant at the level 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table No. 3. Pearson correlation between students' participation in the non-formal activities program and grades in the Communication in Romanian Language discipline

The same situation is highlighted in the case of the LLR discipline for students of the 3rd grade, where the Pearson coefficient is  $r=0.326$ ;  $p<0.01$ .

Correlations			
		Non-formal activities	LLR
Students' participation at the non-formal activities	Pearson Correlation	1	.326**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	99	99
RLL	Pearson Correlation	.326**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	99	99

\*\* .Correlation is significant at the level 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table No. 4. Pearson's correlation between students' participation in the non-formal activities program and grades in the Romanian Language and Literature discipline

The statistical test for non-parametric data for independent samples is significant for the disciplines MEM, Mathematics, CRL, and RLL, their results being presented in the table below:

Group Statistics					
	Program activit. nonformale	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MEM	CTRL	46	2.1211	0.6599	0.05387
	EXP	51	3.6709	0.58722	0.06145
Mathematics	CTRL	48	2.3133	0.78034	0.06552
	EXP	51	3.7864	0.56724	0.08247
CRL	CTRL	46	1.2777	0.69645	0.07523
	EXP	51	3.9888	0.5039	0.09186
RLL	CTRL	48	2.1236	0.47442	0.06554
	EXP	51	4.3762	0.42681	0.08772

### Conclusions

In statistics, Levene's test is used to assess the equality of variance of a variable calculated for two or more groups. Some common statistical procedures assume equal changes in populations drawn from different samples. Levene's test evaluates this hypothesis. Tests the null hypothesis that the population variances are equal. If the resulting p-value of Levene's test is less than the 0.5 significance level, then the obtained difference in sample variance is unlikely to be based on random sampling from populations of equal variance. Therefore, the null hypothesis of equal variances is rejected and it is concluded that there is a difference between the population variances.

		Levenes's		t-test for Equality of Means							
		Test for									
		Equality of									
		Variances									
		F	Sig.	t	df	(2-tailed)	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
										Lower	Upper
MEM	Equal variances assumed	0.783	0.397	-3.53	184	0	0	-0.2149	-0.06862	-0.01534	-0.605
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.612	46.412	0	0	-0.2149	-0.66534	-0.01156	-0.653
Mathematics	Equal variances assumed	2.165	0.273	-3.84	184	0	0	-0.2199	-0.21704	-0.0987	-34069
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.931	19.894	0	0	-0.2199	-0.21704	-0.08779	-0.405
CRL	Equal variances assumed	1.48	0.62	-3.62	184	0	0	-0.4689	-0.13079	-0.21567	-0.735
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.79	32.585	0	0	-0.4689	-0.12417	-0.23955	-0.755
RLL	Equal variances assumed	0.605	0.415	-3.78	184	0	0	-0.2199	-0.13901	-0.35088	-0.124
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.24	21.25	0	0	-0.2199	-0.12779	-0.31294	-0.125



The t-index for independent samples is found to be significant in the case of the four disciplines (MEM:  $t = -3.529$   $p < 0.01$ ; Mathematics:  $t = -3.837$   $p < 0.01$ ; CRL:  $t = -3.623$   $p < 0.01$ ; RLL:  $t = -3.783$   $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, the significant influence of the program of non-formal activities on the school performance of the students is found.

Following the analysis and interpretation of the data, it was found that the participation of students in the program of non-formal activities has a significant impact on the school performance of students in the conclusive subjects in the assessment of performance: CRL (Communication in the Romanian language) and MEM (Mathematics and environmental exploration), and for the class III RLL (Romanian language and literature) and M (Mathematics).

The value of the Pearson correlation index confirms that in the case of students who participate in non-formal activities in the formal space, the school performances, and qualifications in the subjects MEM, M, CRL, and RLL, are superior to those who do not participate in these activities.

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