

**ERD 2021****9th International Conference Education, Reflection, Development****DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S PERSONALITY THROUGH  
NONFORMAL EDUCATION. TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS**

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**Abstract**

Nonformal education has a planned and finite character. This is accomplished through out-of-school and/or extracurricular instructive-educative activities, as long as the embedded actions are characterised by great thematic variety and a high level of flexibility in organisation. The formative feature of nonformal education stands in the transcultural horizon it promotes, the variety of information/knowledge, of interest areas it covers, favouring the development of specific skills and satisfying particular interests. Educating children via such actions may substantially contribute to shaping harmonious and desirable personalities at the level of knowledge society, digitalised and tech society at the same time. The study aims to identify teachers' perceptions regarding nonformal activities from the point of view of efficiency and their influence upon the development of a pupil's personality. The conclusions emphasize the fact that both teachers and students express their option for such activities, but the extent to which these options are expressed may differ, meaning that learners choose such nonformal activities to a higher degree than teacher would. The study confirms the positive effects that nonformal education has upon students from the perspective of completing their knowledge, diversification of experience, multiplication of knowledge opportunities, facilitating social interactions and interactions with objects, things, various phenomena, which leads to the development and harmonisation of learners' personality.

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## **1. Introduction**

Nonformal education encompasses the totality of educational influences that take place outside the classroom (extra-curricular activities) or through some optional activities (Cucoş, 2015). From the perspective of the activities that were carried out, we reckon that nonformal activities represent the activities organised outside the school environment, which enables a bridging between the knowledge taught by teachers and the actual putting into practice of this knowledge. This modern type of instruction removes the stress of being graded, of an imposed subject matter and compulsory homework, hence the joy/pleasure for knowing and supporting self-development. In the context of carrying out qualitative nonformal activities, it is mandatory to follow a set of rules and principles that are based on formal education contents and to provide various opportunities to apply the knowledge gained throughout formal education sessions. Nonformal activities do not exclude students' efforts. Their attractiveness stems from the richness/ variety of the way in which they may take place: reading clubs, sport clubs, cultural-scientific groups, meetings with writers, science clubs, school shows, road trips, camps, weekend schools, contests, festivals, attending shows, visiting museums, libraries, etc. (Mamun & Rahman, 2013; Manea, 2015). At the same time, nonformal education allows for successful use of the new media, which maximizes knowledge (Manea & Stan, 2018). Nonformal education through the specific of its open and flexible activities is beneficial to all students, considering the active participation of each learner in their own process of development and growth. Likewise, the development of socio-emotional skills for each participant grants them a high level of independence, free and creative expression, a state of self-efficacy and increased psychophysical comfort (Manea, 2017).

## **2. Problem Statement**

The society of knowledge, digitalisation and technology calls for a redesign regarding the manner of approaching the forms of education: formal, nonformal, informal. Nonformal education must stem from understanding the area outside the classroom, from customising and exploiting this environment, the creative instructor critically evaluating the suggested strategy, even more so as there are no strict training rules (Sefton-Green, 2013). The aims of nonformal education are related to creating purposes that are consonant to qualitative education, namely, the expansion and completion of the cultural horizon, enriching knowledge from other fields; creating conditions for a proper professionalisation; contributing to the recreation and relaxation of participants, as well as organised leisure time; ensuring the environment for practising and cultivating different inclinations, skills and abilities to display talent (Manea, 2014; Repidia & Țurcanu, 2019). The main characteristic of formal education is given by the high level of flexibility and adaptability to various social contexts, as well as capitalisation of an enormous arsenal of resources from the technological, environmental and natural context, the socio-cultural and economic-financial environment, resources that are meant to stimulate curiosity and satisfaction for learners (Morisky et al., 2009).

In order to increase learners' interest in knowledge and the development of a genuine emotional experience, nonformal activities must take into account the interests, aptitudes, hobbies and preferences that students have (Mamun & Rahman, 2013). Likewise, the educational experience is quantifiable in the

easier adaptation of the individual to later social challenges, to enabling desirable changes at the level of family life, of the workforce market, community, multicultural society and globalisation (Albulescu, 2019). Recently, we have noticed a tendency of similarity between formal and nonformal education: the former tends to become more and more flexible, more adapted to learners' specific needs and motivations, while the latter is organised more and more rigorously, it strives for a more explicit public acknowledgement, it uses the methods that had been tested and approved by specialists, and pursue a qualitative education. As teachers and school institutions are under the constant pressure of shifting from the static, textbook-bound and physical location type of, learners become avid consumers of data and information in need for guidance and input customisation (Mudure-Iacob, 2019). The boundaries between formal, nonformal and informal learning have become much more flexible, since any life context may have an educational potential (Harrison, 2002). Moreover, certain studies have indicated the need to see didactics as a deliberative and practical reflection (Marhuenda-Fluixá & Ros-Garrido, 2015; Tăbăcaru, 2018). Children's life experiences, both in school and outside school have deep effects upon their performance and functioning in society (Resnick, 1987). Self-evaluation is highly promoted, which also ensures the possibility for educational adjustment (Stan & Manea, 2015). Nowadays, nonformal strategies represent an enormous potential of capitalisation and protection of the cultural patrimony, promoting, at the same time the transmission and production of knowledge (Garcia-Fernandez, 2019). It is also worth mentioning the importance of approaching nonformal activities in a critical, innovative and holistic spirit.

### **3. Research Questions**

Considering the fact that nonformal education completes formal education in the sense that relevant scientific activities first take place inside the classroom before moving into the outside-the - school environment (Eshach, 2007), thus becoming a condition for the school success (qualitative education and gaining school performance) especially throughout the first years of school, our intention is to provide an answer to the following question: How is nonformal education perceived by teachers under the aspects of the effects it has upon the young learner in the curricular cycle of fundamental acquisitions?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to identify the teachers' perception regarding nonformal education under the effects it produces upon the harmonious development and becoming of the young learner in the curricular cycle of fundamental acquisitions.

### **5. Research Methods**

The method we used was the questionnaire-based survey, and the questionnaire made of 16 items was applied to primary school teachers. The subject sample is made of 560 primary school teachers from various counties in Transylvania (Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Mureș, Maramureș), Romania. Their answers are recorder in data protocols as tables, in order to allow for proper analysis and interpretation.

## 6. Findings

We present below the items of the questionnaire that are highly relevant for our study. In the elaboration of conclusions, all items of the administered questionnaire are being taken into consideration.

**Table 1.** Teachers’ perception regarding their option for nonformal activities

Degree of preference	N	%
Very little	54	9.64%
Little	186	33.21%
High	172	30.71%
Very high	148	26.42%
Total	560	100.00%

The data indicated in Table 1 indicate that out of the total number of respondents, 33.21% of them have opted for little preference regarding the use of nonformal activities. At the same time, if we put together the percentages of those who have opted for a high (30.71%) and very high (26.41%) use of these activities, these account for over 50%, which makes us claim that these activities are considered by teachers to be effective, necessary and useful in conducting qualitative education. We may explain the reason why 9.64% of the respondents are reluctant to use such activities from the perspective of difficulties that teachers encounter when carrying out these enterprises (to name a few: red-tape procedures when drafting the documents necessary for approval and carrying out nonformal activities such as road trips).

**Table 2.** Teachers’ perception regarding the option for nonformal activities in the case of young learners in the fundamental cycle of acquisitions

Degree of preference	N	%
Very little	8	1.42%
Little	22	3.92%
High	78	13.92%
Very high	442	78.92%
Total	560	100.00%

The answers for item no. 2 are indicated in Table 2, showing that over 75% of respondents, namely 78.92% of students opted for a very high preference over nonformal activities and 13.92% for a high preference. Very few learners - 3.92% - for a little degree of preference and 1.42% - with very little preference chose this option regarding nonformal learning. The obvious conclusion is the fact that the majority of learners chose these activities. We explain this option in light of the fact that nonformal activities are highly flexible, providing variety and multiple possibilities to capitalise on learners’ skills, and of satisfying their interests and needs.

**Table 3.** Teachers' perception regarding the formative value of nonformal activities

Indicator of formative value	N	%
Very small	0	0%
Small	59	10.53%
High	148	26.42%
Very high	353	63.03%
Total	560	100.00%

By analysing the data in Table 3, we observe that the formative value of nonformal activities is appreciated to be very high by 63.03% of the surveyed teachers and high by 26.42% of them. Moreover, all participating teachers estimated that the formative value of nonformal activities is obvious, even if 10.53% of them mentioned that it has a small formative value, there was no educator who didn't appreciate the value of nonformal instruction.

**Table 4.** Teachers' perception regarding the degree of importance that nonformal activities have in developing the young learner's personality

The degree of importance that nonformal activities have in developing the young learner's personality	N	%
Very little	28	5.00%
Little	50	8.92%
High	218	38.92%
Very high	234	41.78%
Total	560	100.00%

In correlation to item no. 3, the 4<sup>th</sup> item of the questionnaire was meant to investigate how influential nonformal activities are in the development of learners' personality. The data shown in Table 4 indicate that nearly 80% of respondents appreciate there is a very high (41.78%) and high (38.92%) influence. The percentage of the teachers who reckoned that the influence that nonformal activities have upon learners' personality is little and very little represents 8.92%, namely 5.00%, which accounts for the same percentage of the respondents who claimed that nonformal education has little formative value. We interpret this reduced percentage as a reflection of understanding the fact that human personality is an extremely complex structure, which is formed under the influence of multiple internal and external factors.

**Table 5.** Teachers' perception regarding the nonformal activities preferred by young learners in the cycle of fundamental acquisitions

Favourite nonformal activities	N	%
Excursions, road trips/hikes, walks	181	32.32%
Visits	64	11.42%
School shows, performances	115	25.53%
Activities in learning clubs	106	18.92%
Contests and competitions	96	17.14%
Total	560	100.00%

The data in Table 5 indicate that excursions, road trips and walks are students' favourites. (32.3%). This appears to be an expression of the pleasant manner that ensures the completion of cultural, historical and geographical knowledge, and of possibilities to diversify life experiences. In the hierarchy of preferences, school shows rank second with 25.53% having opted for this choice. 18.92% of the respondents prefer activities in learning clubs, whereas a nearly equal percentage- 17.14% chose contests and competitions as their favourite nonformal activity. Visits are ranked last in the hierarchy of preferences, with a 11.42% score. There is an even distribution in learners' preferences, which indicates that their favourite activity is in consensus with satisfying the needs, interest and/or capitalization of the skill potential of each student.

**Table 6.** Teachers' perception regarding the characteristics of nonformal activities that ensure maximization of efficiency

Characteristics of nonformal activities	N	%
Flexibility and adaptability	174	31.07%
Organisation outside the school area	101	18.03%
Nonstandardised evaluation system	64	11.42%
Pragmatism, practical aplicability	98	17.14%
Resourcefulness, creativity	123	21.96%
Total	560	100.00%

Item no. 6 of the questionnaire was introduced in order to indicate the feature that is associated with a maximization of efficiency in the case of nonformal activities. The recorded data are shown in Table 6. Thus we may observe that *flexibility and adaptability* is the characteristic that 31.07% of the respondents indicated as a match to ensuring the maximum efficiency of nonformal activities. This feature is followed closely by *resourcefulness, creativity*: 21.96%, as well as *organization outside the school area*, chosen by 18.03%. Other characteristics such as *pragmatism, practical applicability* were indicated by 17.14%, whereas *nonstandardised evaluation system* was selected by 11.42% of respondents. We consider these scores to be objective, in close relation to the educational reality, in the sense that a high degree of flexibility and adaptability of these activities allows for a self-adjustment in the projection and design of tasks, in order to respond to opportunities. At the same time, the higher the degree of resourcefulness and creativity, the more interesting and attractive these activities become for learners. Areas that are located outside schools provide opportunities for free expression, open both to ideas and feelings that learners may have, which is in the benefit of a positive interpersonal relationship.

**Table 7.** Teachers' perception regarding the hierarchy of nonformal activities according to their efficiency

Efficient nonformal activities	N	%
Trips, hikes, walks	164	29.28%
Visits	98	17.50%
School shows, performances	123	21.96%
Activities in learning clubs	112	20.00%
Contests and competitions	63	11.25%
Total	560	100.00%

Regarding the efficiency of nonformal activities, the data in Table 7 reveal important clues, showing the *trips, hikes and walks* are considered to be the most efficient ones by 29.28% of respondents. This may be explained in light of the fact that such activities provide multiple possibilities to acquire new information, to build skills and abilities from an inter and transcurricular perspective. *School shows and performances* represent the next most efficient category that respondents referred to, followed by *activities in learning clubs*, selected by 20% of the interviewed teachers, while *visits* were chosen by 17.50% of respondents. We may observe the similarities between answers from items 5 and 7, in the sense that the same activities that learners appreciated are also considered efficient by teachers, which can be accounted for since efficiency is associated with active participation, joy and interest on behalf of the young learner.

**Table 8.** Teachers' perception regarding the educational opportunities generated by nonformal activities meant to develop young learners

<b>Educational opportunities generated by nonformal activities</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Socialisation, networking	197	35.00%
Building self-awareness, knowing the others	84	15.00%
Establishing new contacts and gaining new experiences	49	8.75%
Acquisition of socio-emotional abilities	120	21.42%
Promotion of patriotic feelings	44	7.85%
Building ecological skills	69	12.32%
Total	560	100.00%

The educational opportunities generated by nonformal activities are reflected in Table 8.

Socialisation and networking are chosen by 35.00 % of respondents as the most obvious ones. 21.42% of responding teachers opted for the opportunity to acquire socio-emotional skills as a major advantage provided by nonformal activities. The reason why these aspects were highly ranked can be that the young learner's personality can be harmonised and developed through the multiplication of knowledge opportunities, through social interactions and interactions with objects, things and various phenomena. *Building self-awareness and knowing others* is chosen by 15.00% of the teachers as a worthy opportunity to be capitalized through nonformal activities. The final positions are occupied by the opportunities referring to *building ecological skills* with 12.32% of respondents *establishing new contacts and gaining new experiences*- by 8.75% , and respectively *promotion of patriotic feelings*- 7.85% of respondents having chosen this option.

## 7. Conclusion

As a result of the analysis and interpretation of the data, we may draw the following conclusions:

- nonformal activities are more favoured by learners than teachers, and the ones they prefer mostly are trips, hikes and walks. The same activities are appreciated by teachers to be the most efficient, which is fortunate given the similarity of choices between students and teachers;

- the degree of importance that nonformal activities have in shaping the young learner's personality is higher as a result of opportunities to acquire knowledge, new information, develop self-awareness and networking skills, diversify cognitive, social, emotional and practical-applicative experiences;
- the most significant educational opportunity generated by nonformal activities from the point of view of teachers is socialisation and networking.

We reckon that a limit of this study lies in the fact that we cannot make any inference on how much these activities influence the intellectual becoming and development of the young learner in the curricular cycle of fundamental acquisitions, in comparison to the two types of education, formal and informal. For a further study, we aim to investigate this aspect as well.

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