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FORMAL EDUCATION, NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING: KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to contribute to the model of formal education, non-formal and informal learning (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974) by exploring students' knowledge about and experience with them. 553 students of humanities, educational sciences and economics participated in the study. Results show that (1) students of humanities have the highest level of knowledge about all three forms of education and learning. (2) As the students progress with their studies, their knowledge about the three forms of education and learning increases. No differences in students' knowledge, involvement in non-formal and informal learning and teaching were found regarding monthly income and parents' formal education. (3) More students with higher knowledge about three forms of education and learning list experience with non-formal learning and informal teaching.

Keywords: knowledge, experience, study group, study year, income, parents' education

Introduction

Education is the most important tool available to foster a deeper and more harmonious human development. It develops talents, creative potentials, responsibility and achievement of personal goals (Delors, 1996). Still, in some communities education is traditionally viewed as social obligation to encourage learning and personal growth that ceases with the end of an intense formative development in adolescence or early adulthood. Thus, for example, the speed of social and technological change in many developed countries has led to an explicit emphasis on the importance of lifelong learning (Vizek Vidović & Vlahović Štetić, 2007).

Despite of the needs for innovative educational system (Gambula, 2009), in conditions of a rapid technological development and commerce, diplomas and degrees based more on

conceptual than on material production, are no longer a guarantee of economic success of individuals and of a society.

Education and learning model accepted by the European Commission (2001) is based on a model introduced by Coombs and Ahmed in 1974. Their study and research is particularly concerned with non-formal programmes to increase the skills and productivity of all persons in everyday life. They describe three forms of education/learning: a) formal education – highly institutionalised, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured "education system", ranging from primary school to the university; b) non-formal learning – organised and systematic educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population of any age; c) informal learning – lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment – at home, at work, at play. It is unorganised and often unsystematic; yet it accounts for the great bulk of any person's total lifetime learning – including that of even a highly "schooled" person (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). According to Schugurensky (2000), with respect to the intent and the awareness, informal learning can be: self-managed (individual has chosen a content for learning), accidental (person had no intention of learning) and socialised (refers to the internalisation of values, attitudes, behaviours and skills that occur in everyday life without intention).

It is imperative to reform the schools' curricula and higher education institutions to enable students to become lifelong learners (Yang & Valdés-Cotera, 2011). However, a person needs to be cautious not to use the recognition of non-formal learning outcomes as a neoliberal tool which serves only the purposes of the economics and the capital, but foremost for the individuals to be less determined by their social class and to gain more opportunities for their individual progress (Kelava, 2012). Definitely, formal education opportunities, in promoting

lifelong learning, provided by primary, secondary and higher education must be a 'basic education' of a modern society.

A number of studies prove (Jurić, 2007) that about 75% of education belongs to informal learning and that there are even more and more debates about the relationship between three forms of education and learning. If formal education, non-formal and informal learning are compared, it becomes obvious that in formal education there is prevalence of declarative knowledge and reproduction skills, while in non-formal and informal learning there is prevalence of operative knowledge, integration of operative knowledge and skills and their application in non-standard situations (Petnuchova, 2012). The individual's learning is unsupported by any strong infrastructure of informal or non-formal learning in the industrialised countries, where the resources for informal learning are rich and varied, as well as in the developing countries, where all formal schools too often have to operate without the support of a rich environment of literacy and learning (King, 1982).

There is no research conducted on the impact of knowledge about three forms of education and learning and involvement in these forms. Jarvis (2007) describes changing approaches to knowledge, knowledge acquisition and knowledge assessment which have occurred in the field of adult education. But based on their investigation, some authors (Vrdoljak & Velki, 2012) conclude that teachers cannot influence students' cognitive abilities, but can help in developing and training of their cognitive skills and so contribute to improving students' success in various academic tasks and indicate that this has great implication on the psychology of education. The key issue in education is no longer the amount of knowledge learned, but the ability to use knowledge and know-how (Petnuchova, 2012), as well as harmonisation with the needs of society (Losito & Pozzo, 2005).

Studies about relationship between socio-economic status or age and educational attainment (Bowers-Brown, 2006; Redmond, 2006) show that better educational achievements are more

valued and important to the families of higher socioeconomic groups. Such families also have the economic strength to pay a high quality education and provide children with everything they need for effective continuing of the education. On the other hand, for children from the lower socio-economic groups it is more valued to finish with education as soon as possible in order to obtain employment income. They develop a different orientation toward the future and they do not appreciate enough the value of development of formal education (except maybe alongside work) (Farnell & Kovač, 2010). Some analyses (Matković, 2010) provide compelling evidence of the connection between low levels of parental education and household income with an increased risk of early school leaving. Also, socioeconomic status (with regional affiliation) can be a significant predictor of educational achievement, and it is an important factor in the analysis and interpretation of test results of the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) survey (Gregurović & Kuti, 2010).

The purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to contribute to the model of formal education, non-formal and informal learning as defined by Coombs and Ahmed (1974) by exploring students' knowledge about and experience with these forms of education and learning. The objectives of the study were: (1) to explore whether there are differences in knowledge about and experience in formal education, non-formal and informal learning and teaching between students of humanities, educational sciences and economics; (2) to find out if there are differences in knowledge about and experience in the three forms of education and learning and teaching related to the students' year of study, parents' formal education and income; and (3) to examine if students with the highest and the lowest level of knowledge differ in their experience with the three forms of education learning and teaching.

Three hypotheses were posed related to the objective (1): *H1*: Students of humanities and educational sciences have a higher level of knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning, compared to students of economics. *H2*: Percentage of students involved in non-formal and informal learning does not differ regarding their study group. *H3*: More students of humanities and educational sciences are involved in non-formal and informal teaching than students of economics.

Three hypotheses were posed related to the objective (2): *H4*: Knowledge about the three forms of education and learning increases with the years of study and parents' formal education, while it does not differ in relation to different levels of income. *H5*: Percentage of students involved in non-formal and informal learning does not differ related to the students' year of study, parents' formal education and income. *H6*: Percentage of students involved in non-formal and informal teaching increases with the year of study, and with decreased income, while it does not relate with parents' formal education.

Two hypotheses were posed related to the last objective (3): *H7*: Students who know more about the three forms of education and learning will list more involvement in non-formal and informal learning. *H8*: Students with different levels of knowledge will not differ regarding their involvement in non-formal and informal teaching.

Method

Participants

A total of 553 students from the University Juraj Dobrila of Pula, 23.5% males and 76.5% females, 18 to 36 years old, took part. They studied economics (52.5%), educational sciences (21.2%) and humanities (in Croatian and Italian language) (26%). The latter two groups study to become teachers. When looked at the study year: 38.2% were from the 1st, 20.4% from the 2nd, 23.1% from the 3rd, and 18.3% from the 4th and 5th year.

Measures

A 15 items test was created for exploring students' knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning (e.g. *Formal education is performed in institutions*.) with the possible answers: *True / False / Not sure*. Total score could vary from 15 to 45. Higher results refer to better knowledge. Experience in learning and teaching was collected as frequencies. General biographical data were collected with few questions related to age, gender, study year and study group. Parents' highest formal education included: elementary school, high school, college and university, and graduate study. Monthly family income was explored with the scale: (a) up to 2.000 kn (Croatian kuna); (b) 2.001 – 4.000 kn; (c) 4.001 – 6.000 kn; (d) 6.001 – 10.000 kn; and (e) more than 10.000 kn.

Procedure

Data were collected in a larger survey that examined students' knowledge and attitudes related to formal education, non-formal and informal learning. Instruments were administered with students' oral consent and anonymously. After the test of knowledge was filled in and collected, students were instructed about the three forms of education/learning. Then they were given, among other, questions about experience in learning and teaching. A coding system was used for collating data from the two phases.

Results and discussion

Formal education, non-formal and informal learning and teaching among different study groups

Differences in knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning among students of humanities, educational sciences and economics were explored with one-way ANOVA.

Table 1

Levels of knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning in three study groups

Study group	*Knowledge test results*					
	M	*SD*	*n*	*F*	*P*	*Scheffé*
Economics (E)	6.91	2.63	259			
Humanities (H)	7.95	3.32	131	5.01	0.002	H-E H-ES
Educational sciences (ES)	6.82	2.62	102			

Results in Table 1 show that students of humanities have the highest level of knowledge, confirming the first hypothesis. It is most likely that the set of courses for pedagogical competencies in humanities offers the most structured knowledge on education and learning, so these students lead in this field. The set of courses for future teachers comprises theoretical background in psychology, pedagogy, sociology, as well as practical subjects such as didactics and internship. Forms of education and learning are immanent topics in these courses, and less in economics. Should it be so? If students in all study programmes had the opportunity to discuss these forms of education and learning, it would probably encourage lifelong learning, as a shift of focus of the educational process to persons who learn and think about their learning process.

Since all the students finished the elementary and high education, only differences in experience with non-formal and informal learning were examined with the chi-square test.

Table 2

Experience with non-formal and informal learning in three study groups

Form of learning		*Involvement (percentage)*					
		Economics	*Humanities*	*Educ. sciences*	χ^2	*df*	*p*
Non-formal	Yes	72 (24.8)	85 (59.0)	63 (53.8)	58.9	2	< 0.001
n = 551	No	218 (75.2)	59 (41.0)	54 (46.2)			
Informal	Yes	66 (23)	73 (50.7)	56 (47.9)	42.6	2	< 0.001
n = 550	No	223 (77)	71 (49.3)	61 (52.1)			

Although all three groups show that almost more than a half of students listed no experience with non-formal and informal learning, the second hypothesis was rejected because more than three quarters of economics students listed no experience with these two forms of learning (Table 2). One of the possible explanations can be in some personality traits' differences between these groups of students: humanities' and educational vocations require a wider range of interests, so it is possible that young people interested in them already have a wider spectrum of involvement in various educational contents. It may be that economics students focus more in fewer topics that satisfy their interests more in depth.

Since none of the students could have had the possibility of formal teaching, further differences in experience with non-formal and informal teaching between the study groups were explored with the chi-square test. Results (Table 3) confirm the third hypothesis, although all three groups of students did not mention much of such experience. Students of humanities mention most experience with the non-formal and informal teaching, followed by students of educational sciences and economics students.

Table 3

Experience with non-formal and informal teaching in three study groups

Form of teaching		*Involvement (percentage)*					
		Economics	*Humanities*	*Educ. sciences*	X^2	*df*	*p*
Non-formal	Yes	2 (0.7)	9 (6.3)	3 (2.6)	12.1	2	< 0.001
n = 552	No	289 (99.3)	135 (93.7)	114 (97.4)			
Informal	Yes	88 (30.2)	78 (54.2)	52 (44.4)	24.6	2	< 0.001
n = 552	No	203 (69.8)	66 (45.8)	65 (55.6)			

It can be expected that students with courses for pedagogical competencies have chosen to become teachers, so they are eager to practice their teaching competencies as soon as possible. However, students of humanities do not necessarily choose these courses because they really want to be teachers, but they choose to have additional option in career – a teaching licence, not necessarily putting it as a priority wish. Still, even with this reservation,

humanities' students have most experience in both non-formal and informal teaching. Motivation does play an important role in choosing the study programme and in studying (Reić Ercegovac & Jukić, 2008).

Formal education, non-formal and informal learning and year of study, parents' education and income

In order to explore the second objective, firstly differences in knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning between students of different years of study, parents' formal education and income were examined with one-way ANOVA. Students of the first year have less knowledge about the three forms of education/learning than the students of the second year, as well as the students of the final years (Table 4), confirming the fourth hypothesis. As the students' progress with their studying, they become more acquainted with the terms mentioned in the questionnaire. Although they are in different study groups, they come across various forms of education and learning, and that explains the obtained results. The hypothesis is also confirmed in the part that predicted no differences in knowledge regarding income. There are no reasons to expect why this particular knowledge would be connected to someone's financial status, once they are all at the university. The part of the hypothesis that was not supported with results was that related to parents' formal education.

Table 4

Levels of knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning regarding study years, parents' formal education and monthly income

	Knowledge test results					
Study year	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*F*	*P*	*Scheffé*
1st	6.39	2.53	186	9.03	< 0.001	1-2 1-(4+5)
2nd	7.65	2.97	101			
3rd	7.31	2.91	116			
4th + 5th	8.07	2.96	89			
Father's (mother's) education						
Elementary school	7.00 (7.05)	2.99 (2.64)	22 (43)	0.26 (0.25)	0.852 (0.863)	
High school	7.24 (7.10)	2.83 (2.87)	338 (310)			
Coll + univ	6.97 (7.31)	2.93 (2.94)	106 (114)			

Graduate	7.20 (7.80)	2.59 (1.92)	5 (5)		
Income					
< 2.000 kn	7.00	3.05	21		
2.001 – 4.000 kn	6.82	2.70	62		
4.001 – 6.000 kn	7.11	2.95	128	1.02	0.398
6.001 – 10.000 kn	7.48	2.99	168		
> 10.000 kn	6.84	2.57	87		

No differences in knowledge among students whose parents have different levels of formal education were found. The probable explanation is that students' population is already selected by higher parents' formal education, so a narrower range of the monthly income does not provide the possibility to examine the situation in the whole population. There is evidence of a strong influence of the social background (parents' education) or social selection of university students as a social group, pointing to existence of educational differences in the educational system (Bjelajac & Pilić, 2005; Ilišin, 2008).

Further, differences in experience with non-formal and informal learning between students of different years of study, parents' formal education and income were examined with the chi-square test. Students involved in non-formal and informal learning did not differ related to the parents' formal education and income, confirming parts of the fifth hypothesis (Table 5). More students of the final years are involved in non-formal and informal learning than students from the first three years of study.

Table 5

Experience with non-formal and informal learning regarding study years, parents' formal education and income

Form of learning		*Involvement (percentage)*							
		Study year							
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th + 5th		X^2	*df*	*p*
Non-formal									
n = 551	Yes	72 (34.4)	41 (36.3)	35 (27.3)	72 (71.3)		53.1	3	< 0.001
	No	137 (65.6)	72 (63.7)	93 (72.7)	29 (28.7)				
Informal									
n = 550	Yes	66 (31.6)	33 (26.5)	44 (34.4)	52 (52)		15.9	3	< 0.001
	No	143 (68.4)	83 (73.5)	84 (65.6)	48 (48)				
		Father's education							
		Elem.	High	Coll+univ	Graduate				
Non-formal									
n = 527	Yes	9 (37.4)	143 (38.2)	61(49.2)	2 (40)		4.8	3	0.191
	No	15 (62.5)	231 (61.8)	63 (50.8)	3 (60)				
Informal									
n = 526	Yes	6 (25)	137 (36.7)	45 (36.3)	2 (40)		1.4	3	0.710
	No	18 (75)	236 (63.3)	79 (63.7)	3 (60)				
		Mother's education							
		Elem.	High	Coll+univ	Graduate				
Non-formal									
n = 530	Yes	20 (42.6)	141 (41)	54 (40.6)	3 (50)		0.3	3	0.969
	No	27 (57.4)	203 (59)	79 (59.4)	3 (50)				
Informal									
n = 529	Yes	18 (38.3)	124 (36.2)	46 (34.6)	4 (67)		2.7	3	0.449
	No	29 (61.7)	219 (63.8)	87 (65.4)	2 (33)				
		Income							
		<2000	2001-4000	4001-6000	6001-10000	>10000			
Non-formal									
n = 521	Yes	13 (52)	24 (34.3)	57 (40.1)	77 (40.5)	40 (42.6)	2.7	4	0.615
	No	12 (48)	46 (65.7)	85 (59.9)	113 (59.5)	54 (57.4)			
Informal									
n = 520	Yes	12 (48)	28 (40)	46 (32.4)	65 (36)	30 (31.9)	19.57	4	0.076
	No	13 (52)	42 (60)	96 (67.6)	121 (64)	64 (68.1)			

Studying maybe broadens students' interests and they become more curious and willing to learn. Also, while studying, students may realise that the study does not meet all their educational needs, so they seek additional or complementary knowledge in the non-formal forms of learning.

Table 6

Experience with non-formal and informal teaching regarding study years, parents' formal education and income

Form of teaching		*Involvement (percentage)*							
		Study year							
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th + 5th		χ^2	*df*	*p*
Non-formal									
n = 553	Yes	4 (1.9)	3 (2.7)	1 (0.8)	6 (5.9)		8.31	6	0.216
	No	206 (98.1)	110 (97.3)	127 (99.2)	95 (94.1)				
Informal									
n = 553	Yes	71 (33.8)	55 (48.7)	46 (35.9)	46 (45.5)		10.68	6	0.099
	No	139 (66.2)	58 (51.3)	82 (64.1)	55 (54.5)				
		Father's education							
		Elem.	High	Coll+Uni	Graduate				
Non-formal									
n = 529	Yes	0	8 (2.1)	6 (4.9)	0		6.81	6	0.339
	No	24 (100)	368 (97.9)	117 (95.1)	5 (100)				
Informal									
n = 529	Yes	10 (41.7)	152 (40.4)	48 (39)	2 (40)		3.37	6	0.761
	No	14 (58.3)	224 (59.6)	75 (61)	3 (60)				
		Mother's education							
		Elem.	High	Coll+Uni	Graduate				
Non-formal									
n = 531	Yes	1 (2.1)	9 (2.6)	3 (2.3)	0		3.22	6	0.780
	No	46 (97.9)	336 (97.4)	129 (97.7)	6 (100)				
Informal									
n = 531	Yes	20 (42.6)	134 (38.8)	58 (43.6)	2 (33.3)		4.25	6	0.643
	No	27 (57.4)	211 (61.2)	74 (56.4)	4 (66.7)				
		Income							
		<2000	2001-4000	4001-6000	6001-10000	>10000			
Non-formal									
n = 522	Yes	1 (4)	2 (2.9)	1 (0.7)	5 (2.6)	3 (3.2)	4.23	8	0.836
	No	24 (96)	68 (97.1)	142 (99.3)	184 (97.4)	91 (96.8)			
Informal									
n = 522	Yes	12 (48)	30 (42.9)	51 (35.7)	74 (39.2)	41 (43.6)	4.35	8	0.824
	No	13 (52)	40 (57.1)	92 (64.3)	115 (60.8)	53 (56.4)			

Results (Table 6) show that students' experience with non-formal and informal teaching does not differ regarding parents' formal education, as well as the level of monthly income and the year of studying, supporting the last part of the sixth hypothesis. Lack of the expected relationship regarding parents' formal education and monthly income could again be due to a narrow span of the income and parents' formal education in the students' population. There is

evidence that educational values differ in higher and lower socio-economic groups (Bowers-Brown, 2006; Redmond, 2006).

Knowledge and experience

In order to examine if students with the highest and the lowest level of knowledge differ in their experience with the three forms of education/learning and teaching, two groups were identified: students that scored on the knowledge test more than one standard deviation higher than the average score (N=78) and students that scored less than one standard deviation lower than the average (N=65).

Table 7

Experience with non-formal and informal learning related to knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning

Form of learning		*Involvement (percentage)*				
		Higher knowledge	Lower knowledge	X^2	*df*	*p*
Non-formal						
n = 143	Yes	43 (55.1)	22 (33.8)	6.48	1	< 0.001
	No	35 (44.9)	43 (66.2)			
Informal						
n = 142	Yes	32 (41.6)	19 (29.2)	2.33	1	0.127
	No	45 (58.4)	46 (70.8)			

Results of the chi-square (Table 7) partly support the seventh hypothesis, showing that more students with higher knowledge list experience with non-formal learning compared to students with lower knowledge. Students with more knowledge about non-formal learning maybe see more benefits from it, and therefore take more part in it. Students' experience with informal learning does not differ regarding their level of knowledge. The possible reason for this can be that, unlike the non-formal learning, the informal learning does not lead to a recognised certificate that can be used in further career.

Table 8

Experience with non-formal and informal teaching related to knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning

Form of teaching		*Involvement (percentage)*				
		Higher knowledge	Lower knowledge	X^2	*df*	*p*
Non-formal						
n = 143	Yes	1 (1.3)	2 (3.1)	0.56	1	0.456
	No	77 (98.7)	63 (96.9)			
Informal						
n = 143	Yes	36 (46.2)	19 (29.2)	4.29	1	0.038
	No	42 (53.8)	46 (70.8)			

Results in Table 8 show that students' experience with non-formal teaching does not differ regarding their higher or lower knowledge about the three forms of education, confirming the eighth hypothesis. However, more students with higher knowledge were involved in informal teaching. It is possible that students with more knowledge are students who have generally better knowledge in academic subjects and therefore they teach subjects, as informal learning.

Conclusion

Before concluding, we should consider some limitations of the study. Self-reporting that relies on the participant's memory can lack accuracy and amount (e. g. Bradburn, Rips & Shevell, 1987). We can presume that lists of students' non-formal and informal learning and teaching involvement are not exhausted. However, all three groups underwent the same procedure, so it is plausible to use the data in the comparative way, as we mostly did in this paper.

Results show that students with courses for pedagogical competencies have a higher level of knowledge about three forms of education and learning, more experience with non-formal and informal learning and teaching, compared to students of without such courses. Although the reason seems very obvious, the question is: Why wouldn't students of all study groups be informed about the three forms of education and learning and be encouraged to take part in it, since they might benefit from it? If students of humanities and educational sciences get jobs

as teachers, they could explain to their students that competencies can be gained also in non-formal and informal learning, and encourage them to take part in it. If students of economics find jobs, they should know about the forms of education and learning so they can improve their competencies. In case of unemployment all these groups can benefit from knowing about various forms of learning because gaining competencies through them can increase their likelihood to get a job. Since results show that more students with higher knowledge about formal education, non-formal and informal learning have experience with non-formal learning, we find this supportive to the idea of spreading more information to the students about various forms of education and learning. It is very likely that students with more knowledge see more benefits from it, and therefore take more part in it. The results also support the idea that informal learning should be recognised as a qualification.

From the point of the lifelong learning, it would be interesting to examine what the situation would be like if the parents' non-formal and informal education and income of non-students' population would be included. That would tackle the theme of social availability of learning to the whole population. Analysis of the qualitative data on the type of non-formal and formal learning and teaching would be a useful step further in better understanding of the topic.

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FORMALNO OBRAZOVANJE, NEFORMALNO I INFORMALNO UČENJE: ZNANJE I ISKUSTVO

Sažetak

Svrha je rada pridonijeti modelu formalnog obrazovanja, neformalnog i informalnog učenja Coombsa i Ahmeda (1974) ispitivanjem znanja i iskustava studentica i studenata u vezi s tim vrstama obrazovanja i učenja. U istraživanju je sudjelovalo 553 studentica i studenata humanističkih, odgojno-obrazovnih i ekonomskih studija. Rezultati pokazuju da (1) studentice i studenti humanističkih studija imaju višu razinu znanja o tri vrste obrazovanja i učenja. (2) Znanje studentica i studenata o tri vrste obrazovanja i učenja povećava se s godinom studija. Nisu nađene razlike u znanju i iskustvu s neformalnim i informalnim učenjem i poučavanjem s obzirom na mjesečne prihode i formalno obrazovanje roditelja. (3) Više studentica i studenata s višom razinom znanja o tri vrste obrazovanja i učenja navodi da ima iskustva s neformalnim učenjem i informalnim poučavanjem.

Ključne riječi: znanje, iskustvo, studij, godina studija, prihodi, obrazovanje roditelja