

IMPROVING SYNERGY BETWEEN FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION IN TEACHER EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

The study focused on improving synergy between formal and informal education in teacher education: challenges and prospects. The study made a conceptual reviews of formal and informal education, teacher education, and the needs for synergy between formal and informal education in teacher education. The study discovered that improving synergy between formal and informal education in teacher education will constitute challenges arising from differences in structure, teaching methods, learning environment, assessment, and accreditation. However, the prospects of improving synergy between the two types of education include among others, bridging the gap of the theoretical pattern of formal education and practical form of informal education, fostering long-life learning, nurturing creativity, enhancing the development of soft skills like communication, leadership, and emotional intelligence which are provided by informal education. The study therefore, made a conclusion and recommends building of learning communities assigning mentors to group of learners, and increasing of engagements for learners such as videos, quizzes, games, etc. as means of improving synergy between formal and informal education in teacher education.

Keywords: Challenges, Education, Formal and Informal Education, Synergy, Teacher Education and Prospects.

Introduction

Education is the life-wire of any nation. It could be defined as the process that transforms raw and crude materials as well as uncivilized and undeveloped manpower resources of a nation into skilled, technical, highly refined and valued substance for the development of the society. Simply put, education means the process of acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, norms and good conducts. Education illuminates the minds, keeps people informed, eradicates poverty, and enables people to function effectively in the society.

Yolaye (cited in Akpomedaye, 2010: 122) confirms the opinions by defining education as “a tool for elimination of ignorance, poverty and disease.” Owunka (cited in Gormor and Danjuma, 2014: 131) sees education as “a cornerstone of building understanding among people, cultures, and civilizations and also helping to achieve peace and development in the global level.” Fafunwa (1991) defines education as the aggregate of all processes which a child or young adults develop abilities, attributes and other forms of positive or acceptable values to the society in which he lives. Also, Abiodun (2021) says that education is the process of nurturing, transmission, and application of such knowledge that transmits the development and sustenance of every society from day to day.

The fact remains that the quality and system of education of any society determines the rate of her development. Hence, education is expected to address critical national issues like dignity of labour, quality leadership and committed followership, industrial harmony, political stability, religious tolerance, national unity and above all, the exploitation of the local endowments for societal advantage.

Types of education are traditional or indigenous, non-formal, informal and formal education. The methods of transmission include teaching, training, storytelling, discussion, demonstration and directed research. Education can take place anywhere, either in a formal or informal setting, and any expression that has a formative effect on the way of people's thinking, feelings, or actions could be considered educational. Wosu (2016) recognises non-formal, informal and formal education as the three basic types of education through which people can acquire education either consciously or unconsciously.

However, the various types of education have different contents and goals, apply different methods and standards, and above all, use peculiar venues and time to achieve their aims in a little way, whereas improving synergy among them especially, between formal and informal education in teacher education will trigger off whole lots of amazing, prospects in the educational system. The burden of this paper therefore, is to encourage a synergy between formal and informal types of education in teacher education.

Conceptual Reviews

Concept of Formal Education

Elekwa and Okanezi (2013) refer to formal education as education provided within the school setting with laid down procedures in order to achieve set goals and objectives. To them, formal education is characterized with teaching and learning, orderly progression through grades, examination and award of certificates. FRN (2004) states that formal education is structured or designed to cover all levels of education from pre-nursery to tertiary institutions. Wosu (2017) says that formal education is consciously planned and impacted in an educational institution to bring about a desirable permanent change in the learner. To him, the characteristics of formal education include a planned education system with definite aims, curriculum and course covered within a definite period, availability of professional teachers, specific location with available infrastructures, properly regulated educational system, and award of certificates.

Formal education usually takes place in the premises of the school where a person learns basic academics or skills. It begins in elementary school and ends in the university. Formal education is provided under a certain set of rules and regulations, and given by professional teachers (passionineducation.com). It further itemized the characteristics of formal education as structured hierarchically, learning in a classroom, deliberately planned, regular payment of scheduled school fees, chronological grading system, award of certificates, a syllabus that is covered within a specified period, and hired professional teachers. Formal education is the learning that is developed in a controlled, systematic way, and guided by an educator or instructor in a formal learning environment, either online or in-person. It follows a structured learning path with a definite goal of acquiring certificate. Formal education includes school teaching, university courses, employee training, health and safety training and much more (<https://www.thinkific.com>).

Munshi (2023) refers to formal education as an organised learning that takes place within educational institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities. The traditional approach to learning provides students with a structured curriculum, trained educators, and standardized assessments to measure programmes. It offers a fundamental foundation of knowledge and academic skills that can be crucial in developing critical thinking, problem solving abilities, and subject-specific expertise. According to him, the merits of formal education are the provision of systematic framework that enables learners to gain expertise in various disciplines, access diverse range of subjects, expert guidance, and a supportive community of peers. However, despite the academic prowess it instills in the learners, it is often being criticized for its limitations in promoting creativity, adaptability, and real – world application.

Concept of Informal Education

Elekwa and Okanezi (2013) see informal education as the type of education that is gotten outside the school system just like the traditional education. It includes learning carpentering or hair dressing under one's uncle or aunty. Obanya (2014) describes informal education as incidental type of education.

Wosu (2017) asserts that informal system of education accommodates all indirect influences of the home and society. To him, the education is not usually planned or regulated hence, teaching and learning can take place anywhere and at any time, either through the press, libraries, films, market, farm, along the road, church, mosque, radio, television, peers, etc. according to him, the characteristics are that learning takes place consciously and unconsciously at any time and place, it provides raw data that is refined by formal education, no planned programmes, no curriculum and syllabus, no organised institution, no certificate is awarded because it is a life-long programme in a natural way, and the teachers are the adult members of the society. Informal education consists of experiences gained at home and society at any given time. It could be a parent teaching a child how to prepare a meal or ride a bicycle (passionineducation.com). It also listed the characteristics of informal education as independent of boundary walls, without curriculum and syllabus, no pre-planned and no time table, no school fees is charged, a life-long process in a natural way, no award of certificates, and the teachers are the adult members of the society.

Informal education does not follow any specific structure or system. It usually takes place outside formal learning settings and is self – directed, and occurs spontaneously and naturally. The learner has no specific goal in mind and may not even realize that learning is taking place. For instance, informal education can take place while watching a video on social media, chatting with a colleague or reading an article you find online and in all of these, you gain new knowledge, even though the learning was not deliberate (<https://www.thinkific.com>). Munshi (2023) says that informal education occurs through experiences and activities outside the conventional classroom setting. It is often self-directed and driven by personal curiosity, interests, and practical challenges. Informal education can take various forms, including reading books, attending workshops, participating in online courses, engaging on hobbies, volunteering and networking with professionals. The basic advantage of informal education is its focus on real world application. Thereby, encouraging learners to explore and experiment, fostering a deep understanding of subjects and the development of valuable skills like problem-solving, adaptability and resilience.

Concept of Teacher Education

The concept, teacher education is an embodiment of two terms that will be separately discussed thoroughly for better understanding. The terms however, are teacher and education.

Teacher

It will be necessary to understand the word teaching first, before diving into the meaning of the term teacher, because teaching is an important role of a teacher. To this end, Okoh (2003) describes teaching as a profession that one engages in to earn a living, and as an enterprise that involves marking of register, preparing lesson plan, imparting knowledge among others to help learners to learn. Amaele and Amaele (2010) state that: teaching whether viewed as an enterprise or act involves “a product of helpful intention between two human beings, the learned and the learner. It involves a communication or shared activities between them. Teaching is not shouting or imposition of knowledge into the brain of the learner. It is not even aimed at moulding the mind of the child; rather it helps to produce a complete and functional person.

Efebo (2005) define teaching as the interaction between teacher and student under the teacher’s leading in order to bring about positive change in the learner. Obanya (2014) says that teaching is not just an adult standing in front, by the side or at the back of a classroom to give instructions, rather teaching is a formal interaction with learners in a variety of pedagogical spaces (classrooms, laboratories, workshops, playground, field trips etc). Clarks (2008) agrees with the definition that teaching is the conscious and deliberate effort by a matured or experienced person to impart information, skills and values to an immature or less experienced person with the aim of bringing about positive change in the latter. On the whole, teaching in whatever guise is a process by which a trained person or persons with the intention of bringing about a positive and permanent change in the person(s).

Back to our discussion, the term teacher virtually means different things to different people. Hence, a school child sees the person standing in front of the classroom as a teacher, Christians see the pastor as a teacher and the Muslims see an Imman as a teacher. Dewey calls a teacher “senior servant” and Gandhiji says that a teacher is a good friend who prevents his friends from shedding tears.

Aurobindo cited in Aggarwal (2010) says that a teacher is not an instructor or a task master, but a teacher is a helper or guide. The work of a teacher is to suggest, encourage, and show a learner the way and not to impose in the mind of the learner. Amaele and Amaele (2010) define “a teacher as a person who is specially trained in knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in a formal training institution to teach or impart same to the learner in the most acceptable ways.” Finally Wosu (2017) says that a teacher is a person who is specially trained in various skills and is employed to help and guide learners in order to achieve set educational objectives.

Education

Education is a lifelong journey that extends far beyond the four walls of a classroom. The term is very broad and controversial, and so has been meaningfully defined and explained differently based on scholar’s perspectives.

Etymologically, the meaning of education is derived from two Latin words educare and educere respectively. While educare is interpreted as to train or form or mould, educere on

the other hand, means to build, lead or develop. It can therefore, be explained from the two Latin words that the society trains, forms or moulds the individual to develop natural potentialities to enable him achieve the societal needs and aspirations (Wosu, 2016 p.7).

Amaele and Amaele (2010) say that education involves the development of an individual morally, physically, mentally, intellectually, socially, and spiritually in such a way that the person will be of best to himself and the society he belongs. Ukeje (1979) views education as a process, product, and discipline. As a process, education deals with the transmission, preservation, development, and advancement of the peoples' culture; as a product, it refers to the outcome from the process of education; and as a discipline, education is seen as a body of knowledge such as what are those things to be taught? What ways should it be taught? What group or categories of people should it be taught to? Fafunwa (1974) defines education as what each generation gives to the younger ones which makes them to develop attitudes, abilities, skills and other behaviours which are of positive value to them and the society. Okoh (2003) defines education from the multi-dimensional perspectives of stipulative, normative, socio- anthropological, and programmatic.

Moughalu (2007) sees education as a process of acquiring knowledge from school processes to develop the cognitive, affective and psych motive domains of the school – going child towards effective contribution to the well-being of people and the development of the community as well as the promotion of cultural heritage. Amaele and Amaele (2010) take education to mean the total development of the individual child through acceptable methods and techniques according to his abilities and interests as well as the needs of the society, to take his rightful place and contribute adequately to the advancement of his society.

From the ongoing discussion, it could be adduced that education is a life-long process that takes place anywhere and anytime with the use of different methods, but with the sole aim of shaping individuals responsibly in order to contribute meaningfully to the growth of the society.

Teacher Education

Having explained the two terms teacher and education, it becomes imperative to define the concept teacher education. The important roles teachers play in education industry stand them out as key players because teachers can make or mar the best educational programme hence, no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers. For this reason, a would be teacher is subjected to rigorous trainings and preparations. The various trainings and preparation a prospective teacher undergoes to qualify as a teacher is what is referred to as teacher education. However, teacher education does not only focus on quantity production of teachers, but also, ensures quality and relevance in education at all levels (Wosu, 2017.pp. 65-66).

FRN (2004) recognizes the importance of teacher education, hence, it states that all teachers in educational institutions shall be professionally trained and that teacher education programmes shall be structured to equip teacher education thus:

- i. Produce highly motivated conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system,
- ii. Encourage further, the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers,
- iii. Help teachers to fit into social life of the community and the society at large, and enhance their commitment to national goals,

- iv. Provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situations, and
- v. Enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

Amaele and Amaele (2010) take teacher education to mean a deliberate, well articulated, purposeful, organized, and managed programme or process aimed at producing the desired quality of teachers who will actualize the educational dreams of the society. Imonikebe (2007) sees teacher education as "a system of education for the production of teachers for various levels of education in a country. New Word Encyclopedia (2010) describes teacher education as the policies and procedures arranged to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and skills they need to discharge their duties effectively and efficiently in the schools they are engaged.

In all, teacher education has a broad outlook that accommodates the general needs of education in the society. The purpose is to produce qualified teachers in arts, sciences, humanities, law, medicine, management, technical, and vocational studies, among others whose acquired skills and characters would make them effective in performance of their duties at all levels of education.

The Needs for Improving Synergy Between Formal and Informal Education in Teacher Education

The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language (2013) defines the word synergy as a combined, correlated and united force or action. Chambers 21st century dictionary (1999) explains synergy from the medical perspective as the phenomenon in which the combined action of two or more compounds, especially drugs or hormones is greater than the sum of the individual effects of such compound or the phenomenon. Also, synergy is the interaction or co-operation of two or more organisations, substance or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects (oxford language).

The understanding from the above definitions of synergy is that combined or united force of two or more different actions is greater than the sum total of an individual action. To this end, a combination or improvement of synergy between formal and informal education in teacher education programme will not only bridge the gap between them but also, generate better and quality output of teachers whose duty is to propagate the gospel message to the learners in various disciplines. Two good heads, they say is better than one. So a symbiotic relationship between the two types of education will lead to a well-rounded and fulfilling educational experience.

Finally, formal education has long been considered as the gold standard for acquiring knowledge, it is essential to recognise the value of informal education experiences in shaping an individual's intellect, character, and skills set. Hence, the need to improve synergy between the two types of education in teacher education.

Challenges of Improving Synergy Between Formal and Informal Education

1. Challenge of blending two types of education: The fact that formal and informal education are two distinct types of education is a pointer that blending them together as a single system for teaching and learning will obviously constitute challenges.

2. **Structure:** Another challenge of improving synergy between formal and informal education is the different structures which both of them take. While, formal education is systematic and organized towards achieving specific learning goals, informal education is unstructured and unplanned, and does not follow any formal system. Learning is shaped by the learner's individual decisions and actions, rather than a pre-set path. For example, a conversation between two colleagues on a topic cannot be structured and without a specific goal in mind but learning is taking place.
3. **Teaching methods:** Formal education is structured and taught by an educator or coach. The teaching might be face – to – face or online. Even when the learning is self-directed, formal education is designed, created and delivered by an educator. Informal education on the other hand, does not follow any formal teaching because there is no set educator or instructor. Learners may learn from adult members of the society or experts in their fields, but there is no fixed teaching or lesson.
4. **Learning environment:** Formal education being structured and planned takes place in a formal learning environment either in-person or online. Learning takes place in a specific learning space like a classroom or a zoom meeting room. Informal education happens without any learning purpose in mind, it can happen anywhere including in formal learning environment like schools or outside in the real-world like in the bus, in a café, on vacation, etc.
5. **Assessment and accreditation:** A key characteristics of formal education is that it usually includes assessments such as examination, quizzes, and formal assignments. At the end of a programme, learners receive a certificate or accreditation to mark their successful completion. Whereas, informal education does not requires any assessment or accreditations because it is unpleasant as no one receives a certificate for chatting with a colleague (<https://www.thinkific.com>).

Ways to Improve Synergy Between Formal and Informal Education in Teacher Education

To improve or facilitate synergy between formal and informal education <https://www.thinkific.com> recommends the following tips:

1. **Building of learning communities:** Learning is a social activity and so to maximize learning experience in teacher education, it is important to blend formal and informal education by providing opportunities for discussions outside the classroom through forum, online discussion boards, and chat functions to help learners interact and engage with training contents.
2. **Assigning of mentors and buddies:** To improve informal learning opportunities, pair learners with mentors or buddies to facilitate learning outside the classroom and provide a more dynamic learning experience.
3. **Increasing of engagement:** Engaged learners are more hungry for knowledge and are more likely to take part in both formal and informal education. Therefore, structure learning in teacher education for maximum engagement by adding videos, quizzes, games, and extra resources for additional learning beyond the course content.

Prospects of Improving Synergy Between Formal and Informal Education

1. Formal and informal education serve different purposes and contribute distinctively to an individual's growth and development. Therefore, blending both together in teaching can help the learner unlock a powerful academic proficiency that will lead to holistic personal professional growth (Munshi, 2023).
2. Bridging of gap: The gap between theoretical knowledge in formal education and practical applications in informal education can be bridged in the real scenarios. Thus, reinforcing and enhancing the concepts learned in the classroom and therefore, making them more tangible and relatable.
3. Fostering lifelong-learning: Enhancing informal education cultivates a thrust for knowledge, encourages individuals to pursue continuous learning through out their lives. It nurtures a growth of mind-set that is open to new ideas and adaptable to change.
4. Nurturing creativity: Informal learning encourages learners to think outside the box, foster creativity and innovation. It offers the freedom to explore diverse fields or disciplines and provision of new perspectives that can enrich formal education.
5. Enhancement of soft skills: While formal education focuses primarily on hard skills, informal education opportunities allow individuals to develop crucial soft skills such as communication, leadership, and emotional intelligence.
6. Prospect of true education: In pursuit of true education, it is important to realize that formal and informal education are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, embracing both approaches will empower teachers to become well-rounded individuals capable of tackling challenges. It will help to explore the vast universe of knowledge and experiences that await beyond the walls of classroom and pave the way for real education that can transform lives and create a brighter future (Munshi, 2023).

Conclusion

Improving synergy between formal and informal education in teacher education will mean not limiting our educational journey to the confines of the classroom, but exploring the vast universe of knowledge and experiences that awaits beyond the four walls of the classroom. Synergy between both types of education is a pursuit of true education that will unlock powerful academic proficiency in teacher education to produce well-rounded individuals capable of tackling educational and societal challenges. Above all, it will pave way for the real education that can transform lives and create a brighter future for the society.

Suggestions:

The study suggested the following as means of improving synergy between formal and informal education in teacher education:

1. That the complementary nature of formal and informal education be recognized and improved upon in teacher education for a holistic personal professional growth.
2. That opportunities for discussions outside the classroom through forum, online discussion boards, and chat functions be provided in teacher education.
3. That mentors and buddies be assigned to paired learners to facilitate learning outside the classroom for dynamic learning experience.

4. Finally, that learning should be structured for more engagement of the learners by adding videos, quizzes, games and other extra resources for learning beyond the course content.

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