



## INFORMAL, NON FORMAL AND FORMAL LEARNING

### Principles, values and differences in learning processes

*How many times educators have been faced with the **challenge of fully engaging every student**, each with their own unique characteristics and learning styles? We understand the importance of finding **approaches that go beyond traditional methods** and can stimulate curiosity while responding to each **individual's unique abilities**.*

*We are particularly convinced that the key competences that prepare youngsters for the challenges ahead can be effectively acquired and enhanced through **non-formal learning**.*

*In this chapter, we will explore the **meaning of non-formal and informal learning** and we give some suggestions on methodology.*

#### 1. **What Non-Formal Learning Methodologies are?**

Non-formal learning refers to structured learning that takes place outside of the traditional, formal education system (such as schools and universities) and normally **outside a traditional formal setting**. It is **intentional and planned**, but does not follow a rigid curriculum or lead to formal qualifications in the same way. Instead, it often involves **activities that are practical, experiential, and participatory**. This does not mean that non-formal learning cannot exist in formal contexts. On the contrary, it is also a crucial component of a modern, holistic learning experience. Formal institutions like schools and universities are not just containers for formal learning. They are vibrant hubs where organized, non-formal learning opportunities are essential for developing well-rounded, skilled, and motivated individuals. The synergy between the rigid structure of the curriculum and the flexible, passion-driven nature of non-formal activities is what defines a truly great education today.

[Here](#) you can find a video about the characteristics of non-formal learning promoted by SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre.

Non-formal learning became part of the international discourse on education policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It can be seen as related to the concepts of recurrent and lifelong learning, whereas the concepts have to do with the extension of education and learning throughout life, non-formal learning is about acknowledging the importance of education, learning and training which takes place outside recognized educational institutions.

#### **Main characteristics:**

- Non-formal learning is an **intentional, structured** and **systematic** learning method.
- Non-formal learning is on **voluntary** basis.
- It is a **flexible** learning method in which content is adapted to the unique needs of the learner (or unique situations) in order to maximize learning.
- It is not in-formal education. It is **planned** and follows **learning theories**.
- Non-formal learning is more **learner centred** than most formal education methods.
- Non-formal learning methodologies use **active participation** and participants' **personal experiences**.





## INFORMAL, NON FORMAL AND FORMAL LEARNING

- Participation and cooperation helps to build **group cohesion** and **reduce biases** between group members.
- Non-formal learning is **non-hierarchical**, and everyone can be learner and teacher.
- All the participants contribute with their experiences to the learning process ensuring their **personal interest** and **effective development** of the group.
- Non-formal learning uses **holistic approach**, where the learning is done by doing. It follows the principle of **head, heart and hands**.
- It furthers understanding of complex concepts, improves **problem solving skills** and stimulates **creativity** and aims to human rights education.
- **Non-formal learning can be evaluated**, using certificates based on self-assessment and evaluation.
- **Questions and conflicts** are regarded as fundamental learning resources, which can be addressed in a positive manner.
- Non-formal learning approach is a valid mechanism **to integrate disadvantaged groups into society**.

Examples of non-formal learning activities include:

- Workshops and training courses: Focused on specific skills or topics.
- Youth groups and clubs: Activities that promote social development, teamwork, and leadership.
- Volunteering and community service: Learning through active participation in society.
- Internships and apprenticeships: Gaining practical experience in a work setting.
- Arts and cultural programmes: Developing creativity, expression, and cultural awareness.
- Peer education: Learning from and with people of the same level.

*And now, a short summary and exercise: Click [Here](#)*

### 1. *What's Informal Learning?*

Informal learning, on the other hand, is learning that occurs spontaneously and unplanned, outside of any formal or non-formal educational structure. It is an ongoing process, often unintentional, that results from daily activities, experiences, and interactions.

Informal learning is achieved through a variety of ways, often unstructured and guided by the individual's interests and needs. Some of the most common methodologies include:

- **Self-directed learning:** The individual takes responsibility for their own learning, identifying their needs, setting goals, and choosing the most suitable resources and strategies.





## INFORMAL, NON FORMAL AND FORMAL LEARNING

- **Experiential learning:** Learning occurs through direct experience, practice, and reflection on one's actions.
- **Social learning:** Interaction with others, such as colleagues, mentors, friends, or family, plays a fundamental role in the acquisition of knowledge and skills.
- **Situated learning:** Learning is closely linked to the context in which it occurs, allowing the individual to better understand the practical application of their knowledge.
- **Observation and imitation:** Learning by observing others and imitating their behaviors or actions.
- **Trial and error:** Acquiring knowledge through experimentation, making mistakes, and learning from them.
- **Autonomous reading and research:** Using books, articles, online resources, and other materials to acquire information independently.
- **Participation in communities of practice:** Interacting with groups of people who share similar interests or professions to learn and exchange knowledge.
- **Informal mentoring and coaching:** Receiving guidance and support from more experienced people in an unstructured way.

### 1. *Why is Non Formal Learning Useful for Youth Development?*

There are several key reasons why non-formal learning methods are particularly effective for young people:

**Active involvement and motivation:** As they are often based on **practical, experiential and participatory activities**, such as role-plays, group projects, simulations, art and sports activities, they capture young people's interest more effectively than passive lectures. 'Learning by doing' makes learning more dynamic and memorable.

**Adaptability and flexibility:** These methods can easily be **adapted to the interests, needs and learning styles of young people**. They often start from participants' life experiences, making the content more relevant and meaningful.

**Development of soft skills:** Non-formal learning promotes the development of **essential social and emotional skills**, such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, empathy, and leadership. These skills are vital for personal and professional success.

**Learning in real-world contexts:** Many non-formal activities **take place in real or simulated contexts** that reflect real-life situations, helping young people connect learning with the world around them.

**Strengthening self-esteem and self-confidence:** Success in practical activities and active participation in groups can boost young people's self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy. Non-formal learning provides a structured yet flexible approach. Recognising and valuing different types of learning can lead to a more **holistic and effective learning approach** for young people with diverse learning styles.



# SL PRINCIPLES & METHODOLOGIES



## INFORMAL, NON FORMAL AND FORMAL LEARNING

### Find out more...useful resources:

**Video on Teaching Methods for Inspiring the Students of the Future | Joe Ruhl | TEDxLafayette**

**Video explaining FORMAL, NON-FORMAL, INFORMAL LEARNING**

**Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training)**: Cedefop offers numerous publications and resources on non-formal and informal learning methodologies, including studies, reports, and guidelines.\_

**European Commission - Education and Training**: The Education and Training section of the European Commission website provides information on policies, programs, and initiatives related to non-formal and informal learning.\_

**EAEA (European Association for the Education of Adults)**: EAEA is a European organization that promotes adult learning and offers resources, publications, and events on the topic of non-formal and informal learning.\_

**UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning**: UIL focuses on lifelong learning and provides resources, research, and publications on non-formal and informal learning in various parts of the world.\_

**OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)**: The OECD offers resources and publications on education and learning, including comparative analyses and best practices related to non-formal and informal learning.



Co-funded by  
the European Union