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NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Annotation

Modern changes in education require flexible approaches to learning that can meet the needs of teachers' professional development. This article examines non-formal learning as an important and flexible tool for teachers' professional development in the context of modern educational transformations. Against the backdrop of increasing demands for continuous learning, adaptation and innovation, traditional models of teacher professional development are often insufficient. The purpose of this study is to examine non-formal learning as a tool for teachers' professional development in the context of modern educational transformation. The authors examine the role of non-formal learning methods such as workshops, self-study, mentoring, and participation in professional communities as effective strategies that meet teachers' individual needs and enhance their pedagogical competence.

Based on theoretical analysis and empirical research, including semi-structured interviews with 27 teachers in general education schools in Karaganda, Kazakhstan, the study highlights the benefits of non-formal learning. The main findings show that this learning environment promotes active knowledge acquisition, innovative teaching methods and teacher motivation. The interview results show a strong correlation between participation in non-formal learning activities and increased professional confidence, learning effectiveness and collaboration in teaching teams.

In addition, the authors propose a model of non-formal learning that synthesizes various educational theories (experiential learning, andragogy, connectivism, etc.) and integrates personal, social, and organizational factors. This model serves as a practical framework for implementing non-formal teacher education programs and evaluating their impact.

The study concludes that non-formal learning not only complements formal professional development but also strengthens a teacher's capacity to adapt to the evolving demands of the 21st-century classroom. Recommendations include institutional support for teacher-led initiatives, increased access to flexible training formats, and the integration of non-formal learning into formal education systems.

Keywords: mentoring, professional development, lifelong learning, innovative teaching methods, concept of non-formal learning, semi-structured interview, professional communities

Introduction. The modern stage of society development, characterized by the processes of digitalization, globalization and rapid changes in the labor market, puts forward increased requirements for professional flexibility and continuous learning of specialists. Traditional formats of formal education are often not dynamic enough for timely response to current challenges, which increases the importance of non-formal education as a tool for updating knowledge, developing professional competencies and adapting to new conditions [1], [2].

Non-formal learning plays a special role in the process of professional development, as it provides an opportunity to take into account individual needs, interests and professional tasks of the learner. Such forms as self-education, mentoring, participation in professional communities and the use of digital educational platforms contribute to the deepening of professional skills and strengthening the professional identity of a specialist [3], [4].

The transition to the concept of lifelong learning, reflected in the strategic initiatives of international organizations, including UNESCO [5] and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [6], highlights the importance of integrating non-formal learning into the systems of training and retraining of specialists. In the conditions of accelerated technological development and changes in the economy, non-formal learning becomes an integral element of professional activity.

Learning is divided into formal and non-formal, which allows taking into account different approaches to the organization of the educational process, its context and ways of knowledge assimilation.

Formal learning takes place in institutional settings such as schools, universities and vocational training institutions. It is characterized by well-structured organization, predetermined objectives, programs and assessment mechanisms that provide formal recognition of results [7]. The purpose of this study is to examine non-formal learning as a tool for teachers' professional development in the context of modern educational transformation.

Non-formal learning, on the contrary, takes place outside the framework of formal educational institutions, but can be structured and purposeful. It is realized in professional communities, through self-education, as well as in the framework of trainings and seminars aimed at solving specific tasks. According to M. Eraut's definition, non-formal learning is a process in which knowledge and skills are acquired through practical experience, interaction with colleagues and independent activity. The main advantage of this approach is its flexibility and ability to adapt to changing conditions, which makes it an effective tool for professional development [2, p. 250].

Non-formal education is implemented outside the system of formal educational organizations and does not imply the mandatory receipt of certificates or diplomas. At the same time, it can be structured in the form of courses, trainings, master classes and other educational activities.

Thus, we can formulate four characteristics of non-formal learning.

Firstly, non-formal learning is realized in different formats, such as seminars, training courses, which allows to achieve flexibility of learning.

Secondly, non-formal learning programs are oriented to the educational needs of learners, which requires the specification of learning objectives and thus achieves practical orientation of learning.

Thirdly, non-formal learning contributes to the continuous development of professional skills.

Finally, fourthly, in most cases non-formal learning is not supposed to issue official documents confirming the completion of the course, which emphasizes its focus on the development of knowledge and competences, rather than on formal certification.

In general, we talk about non-formal learning as a process that allows to adapt the learning process to individual needs and, thus, provides practical value of this form of education for professional and personal growth of teachers [8].

Methods and materials. This study is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines theoretical and empirical methods of analysis, allowing us to study non-formal learning as a tool for professional development. In the course of theoretical analysis, we analyzed the scientific works of domestic and foreign researchers devoted to non-formal learning; summarized the key provisions of the theories of learning through experience, andragogy, situational learning and others; compared theoretical approaches to identify their common features and differences. The method of content analysis allowed us to study the content of professional educational programs, courses, trainings and digital platforms related to the implementation of non-formal learning principles, as well as to analyses the documents of international organizations (UNESCO, OECD) on lifelong learning. The comparative method helped in comparing non-formal and formal learning according to the criteria of flexibility, goal-orientation, practice-orientation and motivation. Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews with participants of non-formal educational activities (courses, trainings, seminars).

To achieve the research objectives, mixed methodology methods were used: along with quantitative surveys, qualitative methods were used - semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observation and content analysis. The socio-demographic composition of participants covered a wide range of characteristics, which ensured the representativeness of the sample. Both men and women participated in the sample, with women accounting for the majority of respondents, reflecting the gender specificity of the teaching profession in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The age range of participants varied from 30 to 50 years, indicating the involvement of mature teachers with solid professional experience in the study. The respondents' teaching experience ranged from 5 to 25 years, which allowed both young professionals and experienced teachers to be included in the analysis. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the perception of non-formal education as a tool for professional growth and identified the real impact of participation in non-formal educational initiatives on teaching practice.

Based on a summary of these thematic blocks, a model was constructed that reflects three key components: individual development (through self-study and reflection), social interaction (through participation in professional online communities), and institutional support (through the availability of conditions and resources). Thus, the model is the result of interpreting empirical data and represents a visualised summary of the real-life experiences of teachers, as recorded during interviews.

The obtained data were processed using SPSS software (version 26) for statistical analysis and MAXQDA for systematization and interpretation of textual information. Methodological integrity was ensured by triangulating the data - comparing results from different sources to increase the validity of the findings.

The ethical part of the study was strictly adhered to. Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, its content and the intended use of the information. Participation in the study was completely voluntary and each respondent signed an informed consent form. All data were anonymized: identifying information was not recorded or used for publication. Confidentiality was ensured by storing the data in encrypted form and restricting access to the data to members of the research team only.

The study complied with the ethical standards set out in the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Scientific and Scientific-Technical Activity" and the principles of the researcher's code of ethics. The ethical protocol for the research was agreed at the level of the institution and did not involve risks to participants.

Results and discussion. The concept of non-formal learning has deep historical roots, dating back to the first studies of processes that take place outside formal educational institutions. It has developed at the intersection of pedagogy, andragogy and sociology, responding to the challenges of society's changing needs for knowledge and skills.

Non-formal learning is a flexible, individualized and practice-oriented form of education that meets the current challenges of the labor market and professional development.

Non-formal learning occupies a special place in the education system due to its flexibility, practical orientation and individual approach. It becomes a powerful tool for professional and personal development, contributing to human adaptation to the changing conditions of the modern world.

Our analysis of scientific works of domestic and foreign researchers devoted to non-formal learning allowed us to organize Table 1 of the main clauses and their possible application.

Title	Author/	Main points	Application
	Researcher		
Theory of experience	John Dewey	Learning is built on experience; experience is the link between past and new knowledge.	Used in adult pedagogy, training and mentoring.
Theory of andragogy	Malcolm Knowles	Adults learn better when learning is related to their life or professional goals.	A core approach in adult and corporate learning.
Theory of practical knowledge	Michael Eraut	Non-formal learning is shaped through experience, interaction with peers and practical problem solving.	Used in professional development, especially in medicine and business.
Social learning	Albert Bandura	Learning takes place through observation, modelling and interaction with others.	Used in mentoring, coaching and learning by example.
Connectivism	George Siemens, Stephen Downs	Learning is the process of making connections between knowledge sources in a digital environment.	Used in online courses, digital platforms and online learning.
Activity-based approach	L.S. Vygotsky, A.N. Leontiev	Learning takes place through active activity in a real or artificially created context.	Applied in project and practice- oriented pedagogy.

Table 1. Key clauses of non-formal learning theories

Self-education theory	Carl Rogers	Learning becomes successful when it is learner-initiated and related to the learner's interests.	Used in self-study, when using open educational resources.
Learning by doing	David Kolb	The foundation of learning is a cycle of experience, observation, generalisation and experimentation.	Widely used in business training, coaching and professional training.

Source: compiled by the author

It can be concluded from the above table that non-formal learning is a dynamic and flexible form of education that is built around the individual needs and professional experiences of learners. It is underpinned by a number of theories and approaches, each of which contributes to understanding its nature and practical application.

Theories of non-formal learning cover a wide range of approaches, from traditional learning through experience (Dewey) to modern digital technologies (Siemens and Downs). This emphasizes the universality of non-formal education.

Almost all theories emphasize the use of knowledge in real-life situations, which makes non-formal learning particularly effective for professional development.

Many approaches, such as andragogy and self-learning theory, emphasize the importance of tailoring the learning process to the individual learner's needs.

Theories such as situational and social learning emphasize the importance of interaction with others and participation in professional communities.

Connectivism shows that modern technologies provide new opportunities for learning, making it more accessible and flexible.

Thus, non-formal learning combines elements of traditional and modern approaches, which makes it a powerful tool for professional and personal development.

In the framework of the study, a survey in the format of semi-structured interview was conducted among teachers of general education schools in Karaganda city. The main purpose of the interview was to study the experience of teachers participating in non-formal educational activities, as well as their motivation, perception and assessment of the impact of such activities on professional development.

Interviews were conducted with 27 teachers with experience of participation in seminars, trainings and courses organized within the framework of Competence Centers, which include schools of Karaganda city. All respondents were teachers of different subjects with different lengths of service, but common to them was the desire for professional growth and readiness to introduce new approaches in the educational process. The interviews lasted from 10 to 20 minutes, which allowed collecting detailed and versatile data.

The results of the interviews showed that teachers' motivation to participate in non-formal educational events is related to the desire to improve their qualifications, introduce innovative methods in teaching and find new solutions to professional challenges. Many teachers noted that the flexibility of such formats, their practical orientation and focus on the real needs of the educational process make them particularly attractive.

During the interviews, the respondents described in detail which training formats were the most useful for them. Practical classes, group discussions and masterclasses were the most popular, as they allowed not only to acquire new knowledge, but also to see its practical application immediately. Teachers noted that during the workshops they were able to learn relevant pedagogical approaches, which they then successfully applied in school practice.

In parallel to the positive aspects, teachers pointed out certain difficulties they had encountered. Among them were highlighted the lack of time to participate in the activities, difficulties in integrating new knowledge within the existing school system, as well as the need for deeper adaptation of educational programs to the specific needs of teachers.

The interviews revealed that participation in non-formal educational activities has a significant impact on teachers' professional activities. Many respondents noted an increase in self-confidence, professional competence, and improved relationships with students due to the introduction of new

approaches. In addition, teachers emphasized that such activities help to create a community of professionals where they can share experiences and receive support.

The study also identified recommendations that would improve the work of the Competence Centers. Teachers expressed a desire to see more practice-oriented programs and a more flexible schedule. Particular attention was paid to the need to further expand the topics of the workshops, which would allow all aspects of professional development to be covered.

Thus, the semi-structured interviews demonstrated that non-formal learning plays a key role in the professional development of teachers. It not only helps to solve current problems, but also creates motivation in teachers for continuing education, which makes such activities an important tool for the development of the school education system.

Based on the analysis of various scientific sources and data obtained during the semi-structured interview with teachers of general education schools of Karaganda city, we have developed a model of non-formal learning, which is a complex system reflecting the influence of many factors on the process of learning outside the traditional educational framework (Figure 1). It is based on the idea that non-formal learning is a dynamic process that depends on individual characteristics of students, educational environment, applied methods and strategies, as well as social and organizational conditions.



Figure 1. A model of non-formal learning

Source: compiled by the author

The starting point of the model is the input data, which includes the learner's initial level of competence, motivation, professional experience and access to educational resources. From this starting point there are several key directions that determine the process of non-formal learning. The learning environment plays an important role, which includes available information resources, professional communities and opportunities to interact with colleagues. Learning methods and strategies represent various forms of self-development, mentoring, participation in trainings and masterclasses, use of digital technologies and sharing experiences in professional networks.

In addition, social and organizational factors, including peer support, a culture of lifelong learning and the willingness of educational institutions to integrate elements of non-formal learning into the professional development of educators, have a significant impact. The interaction of all these elements leads to the formation of a new level of knowledge, improvement of professional skills and adaptation to the modern requirements of the educational environment.

Thus, the proposed model emphasizes that non-formal learning is an inseparable process that depends on many interrelated factors. Its successful implementation requires a comprehensive approach that provides a balance between the individual needs of learners, the conditions of the educational environment and methodological strategies aimed at the development of professional competencies.

The developed model of non-formal education can be used to develop non-formal teacher education programs, organize activities and evaluate their effectiveness. This model takes into account the key factors identified during the interviews and is oriented to meet the needs of teachers in professional development.

The scientific novelty of the proposed model of professional development for teachers lies in its individualized nature, based on a synthesis of non-formal education approaches and the concept of non-positional leadership. Unlike traditional models focused on vertical forms of interaction and formal mechanisms for professional development, the developed model is based on the principles of personalization of professional growth and takes into account the unique needs, motivation, and resources of each participant. The model integrates the ideas of experiential learning, andragogy, and connectivism, thereby ensuring a high level of engagement and meaningful participation of teachers in educational communities. One of the key features of the model is its emphasis on horizontal connections and network collaboration, where teachers realize their leadership potential through voluntary participation, initiative, exchange of experience, and support from colleagues. Thus, the model contributes to the formation of sustainable professional communities and develops a culture of teacher interaction in which teachers become not only objects but also active subjects of their own professional development. This makes the proposed model particularly relevant in the context of education system reform and the pursuit of more flexible and effective professional development strategies.

Despite the significant results obtained, this study has a number of limitations that must be taken into account when interpreting the findings. First, the sample of respondents was limited geographically and included only teachers from educational institutions in the city of Karaganda. This narrows the possibility of generalizing the results to other regions of Kazakhstan or the international context.

Second, the quantitative part of the study was based on participants' self-reports, which may include elements of subjective assessment and social desirability bias. Despite measures to ensure anonymity and honesty, this factor cannot be ruled out.

Third, the sample size, especially at the in-depth interview stage, was relatively small (27 people), which, although it allowed for rich qualitative data to be obtained, does not ensure full representativeness.

In this regard, further research is needed with an expanded geography, an increased number of participants, and, if possible, the inclusion of objective indicators of teachers' professional development.

The results of semi-structured interviews with teachers confirmed the key points identified during the analysis of scientific literature on the topic of non-formal learning and professional development of teachers.

First, the majority of interviewed teachers indicated that participation in professional communities and non-formal initiatives (webinars, methodological circles, sharing experience online) contributes to the development of confidence, professional reflection and increased motivation. These findings are consistent with the approach of D. Kolb (1984) that experiential learning is an effective mechanism for professional growth. Teachers emphasized the importance of practical application of knowledge and sharing real teaching experiences, which also reflects the ideas of M. Knowles (1980) on andragogy and adult self-learning.

Secondly, as Billett (2001) notes, non-formal learning becomes particularly significant in contexts where traditional forms of professional development are insufficient. Respondents confirmed that it is non-formal formats that help to prompt innovation in practice, including through work in inter-school communities and project groups. This is consistent with Hargreaves & Fullan's (2012) concept of professional capital, which emphasizes the importance of collective activity and trust [9, 10].

Third, the interviews reveal that educators particularly value peer support, the availability of mentoring and the opportunity to freely exchange ideas, which supports Wenger's (1998) theorization of 'communities of practice' and theories of connectivism as the basis for digital collaboration and self-organizing learning [11].

Thus, the empirical data confirm that non-formal learning not only corresponds to the current pedagogical theories, but also is effectively implemented in the conditions of modern Kazakhstani education. This emphasizes both the scientific significance of the topic and its applied value for the development of models of teachers' professional development.

Conclusion. The analysis of modern trends in education shows that non-formal learning plays a significant role in the process of teachers' professional development. Unlike formal education, non-formal learning provides an opportunity for independent choice of content, methods and pace of learning material, which makes it especially in demand in a rapidly changing educational environment. The conducted research based on the study of theoretical sources and semi-structured interviews with teachers of general education schools in Karaganda city allowed to identify the main advantages and challenges associated with this form of education.

The characteristics of non-formal learning identified in the course of the study indicate its significant adaptability and focus on the practical application of knowledge. Teachers note that participation in trainings, master classes, seminars and professional communities contributes to the rapid learning of new teaching methods, exchange of experience and expansion of professional competences. One of the key factors in the effectiveness of non-formal learning is its voluntariness and high degree of motivation of participants, which contributes to better learning and its integration into professional activities.

The model of non-formal learning developed in the course of the study reflects the basic mechanisms of its functioning, including the relationship between motivation, learning format, practical orientation and final educational results. This model allows to present non-formal learning as a holistic process that includes both individual and collective educational activities.

At the same time, the analysis has shown that there are certain challenges associated with non-formal learning. Among them are the lack of uniform standards for assessing effectiveness, difficulties in verifying the knowledge gained and the need to organize the learning process independently. However, the advantages, such as flexibility, orientation to actual professional tasks and the possibility of integration into the work process, make non-formal learning an integral part of the system of continuous professional development.

Thus, the results of the study confirm that non-formal learning is an important tool for teachers' professional development, contributing to their professional development, adaptation to modern educational challenges and introduction of innovative teaching methods. To further improve the effectiveness of this form of learning, it is recommended to develop mechanisms for assessing its

results, to create educational communities for sharing experience and to integrate elements of non-formal learning into formal educational programs.

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ПЕДАГОГТІ КӘСІБИ ДАМЫТУ ҚҰРАЛЫ РЕТІНДЕГІ БЕЙРЕСМИ ОҚЫТУ

Аңдатпа

Білім берудегі заманауи өзгерістер мұғалімдердің кәсіби дамуының қажеттіліктерін қанағаттандыра алатын икемді оқыту тәсілдерін талап етеді. Бұл мақалада бейресми білім беру қазіргі білім беру трансформациялары жағдайында мұғалімдердің кәсіби дамуының маңызды және икемді құралы ретінде қарастырылады. Үздіксіз оқуға, бейімделуге және инновацияларға қойылатын талаптардың артуы аясында мұғалімдердің кәсіби дамуының дәстүрлі үлгілері жиі жеткіліксіз болып жатады. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты қазіргі білім беру өзгерістері жағдайында педагогтердің кәсіби дамуының құралы ретінде бейресми оқытуды зерттеу болып табылады.

Авторлар семинарлар, өзін-өзі оқыту, тәлімгерлік және кәсіби қауымдастықтарға қатысу сияқты бейресми оқыту әдістерінің рөлін қарастырады. Бұл әдістер мұғалімдердің жеке қажеттіліктерін қанағаттандырып, олардың педагогикалық құзыреттілігін арттыратын тиімді стратегиялар ретінде бағаланады.

Теориялық талдау мен эмпирикалық зерттеу негізінде (оның ішінде Қарағанды қаласындағы жалпы білім беретін мектептердің 27 мұғалімімен жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбаттар) бейресми оқытудың артықшылықтары айқын көрсетілген. Негізгі қорытындылар мұндай оқыту ортасының білімді белсенді түрде меңгеруге, инновациялық оқыту әдістеріне және мұғалімдердің мотивациясына ықпал ететінін дәлелдейді.

Сұхбат нәтижелері бейресми оқытуға қатысу мен кәсіби сенімділік, оқыту тиімділігі және педагогикалық командалардағы ынтымақтастық арасындағы тығыз байланысты көрсетеді.

Сонымен қатар, авторлар түрлі білім беру теорияларын (тәжірибелік оқыту, андрогогика, коннективизм және т.б.) біріктіретін және тұлғалық, әлеуметтік әрі ұйымдық факторларды қамтитын бейресми оқытудың моделін ұсынады. Бұл модель бейресми педагогикалық білім беру бағдарламаларын жүзеге асыру мен олардың нәтижелілігін бағалау үшін тәжірибелік негіз ретінде қызмет етеді.

Зерттеу бейресми оқыту тек ресми кәсіби дамуды толықтырып қана қоймай, сонымен қатар XXI ғасыр сыныбының өзгермелі талаптарына бейімделу қабілетін нығайтатынын көрсетеді. Ұсынымдар мұғалімдердің бастамаларын институционалды қолдауды, оқытудың икемді форматтарына қолжетімділікті кеңейтуді және бейресми оқытуды ресми білім беру жүйесіне интеграциялауды қамтиды.

Түйінді сөздер: тәлімгерлік, кәсіби даму, үздіксіз оқу, оқытудың инновациялық әдістері, бейресми оқыту тұжырымдамасы, жартылай құрылымдық сұхбат, кәсіби қауымдастықтар

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НЕФОРМАЛЬНОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ КАК ИНСТРУМЕНТ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОГО РАЗВИТИЯ УЧИТЕЛЯ

Аннотация

Современные изменения в образовании требуют гибких подходов к обучению, способных удовлетворить потребности профессионального развития учителей. В данной статье рассматривается неформальное обучение как важный и гибкий инструмент профессионального развития учителей в контексте современных образовательных трансформаций. Целью данного исследования является изучение неформального обучения как инструмента профессионального развития учителей в условиях современных образовательных трансформаций. На фоне растущих требований к непрерывному обучению, адаптации и инновациям традиционные модели профессионального развития учителей часто оказываются недостаточными. Авторы рассматривают роль неформальных методов обучения, таких как семинары, самообучение, наставничество и участие в профессиональных сообществах, как эффективные стратегии, удовлетворяющие индивидуальные потребности учителей и повышающие их педагогическую компетентность.

На основе теоретического анализа и эмпирического исследования, включая полуструктурированные интервью с 27 учителями общеобразовательных школ Караганды (Казахстан), подчеркиваются преимущества неформального обучения. Основные выводы показывают, что такая образовательная среда способствует активному усвоению знаний, применению инновационных методов преподавания и повышению мотивации учителей. Результаты интервью показывают сильную корреляцию между участием в неформальном обучении и повышением профессиональной уверенности, эффективности обучения и сотрудничества в педагогических командах.

Кроме того, авторы предлагают модель неформального обучения, которая синтезирует различные образовательные теории (опытное обучение, андрагогику, коннективизм и т. д.) и объединяет личностные, социальные и организационные факторы, влияющие на профессиональное развитие учителей. Эта модель служит практической основой для реализации программ неформального педагогического образования и оценки их результативности.

В исследовании делается вывод о том, что неформальное обучение не только дополняет формальное профессиональное развитие, но и укрепляет способность учителя адаптироваться к меняющимся требованиям класса XXI века. Рекомендации включают институциональную поддержку инициатив учителей, расширение доступа к гибким форматам обучения и интеграцию неформального обучения в системы формального образования.

Ключевые слова: наставничество, профессиональное развитие, обучение на протяжении всей жизни, инновационные методы обучения, концепция неформального обучения, полуструктурированное интервью, профессиональные сообщества

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