

A Study on Conditions and Factors Influencing Learning Activities of Basic Non-formal Education Students in the Lower Central Part of Thailand

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Abstract. Non-formal education was well known among Thai people. Nonetheless, there have been lately some concerns about its pedagogical methods and course management. Many educators are of the opinion that suitable approaches should be devised so that the program can be run more productively and efficiently. In order to develop an effective program for basic non-formal education students, the state and factors influencing these students' learning activities should be thoroughly understood first. This research is aimed to study state and factors which affect learning activities basic non-formal education students in 2011 in the lower central part of Thailand. The samples are comprised of 398 junior high school students in the basic non-formal education program. These students were selected by simple random sampling. The tool was a questionnaire asking for the students' perception of their learning activities in 7 domains including (1) learning environment, (2) curriculum, (3) learners, (4) instructors, (5) pedagogic methods & activities, (6) measurement & evaluation and (7) information & communication technology (ICT) used in the instruction. The current study also looked into 8 factors related to the learning activities. Such factors were (1) self-development, (2) career, (3) society, (4) government policy, (5) related parties, (6) convenience, (7) economy and (8) technology. The in-depth data analysis was conducted by employing descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA. The findings revealed that the most influential factor on the condition of students' learning activities was the "instructors." Meanwhile, ICT was rated the lowest rank. Via one way analysis of variance, this study has found that all the seven factors related to learning activities were at the "much" level. "Career" was mentioned to be the most influential factor of the participants' learning activities, followed by self development, convenience, society, government policy, related parties, economy and technology, respectively.

Keywords: Learning Factor, Learning Activities, Non-Formal Education, the Lower Central Part of Thailand.

1. Introduction

Non-formal education is a type of education provided to destitute Thai people in order to develop their quality of life and society in which they reside. This style of education holds on to the principle of education as a life-long learning activity. Non-formal education is generally considered an opportunity for the underprivileged or those who lack educational opportunities in formal schooling. Non-formal education is thus believed to provide these deprived students with a golden opportunity to gain knowledge and acquire skills. The non-formal education also cultivates the attitude necessary for their standard of living, right livelihood and adaptation to the rapid change of various advanced technology for moderate happiness [1]. Nowadays, nonetheless, non-formal education is deemed the last choice, resulting in a decline of the number

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of students in the continuing non-formal education courses at the university level. The society often thinks that the products of non-formal education—graduates from non-education programs—are of poor quality. Importantly, the prospective students tend to be those with inferior economic status and frequent migration. As a result, these students cannot receive academic services and/or participate in learning activities in a continuous manner. In addition, the effect of ICT is twofold. First, due to inadequacy of ICT provided by the government agency and/or academic service providers, the target students cannot access the learning sources equitably. Second, the mainstream of globalization and materialism allows information flow to people in a fast and diverse fashion. Without suitable guidance, society gradually worsens while morality declines. Learning activities aiming at the betterment of the non-formal education students are becoming more and more difficult [2].

A study of learning activities and factors which influence the learning activities of non-formal education students in the lower central part of Thailand is thus conducted. This study can provide the information on the underlying causes of non-formal education students. The penetrating insight will then offer suitable ways in developing learning models for non-formal education. Such models can then enable non-formal education to cope with changes in terms of conditions, learners’ ongoing demands, science, knowledge and modern ICT. Moreover, the finding from this study will also offer a way to develop Thai personnel to be qualified for the labor market and to have high potential to compete with people of other countries.

2. Objectives

- To examine learning activities of non-formal education students in the lower central part of Thailand.
- To investigate factors related to the learning activities of non-formal education students in the lower central part of Thailand.

3. Methodology

The present research was a survey study. The questionnaire was conducted with the 398 students of basic non-formal education schools in the three provinces located in the lower central part of Thailand. The three provinces were Nakhon Pathom, Kanchanaburi and Ratchaburi. The questionnaire included 85 items about state and factors related to the learning activities of non-formal education students.

4. The Result of Research

This study is divided into two parts: a study on the learning activities and a study on factors related to the learning activities. Below were the findings.

4.1. State of Learning Activities

The students’ perception on learning activities provided in non-formal education included 7 aspects: (1) learning environment, (2) curriculum, (3) learners, (4) instructors, (5) pedagogic methods & activities, (6) measurement & evaluation and (7) information & communication technology (ICT) used in the instruction. Based on a five-point likert scale, the results were shown in the following tables.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of state of the learning activities

State	Rank.	\bar{X}	S.D.
1. Learning Environment	3	3.85	0.53
2. Curriculum	2	3.96	0.60
3. Learners	5	3.82	0.61
4. Instructors	1	4.02	0.58
5. Pedagogic Methods & Activities	6	3.78	0.54
6. Measurement & Evaluation	4	3.85	0.57
7. Information & Communication Technology (ICT)	7	3.58	0.77

Table1 shows that the students' average score in all 7 aspects were at “good” level. The highest average score fell on the “instructors” ($\bar{X} = 4.02$), while the lowest average score was “ICT” for instruction ($\bar{X} = 3.58$).

Regarding the “pedagogic methods and activities” which is an important aspect in teaching and learning management, we further divided this aspect into four models: (1) self-directed learning, (2) group learning, (3) distance learning and (3) other-sources learning as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Pedagogic Methods and Activities

Methods and Instruction Activities	Rank.	\bar{X}	S.D.
(1) Self-directed Learning	1	3.87	0.58
(2) Group Learning	2	3.86	0.55
(3) Distance Learning	4	3.56	0.77
(4) Other-sources Learning	3	3.79	0.61

From Table2, it was found that students’ score in “self-directed learning” ranked the highest ($\bar{X} = 3.87$), followed by “group learning” and “other-sources learning.” The lowest score belonged to “distance learning” which used ICT as a medium of instruction.

Goal of life was also studied to find whether or not it was related to the overall students’ opinions. The goal of life was divided into 3 groups: very much, much and moderate. The analysis of variance classified by 7 aspects was conducted as illustrated in the following table.

Table 3: Comparison of State of Learning Activities of Basic Non-formal Education Students Divided by the Goal of Life

State	The Goal of Life		Very Much		Much		Moderate		F-test
	\bar{X}	SD.	\bar{X}	SD.	\bar{X}	SD.	\bar{X}	SD.	
1. Learning Environment	4.05	0.54	3.84	0.48	3.74	0.53	9.35*		
2. Curriculum	4.14	0.50	3.97	0.54	3.83	0.67	7.42*		
3. Learners	3.99	0.61	3.85	0.61	3.67	0.58	8.05*		
4. Instructors	4.23	0.51	4.03	0.56	3.87	0.62	10.64*		
5. Pedagogic Methods & Activities	3.99	0.48	3.79	0.53	3.63	0.55	12.08*		
6. Measurement & Evaluation	4.05	0.54	3.82	0.54	3.77	0.58	6.70*		
7. Information & Communication Technology(ICT)	3.82	0.72	3.59	0.76	3.44	0.83	6.20*		

*P < .05

Table 3 reveals that students who have different goals of life significantly showed different opinions about the learning activities in all aspects.

The average score showed that non-formal learners who have “very much” goal showed greater opinions about the learning activities in all aspects than those with “much” and “moderate” life goal.

In the next part, the factors related to learning activities of basic non-formal education students will be revealed.

4.2. Factors related to the Learning Activities

The present study looked specifically into eight factors affecting non-formal education students’ learning activities. The eight aspects were (1) self-development, (2) career, (3) society, (4) related parties, (5) convenience, (6) economy, (7) technology and (8) government policy. Based on a five-point likert scale, the findings were shown in following table.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of Factors of Learning Activities

Factors	Rank	\bar{X}	S.D.
1. Self-development	1	4.03	0.56
2. Career	1	4.03	0.63
3. Society	3	3.92	0.65
4. Related Parties	5	3.85	0.60

5. Convenience	2	3.94	0.61
6. Economy	6	3.77	0.68
7. Technology	7	3.65	0.63
8. Government Policy	4	3.85	0.63

From Table 4, it was found that the students' average scores in 8 aspects were at “high” levels. The highest average score was “career” and “self-development” (\bar{X} = 4.03 for both), followed by convenience, society, government policy and related parties, respectively; whereas technology obtained the lowest average score (\bar{X} = 3.65).

In furtherance to the eight factors of learning activities, goal of life was studied if it was related to their opinion or not. Life goal was divided into 3 groups: very much, much and moderate. The analysis of variance was used and the data was classified into 8 aspects as shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Comparison of Factors Related to the Learning Activities of Basic Non-formal Education Students Divided by the Goal of Life

Factors	The Goal of Life		Very Much		Much		Moderate		F-test
	\bar{X}	SD.	\bar{X}	SD.	\bar{X}	SD.	\bar{X}	SD.	
1. Self-development	4.28	0.54	4.01	0.55	3.89	0.55	12.98*		
2. Career	4.32	0.58	3.99	0.59	3.89	0.65	12.91*		
3. Society	4.14	0.63	3.93	0.64	3.77	0.65	8.84*		
4. Related Parties	4.05	0.55	3.84	0.60	3.72	0.59	8.22*		
5. Convenience	4.03	0.64	3.95	0.60	3.85	0.61	2.17		
6. Economy	3.89	0.63	3.82	0.68	3.63	0.70	4.51*		
7. Technology	3.88	0.60	3.65	0.59	3.48	0.65	10.56*		
8. Government Policy	3.98	0.59	3.89	0.64	3.70	0.62	6.23*		

*P < .05

Table 5 shows that students who had different goals showed different opinions about the learning activities significantly in all aspects except the “convenience” factor.

From the average score, it was found that learners who had “very much” goal showed greater opinions about factors related to the learning activities in all aspects than others with “much” and “moderate” life goals.

5. Discussion

The present study found that state of basic non-formal education students' learning activities were at “good” level in all seven aspects. The greatest influential factor was “instructor”; whereas the lowest opinion fell on “ICT.” Considering state of the learning activities particularly in “pedagogic methods and activities” aspect, the study revealed that the lowest opinion was “distance learning” for which ICT was used as a medium of instruction. This can be explained that learning through ICT among students in the basic non-formal education programs is still a major problem in Thailand. As a matter of fact, major problems current non-formal students encountering stem from inadequate tools, equipment and personnel necessary for effective instruction management [3]. Even though there has been a government policy to establish ICT centers nationwide, it is still difficult to promote the extensive usage of the Internet in learning and exchanging knowledge. The ICT support is believed to enable deprived Thais to receive education for their whole life and with quality [4].

For the time being, the Internet becomes an important part of our daily life in various areas including communication, education, commerce transactions and entertainment [5]. To develop learning potential of the non-formal education learners, who are mostly adults, the government agency should promote and support lifelong learning so that these adult learners keep learning all the time. Lifelong learning is aimed to develop people in a country to realize their own potential and develop themselves so that they can utilize such potential for the benefits of their own and the country at large. With the lifelong knowledge, skills and experiences gained from the non-formal education programs, the learners will be able to successfully adapt themselves and face rapid changes and sophistication of the world in the domains of economy, society, environment, science, technology and information without borders [6]. To promote lifelong learning among

non-formal adult learners by using technology, the learners must be open-minded first. In other words, adult learners have to accept the global change and the use of ICT in their learning. They, then, can use technology innovations in their lifelong learning, for instance, online lessons, E-learning, etc. in a more effective manner.

Based on motivation theories [7], the present research has found that the most significant factor related to the learning activities of basic non-formal students was “career development.” This finding was truly important because “career” will enable the participants to win a job, ready themselves for a career in the future, adjust the present position, improve performance and learn about other occupations. This finding accords with what Pathom Nickmanon [8] found in his study. He contended that adult learners, especially young adults, come back to school to receive non-formal education because they have “vocational motive,” which is the primary and most important reason. These young adults need to develop themselves so that they can find a job more easily, do a more lucrative job, gain promotion, earn more, etc. The secondary reason is self-development, housewife development, social motive and others, respectively. The least important factor is “technology.”

Concerning goal of life, non-formal education students with high goal of life were of high opinions about state and factors related to the learning activities in all aspects. Thus, to devise a pedagogic plan and learning activities, educational service provider should formulate clear goals of learning for learning aptitude achievement.

Despite increasing significance of technology, ICT received the least opinion from basic non-formal education students who were participants in the current study. If Thai personnel have a greater chance to develop this skill, Thailand will be full of qualified and capable personnel who can help to develop the country more. The Ministry of Education should formulate educational policy in terms of infrastructure, equipment—hardware and software, personnel and instruction using ICT so that Thai people can have more opportunity to improve their self-directed education. Based on these findings, instructors should be encouraged to develop themselves and their teaching for pedagogic excellence. They should gain some more training with greater quality and higher standards. As for factors in career and self-development, students should enroll in courses where they can participate in curriculum and learning activities enjoyably and effectively which respond to their real-life experiences/requirements/etc and personal needs so that the new knowledge and skills can foster them for their career development and advancement in the future.

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