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State of Israel

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Education and Teaching Staff Department



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Central Bureau of Statistics
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Non-formal and Adult education: Identifying the terminology

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SOME KEY BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

- **CAN WE DRAW A GOOD, USEFUL DEFINITION OF ADULT EDUCATION? WHAT IS INCLUDED AND WHAT IS NOT?**
- **DO WE NEED SUCH A DEFINITION FOR PRODUCING USEFUL STATISTICS AND INDICATORS?**

A preliminary and important goal for the present Twinning activity is to clarify the interpretation given here to terms such as Non-Formal Education and Adult Education. This task is crucial since we seek to collect data and propose indicators on the phenomenon, and therefore we must first understand what the relevant population is in the Israeli case and which definitions apply, especially to make it internationally comparable later on. Most importantly, such an exercise is needed to set the grounds for good communication during the Twinning activity itself and whatever further activities are set in motion by it in the future.

In what follows, we'll try to set the grounds for the general conceptual background used for similar phenomena, show the similarities and differences between the terms, and propose a local mapping within this discourse.

Lifelong Learning

UNESCO has provided some of the foundational conceptualisations for the current "Lifelong learning" paradigm, stressing the role of all forms of learning throughout life, and not only during its initial stage. In a nutshell, it has been defined as -

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*formal, non-formal and informal patterns of learning throughout the life cycle of an individual for the conscious and continuous enhancement of the quality of life, his own and that of society.*¹

"Lifelong learning" in itself is not a useful term to narrow down the type of practices that we seek to measure here, but rather a conceptual framework which leads our specific interest in forms of education which are not necessarily part of a clearcut, structured hierarchy of formal educational provision, and at the same time do not target the traditional school-age population. It's only within this framework that one can start asking questions about what "adult education" means for our purposes, as opposed to "initial education".

Adult education

Again, the definition is attributed to UNESCO -

the term 'adult education' denotes the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship [...]; adult education, however, must not be considered as an entity in itself, it is a subdivision, and an integral part of, a global scheme for life-long education and learning.

In the process of narrowing down what is of interest to us, we must note here that this term still deals with a mix of formal, non-formal and informal learning intended for adults. Even OECD leaves this term unresolved, while explaining some of its complexity:

*A [...] problem in studying adult education is the variety of forms it can take. Within most OECD countries, the various levels of an education system are marked by distinctive regularities, making it possible to describe quite precisely what primary schools or secondary schools or universities are like. But even OECD's definition of adult education — the education and training for adults 25 and over who have completed their initial schooling and then returned to further education — encompasses a variety of specific forms of education, with different (and often inconsistent) goals, different populations targeted, and different criteria by which to judge the effectiveness of these programs. Adult education therefore includes training provided by employers for their own workers; union-sponsored training; training provided by governments to upgrade the skills of particular employees, or to allow individuals to change from one occupation to another [...]; programs that some people consider basic rights, like literacy programs, or other programs concerned with advancing citizenship; programs with specific social goals, like those for Aboriginal populations or for immigrants; welfare-related education and training to enable individuals to move into the economic mainstream and become self-sufficient.*²

¹ Dave, R.H. (1976). *Foundations of Lifelong Education*. UNESCO Institute for Education.

² <http://www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/1940299.pdf>

Despite this very generic description, OECD leaves out of this list the most obvious forms of education in which adults enroll – formal levels of education, namely tertiary education as defined in ISCED. Also targeting "adults 25 and over" implies that the term Adult Education obviates those well-structured programmes directed at ages 18-25 – i.e. ISCED levels 5, 6, etc.

ICBS publishes on an ongoing basis well-established and detailed statistics concerning all types of formal education for adults, including tertiary education. Instead, what we seek to further develop in ICBS through this Twinning Activity B5 is all other forms of non-initial education provision, which is neither classified by ISCED level nor has been reported to international bodies to the date.

Formal and non-formal education

Since we wish to distinguish within adult education between non-formal and formal education, it is imperative to ensure an understanding of these term's definition, as provided by UNESCO³:

Formal education

Education that is institutionalized, intentional and planned through public organizations and recognized private bodies and, in their totality, make up the formal education system of a country. Formal education programmes are thus recognized as such by the relevant national educational authorities or equivalent, e.g. any other institution in co-operation with the national or sub-national educational authorities. Formal education consists mostly of initial education. Vocational education, special needs education and some parts of adult education are often recognized as being part of the formal education system.

Non-formal education

Education that is institutionalized, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or a complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided to guarantee the right of access to education for all. It caters for people of all ages, but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway-structure; it may be short in duration and/or low intensity, and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars. Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognized as formal qualifications by the relevant national educational authorities or to no qualifications at all. Non-formal education can cover programmes contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of-school children, as well as programmes on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development.

Despite very problematic tautological issues and circular references that can be identified in these definitions⁴, a useful rule-of-thumb been used until lately for distinguishing formal from non-formal

³ <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Pages/Glossary.aspx>

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education was the ISCED national mapping: if a programme could not be accommodated into any of ISCED levels, it was to be considered non-formal, assuming that the sum of all ISCED levels equals the totality of formal education in a country. The introduction of ISCED 2011, the new classification which for the first time aspires to cover non-formal education in addition to formal education, apparently makes the above assumption no longer useful. Still, the feasibility of implementing such coverage remains unclear, as expressed on the ISCED 2011 document itself:

The heterogeneity of non-formal education programmes means that it is difficult to provide general guidelines for their application in statistical instruments given the purpose of international comparability. (UNESCO 2011, paragraph 290)⁵

While non-formal education is a recognized part of ISCED it is likely that international data collection exercises (mappings, surveys and censuses etc.) will restrict their coverage to formal programmes [...]. However, at this stage, ISCED 2011 does not give specific advice on the development of mappings for non-formal programmes or any related non-formal qualifications. (ibid. paragraph 296)

Vague definitions as the ones depicted above threaten to discourage those seeking a useful and readily applicable categorization, threatening to throw us back into a conceptual blur:

Some specialists are arguing that the very term 'non-formal education' has lost its meaning and relevance altogether, because of both the current of enormous diversity of forms and the difficulties in drawing a line between what is formal and what is non-formal, when so many initiatives show characteristics belonging to both. They prefer to drop the term 'formal' and 'non-formal' [...] or to subsume all forms under 'lifelong learning'. (Hoppers 2006, p. 21)⁶

If we assume that the actual application of ISCED 2011 to non-formal programmes remains largely unfulfilled (e.g. when looking at Israel's national mapping), we could still stick to finding a proper definition by elimination, as suggested above: Since formal education is easier to identify, it could be said that non-formal education is the sum of those educational programmes which do not comply with the requirements defined for any of the formal levels of education. In this case we'd be directly

⁴ A few examples: It appears that Formal education is composed of bodies which "in their totality, make up the formal education system of a country", "Formal education programmes are thus recognized as such"; "Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognized as formal qualifications". In all these citations we get no concrete, useful clues as for the actual meaning of "formal qualification" or "recognition", so we are left no wiser than before.

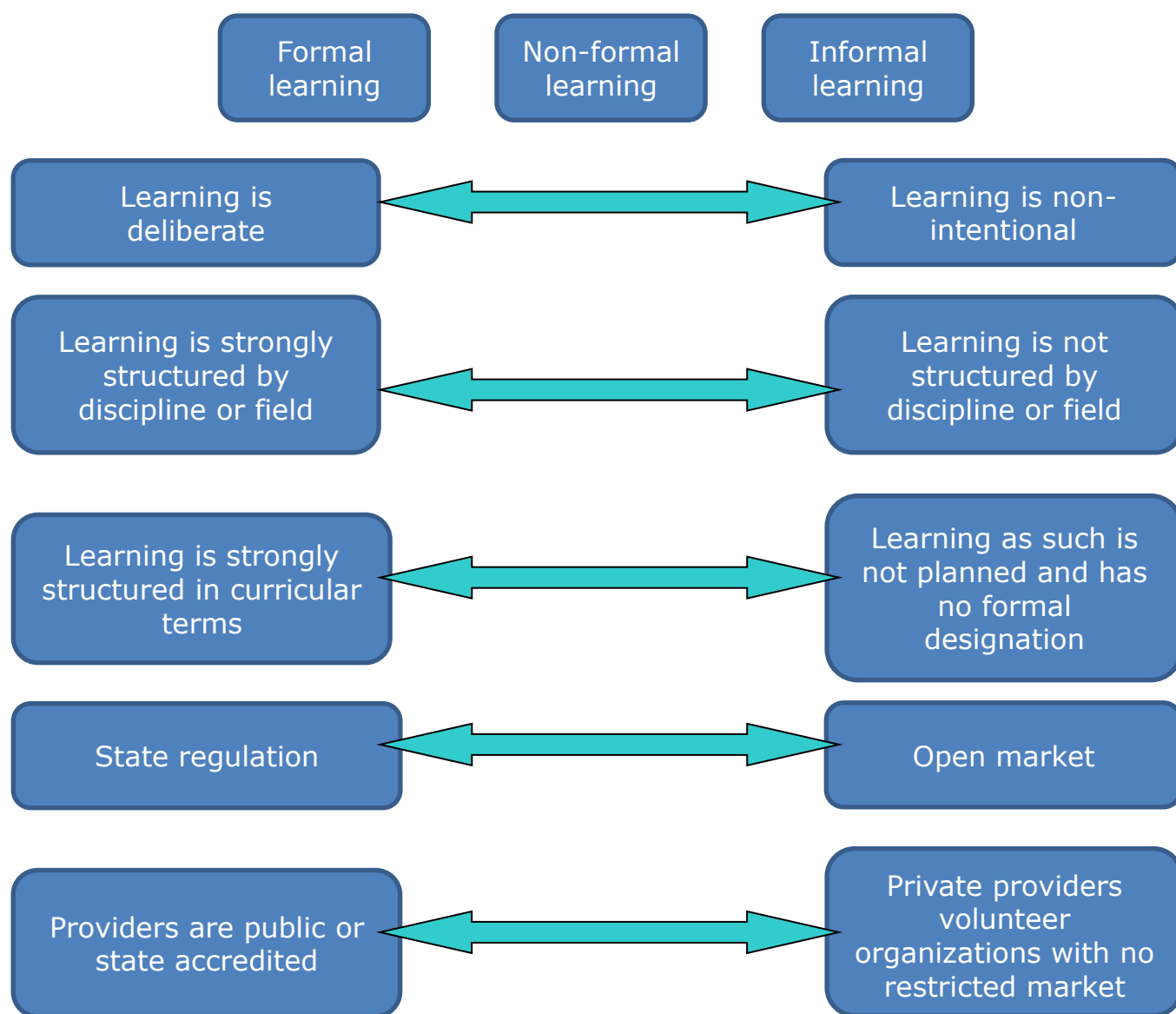
⁵ UNESCO, 2011, **Revision of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)**, Item 5.5 of the General Conference 36th Session, Paris, available from <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-standard-classification-of-education.aspx>

⁶ Hoppers, Wim, 2006, **Non-formal education and basic education reform: a conceptual review**, UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris. Available: <http://www.unesco.org/iiep/PDF/pubs/K16.pdf>

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referred to analyzing the characteristics of each individual ISCED level which applies, and we'd be largely relieved from interpreting UNESCO's largely tautological theoretical definitions.

Complementing this line of thought, a way of presenting non-formal education could be to oppose it to formal education on one hand, and to informal education on the other. Although clearly we do not currently seek to identify informal education in itself, such a scheme sets the limits for our discourse in a rather clear-cut way, as has been schematically presented by OECD⁷:



⁷ Source: <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/44600408.pdf>



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Quality assurance
mechanisms



No quality assurance
mechanisms

Both of the above suggested identification methods rely on elimination, in that they mainly indicate what non-formal education is not, rather than what it is. Although it is a reasonable starting point for our needs, we should be moving from that stance onwards to a more systematic definition.

Towards a useful classification method

There is a large amount of information and potential statistics available to ICBS which is not currently used in a systematic way. What all these sources have in common is that they represent educational programmes which have not been classified under any of the formal levels of education in the UOE national mapping for Israel. Since our job is to produce measurable statistics and indicators on education, we cannot just subsume all these forms within an adult person's lifelong learning cycle, as some fine tuning is in order.

For this reason, and after analyzing the conceptual frameworks that could be of use for this purpose, we propose here to reject the use of the term "lifelong learning" for analytic purposes at this stage, for its too-wide scope and vagueness. Instead, we choose to speak of non-formal adult education. In so doing, we must underscore that some categories are considered here non-formal in that they do not comply with the necessary requisites to be counted as formal by the ISCED classification, especially in terms of length and intensity. This emphasis is necessary, since by this interpretation we are aware that we consider as non-formal some programmes which are planned, funded or certified by the State and its public agencies.

The analytical category that we are dealing with can then be situated in the intersection of adult education and non-formal education, as indicated in red in the following matrix:



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Type of educational programme	Initial Education	Adult education
Formal education	Pre-primary, primary, secondary	Tertiary education
Non-Formal education		Non-formal adult education
Informal education		

What still remains to establish is to what degree we can attribute the "non-formal" title to each of the concerned programmes and data sources. For that purpose we suggest a table which could provide the answer after being filled (see AnnexA). The theoretical criteria to be fulfilled in the column titles are directly taken from UNESCO's definitions of formal and non-formal education, meaning that we'd still need to use a large degree of interpretation to its ambiguous terminology (see above).

For each programme we'd need to answer whether it complies with the trait described in each column. This could generate a national mapping of adult education programmes, describing to what degree each programme can be adjudicated to be "formal" or "non-formal", inevitably finding in-between "hybrid" programmes.



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AnnexA

Preliminary mapping of adult education in Israel, according to programme traits described by UNESCO

Existing programmes / data sources for adult education in Israel	Traits of formal education		Traits of non-formal education			
	Planned through public organizations and recognized private bodies	Recognized by national authorities	Does not apply a continuous pathway-structure	Typically provided in the form of short courses	Mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognized as formal qualifications by the national authorities or to no qualifications at all	Programmes on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development