Other Than Formal: Situating Non-Formal and Informal TVET in the Philippines

TESDA

> *"What Place Does Non-Formal and Informal TVET have in the Philippines?"*

I.   Introduction

Education is a universal right of all people, regardless of social and economic standing. Unfortunately, this right is not always achieved by all people due to various factors beyond their control. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), socio-economic problems mean that there are at least 18 million children and out-of-school youth in the Asia-Pacific Region alone as of 2018. When the COVID-19 Pandemic broke out, as many as 1.2 billion children across the world were out of their classrooms due to school closures.

Instances such as these, whether they be mundane or extraordinary, are the main reason why alternative learning systems are becoming more prominent than ever before. These come in the form of online classes, distance learning, mobile schools, home tutoring, and so forth, or even simply reading a book during one's spare time. In essence, they are alternatives to the type of *formal education* that people are usually accustomed to, which is "the institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured… system, spanning lower primary school and the upper reaches of the university". These alternatives to formal education are henceforth identified as either *informal education* or *non-formal education*.

Nowadays these two terms are used interchangeably - i.e. any education system that goes beyond formal education or schooling is called informal or non-formal. However, this blurring of the two types is a common mistake committed by educators and policymakers alike (Johnson and Majewska, 2020). Firstly, for any education plan moving forward, it is important to distinguish the three systems - formal, informal, and non-formal - from each other, particularly the last two as they are quite different. Secondly, identifying how to utilize each type to its fullest potential should always be an important consideration for education leaders, as different kinds of learning have their own advantages and disadvantages. And this is not just limited to conventional schooling alone; these same considerations should also be applied for the formal, informal, non-formal technical vocational education and training (TVET).

II.   What is the Difference between Formal, Informal, and Non-Formal TVET?

A. Definition of the Three Types

According to Cameron and Harrison (2012), one of the most commonly-cited definitions for formal, informal, and non-formal education comes from the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) in 2005. To quote directly:

> *Formal learning: Refers to learning through a programme of instruction in an educational institution, adult training centre or in the workplace, which is generally recognised in a qualification or a certificate.*

> *Non-formal learning: Refers to learning through a programme but it is not usually evaluated and does not lead to certification.*

> *Informal learning: Refers to learning resulting from daily work related, family or leisure activities.*

Over the years, this definition has been used by educators to further contextualize what is meant with formal, non-formal, and informal education, to the point that the interrelationship of these three could be observed and the extent of their respective impacts on the individual could be measured (Cameron and Harrison, 2012). One of the more recent of such studies was from Johnson and Majewska (2022), in which they determined how each of these learning systems correlated with each other, and how many elements they actually share.

For instance, formal learning is usually structured with defined learning objectives, but this is not necessarily a requirement for non-formal learning and usually not for informal learning. However, formal and non-formal learning *can* take place in a proper education institution or venue, whereas informal learning can happen anywhere. On the other hand, formal learning is mostly centered around a uniform curriculum (i.e. a linear progression of learning objectives), but informal and non-formal learning are more user-specific. Considering the ambiguities surrounding the three types of education systems, Johnson and Majewska created a summary for each type by combing over various definitions from multiple sources, for the benefit of educators and policymakers (See Table 1).

The researchers noted that formal learning is the most well-defined among the three, with non-formal learning being the most difficult to properly define due to the amount of overlap it has with the other two. Generally speaking, non-formal learning can also be considered formal or informal learning depending on the context, which perhaps explains why many academic papers use "informal" and "non-formal" interchangeably (Johnson and Majewska, 2022). A key difference that should not be overlooked is that informal learning is not structured around a certain curriculum. Informal learning is also completely focused on the learner, as he or she has control over their time to learn; leisurely activities can be considered "informal learning" in this regard.

Despite the difficulty in properly defining "informal" and "non-formal", this did not deter educators from using the two systems as a complement to formal learning, especially in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Non-formal learning was used by non-government organizations in collaboration with UNESCO to develop alternative learning management systems for youths in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam from July 2020 to September 2022. This project proved incredibly useful in helping out-of-school youths to attend classes even before the outbreak of the Pandemic. Non-formal education was implemented via blended learning schemes and other digital solutions to connect students with their teachers, in the wake of school closures and city-wide lockdowns. The key here was to utilize all these systems to encourage the learners to be self-sufficient, as well as cultivate a positive attitude towards continuous, lifelong learning for the benefit of their society.

Table 1. Characteristics of Formal, Informal, and Non-Formal Learning (Johnson and Majewska, 2022)

Formal learning	Non-formal learning	Informal learning
Learning is structured (e.g., linear learning objectives)	Learning **may be** structured	Learning is not structured
Learning is promoted through direct teaching behaviours	Learning is promoted through indirect teaching behaviours	
Learning is intended (by educator and learner)	Learning is intended by the **learner**	Learning may not be intended by the learner
Learning is recognised by the learner and educator	Learning is recognised by the **learner**	Learning may not be recognised by the learner
Motivation for learning may be extrinsic to the learner		Motivation for learning is intrinsic to the learner
Learning takes place in educational institutions	Learning **can** take place in educational institutions	Learning can take place anywhere
Learning has a mandated dimension	Learning has a voluntary dimension	
Learning may be recognised or measured through qualifications		Learning is not recognised or measured through qualifications
Learning may primarily focus on propositional knowledge	Learning may focus on both propositional and procedural knowledge	
Learning tends to have a cognitive emphasis	Learning involves cognitive, emotional, social and behavioural elements	
Curriculum is written down	Curriculum **may be** written down	Curriculum is not written down
Learning process is 'top down', focusing on developing specific knowledge and skills	Learning process is 'bottom up', focusing on the learner and their needs	
Learning follows formal curriculum	Learning may complement formal curricula	
Learning may not be linked to socialisation		Learning is often linked to socialisation

Source: Cambridge University

With this in mind, TVET could be implemented through the same three systems.

B. Implementation of Formal, Informal, and Non-Formal TVET

Formal TVET is quite self-explanatory, and therefore needs little elaboration. Much like with other forms of education, formal TVET is structured around specific learning objectives in mind, with a definite time frame or duration for learning to take place. More often than not, formal TVET programs are provided for by an educational institution and are regulated by a designated authoritative body.

Informal and non-formal TVET, like other informal and non-formal education systems, are the opposite, in that they are not structured nor do they strictly follow a curriculum. Non-formal TVET may loosely follow a curriculum and may occur at an unconventional setting, like a hybrid of online and physical venues, which may or may not also be supervised. Informal TVET is even less restricted, in that there is no curriculum to follow whatsoever and the learners themselves could "learn" at their own pace, with no set goals or rules to follow other than their own volition. According to Lechewski et al. (2020), "informal TVET" can happen as mundanely as someone reading a journal or a book to learn something new, or watching an online video tutorial to learn a specific task. In addition, informal and Non-formal TVET typically do not lead to a certification.

When and how these three types of TVET learning should be implemented may vary depending on the setting. Usually, formal TVET is initiated by people currently looking for employment, then shift to non-formal and informal TVET activities to improve their skills after they find employment. On the other hand, non-formal and informal learning may be more prevalent than formal learning, when the setting advocates for continuous self-improvement, especially for work - this is also known as life-long learning. Thus, non-formal and informal activities are more commonplace among those who are already part of the labor force. In Germany, for example, Lechewski et. al. discovered that informal (50%) and non-formal (43%) TVET make up the bulk of its continuous vocational education and training programs. Examples of non-formal continuous TVET activities as cited by learners in Germany include in-company seminars or training courses, either done during work or in leisure, and on-the-job training programs. Continuous informal TVET activities usually come in the form of simply reading journals and books, as well as engaging in computer-based learning activities.

The motivation for anyone to engage in formal, informal, and non-formal TVET also varies from person to person. For the most part, non-formal TVET activities appeal most to those who see benefits from them in relation to their current work. Hence, non-formal TVET is usually undertaken by young people in the labor force because, logically, they are more likely to stay at their current workplace than older people (Lechewski et. al., 2020). This perhaps explains why the Germany study also mirrors the results of a 2007 survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). In it, the ABS discovered that 12% of Australians aged 25 to 64 engage in formal learning activities, compared to the 30% and 74% who engaged in non-formal and informal learning, respectively. Also, innovative workplaces that also encourage lifelong learning tend to have high participation rates in non-formal learning among the workforce, such as TVET, to protect their human resources (Lechewski et. al., 2020).

III.   How is Formal, Informal, and Non-Formal TVET Implemented in the Philippines?

A.   Philippine Definitions

As previously mentioned, there is no universally accepted definition of formal, informal, and non-formal education by all scholars. The same is true with the Philippines. Thus far, the Department of Education defines these systems as thus:

- **Formal Education -** "the systematic and deliberate process of hierarchically structured and sequential learning corresponding to the general concept of elementary and secondary level of schooling. At the end of each level, the learner needs a certification in order to enter or advance to the next level."
- **Informal Education -** "refers to diverse forms of learning that are intentional or deliberate but are not institutionalized. It is a lifelong process of learning by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights from daily experiences at home, at work, at play, and from life itself towards literacy."
- **Non-Formal Education -** "refers to any organized and systematic educational activity carried outside the framework of the formal education system to provide selected types of learning to a segment of the population."

In the context of TVET, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) resorts to definitions made by other organizations, as there is no definition for formal, non-formal, and informal TVET found in Republic Act No. 7796, also known as the TESDA Law. This is despite the fact that the TESDA Law uses "formal" and "non-formal" in referring to "middle-level manpower" and also making a provision for the creation of an Office of Formal Technical Vocational Education and Training and an Office of the Non-Formal Technical-Vocational Education and Training. Nevertheless, TESDA defines the three types of education as follows:

- **Formal Education** - "a structured program of learning that leads to the full or partial achievement of an accredited/registered PQF qualification. - *TESDA Circular No. 090, s. 2021* "
- **Informal Education** - "is a lifelong process of learning by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights from daily experiences at home, at play, and from life itself. - *IRR of RA No. 10968*"
- **Non-Formal Education** - "is any organized, systematic education activity carried outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to a segment of the population. This shall also cover learning outcomes derived from professional development in the practice of profession which leads to qualifications. - *IRR of RA No. 10968*"

As seen here, TESDA's definitions for these types of education programs in the TVET context are based around the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF). The lack of a PQF qualification for non-formal education (and non-formal TVET, by extension) stems from the traditional definition(s) that learning is only measured by, and thereby results in the issuance of, a qualification. Established by Republic Act No. 10968, UNESCO described the PQF as "a quality assured national system for the development, recognition and award of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skills and values acquired in different ways and methods by learners and workers of the country."

The PQF also has definitions of the three education systems, most of which are already incorporated by TESDA. As stated in the Implementing Rules and Regulations:

- **Formal Education** - "refers to the systematic and deliberate process of hierarchically structured and sequential learning corresponding to elementary, secondary, technical-vocational education and training, and higher education."
- **Informal Education** - "is a lifelong process of learning by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences at home, at work, at play, and from life itself."
- **Non-Formal Education** - "...any organized, systematic educational activity carried outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to a segment of the population. This shall also cover learning outcomes derived from professional development in the practice of profession which leads to qualifications.

Table 2.   Philippine Definitions of Formal, Informal, and Non-Formal Education

Types of Education	PQF Definition	DepEd Definition	CHED Definition	TESDA Definition
Formal	**systematic** and **deliberate** process of hierarchically **structured** and sequential learning corresponding to elementary, secondary, technical-vocational education and training, and higher education	the **systematic** and **deliberate** process of hierarchically **structured** and sequential learning corresponding to the general concept of elementary and secondary level of schooling. At the end of each level, the learner needs a certification in order to enter or advance to the next level.	refers to the **systematic** and **deliberate** process of hierarchically **structured** and sequential learning corresponding to elementary, secondary, technical-vocational education and training, and higher education	a **structured** program of learning that leads to the full or partial achievement of an accredited/registered PQF qualification.
Informal	a **lifelong** process of learning by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from **daily experiences** at home, at work, at play, and from life itself.	refers to diverse forms of learning that are intentional or deliberate but are not institutionalized. It is a **lifelong** process of learning by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights from **daily experiences** at home, at work, at play, and from life itself towards literacy.	is a **lifelong** process of learning by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from **daily experiences** at home, at work, at play, and from life itself	a **lifelong** process of learning by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights from **daily experiences** at home, at play, and from life itself.
Non-Formal	any organized, systematic educational activity carried **outside the framework of the formal system** to provide selected types of learning to a segment of the population. This shall also cover learning outcomes derived from professional development in the practice of profession which leads to qualifications.	refers to any organized and systematic educational activity carried **outside the framework of the formal education system** to provide selected types of learning to a segment of the population.	is any organized, systematic educational activity carried **outside the framework of the formal system** to provide selected types of learning to a segment of the population	any organized, systematic education activity carried **outside the framework of the formal system** to provide selected types of learning to a segment of the population. This shall also cover learning outcomes derived from professional development in the practice of profession which leads to qualifications. refers to a structured program of learning but does not lead to a PQF qualification.

From these three definitions, it is clear that the Philippine perspective mostly follows the comparison made by Johnson and Majewska in 2020, even though the DepEd and the TESDA definitions are also based on the PQF's. Chiefly, they also consider formal education as a systematic, structured process and informal education as more small-scale and unorganized, whereas non-formal education derives from elements of the two, but special focus is given to lifelong learning.

However, there is at least one issue that should be pointed out: TESDA uses two definitions for "non-formal education" that are contradictory with each other, i.e. one says non-formal learning leads to qualifications, and another one says it cannot. In a way, this duality is similar to what Johnson and Majewska said in their paper regarding non-formal education, in that learning may or may not lead to a qualification. On the other hand, TESDA's definitions for non-formal education are derived from two sources, the PQF and one of its Circulars that are regularly disseminated to its various offices and to other TVET centers. This issue should perhaps be addressed as soon as possible due to the fact that TESDA offers both formal and non-formal TVET learning in the Philippines. An ambiguity on whether or not non-formal TVET in the Philippines should lead to a qualification can present problems in some of TESDA's current programs for community-based training.

B. Contextualizing TVET Learning in the Philippines

According to UNESCO's Country Profile for the Philippines (2019), much of the TVET system is formalized and implemented through TESDA, though several non-formal TVET programs are also recognized. Among them are center-based programs that are provided for by various regional and provincial training institutions, community-based programs intended for those with minimal financial resources to afford formal education, and enterprise-based programs that TESDA would deliver in partnership with various companies to provide TVET learning to the labor force apprenticeships, learnerships, and the dual training system (See Figure 1).

When compared against the International Standard Classification for Education (ISCED), the Philippines' formal TVET system covers ISCED Levels 3 to 8, meaning the TVET programs are offered in upper-secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary, and tertiary levels. Most TVET programs can take upwards from several weeks to three years, with ISCED Level 5 to 8 programs taking up to four years, which fit their place as tertiary-level education in the country. Non-formal TVET programs, on the other hand, typically take less time as they are geared towards meeting certain skill needs of a particular enterprise or locale. Apprenticeships from enterprise-based programs, for example, last about four months, while learnerships take up to three. While the programs do not necessarily result in a certification, companies and organizations that want to hire trainees or apprentices through these programs must be accredited by TESDA.

Data regarding the informal TVET in the Philippines is sparse as the term is more often than not merged together with "non-formal TVET", such as with the UNESCO's Country Profile and with the Philippine Development Plan for 2023-2028. This shortcoming is precisely what Johnson and Majewska mentioned earlier that is a common pitfall with trying to distinguish between "informal" and "non-formal" types of education among many pieces of literature. This paper can assume that some level of informal TVET exists in the Philippines regardless, as (again) denotes any short-term, undocumented learning activity that is done at the learner's time and not resulting in any certification or formal proof that the learning took place. However, informal TVET is almost entirely unrecognized in the current TVET system, save for TESDA's current initiative for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) in certain training programs.

Figure 1. Illustration of the Philippine TVET System (June 2019)
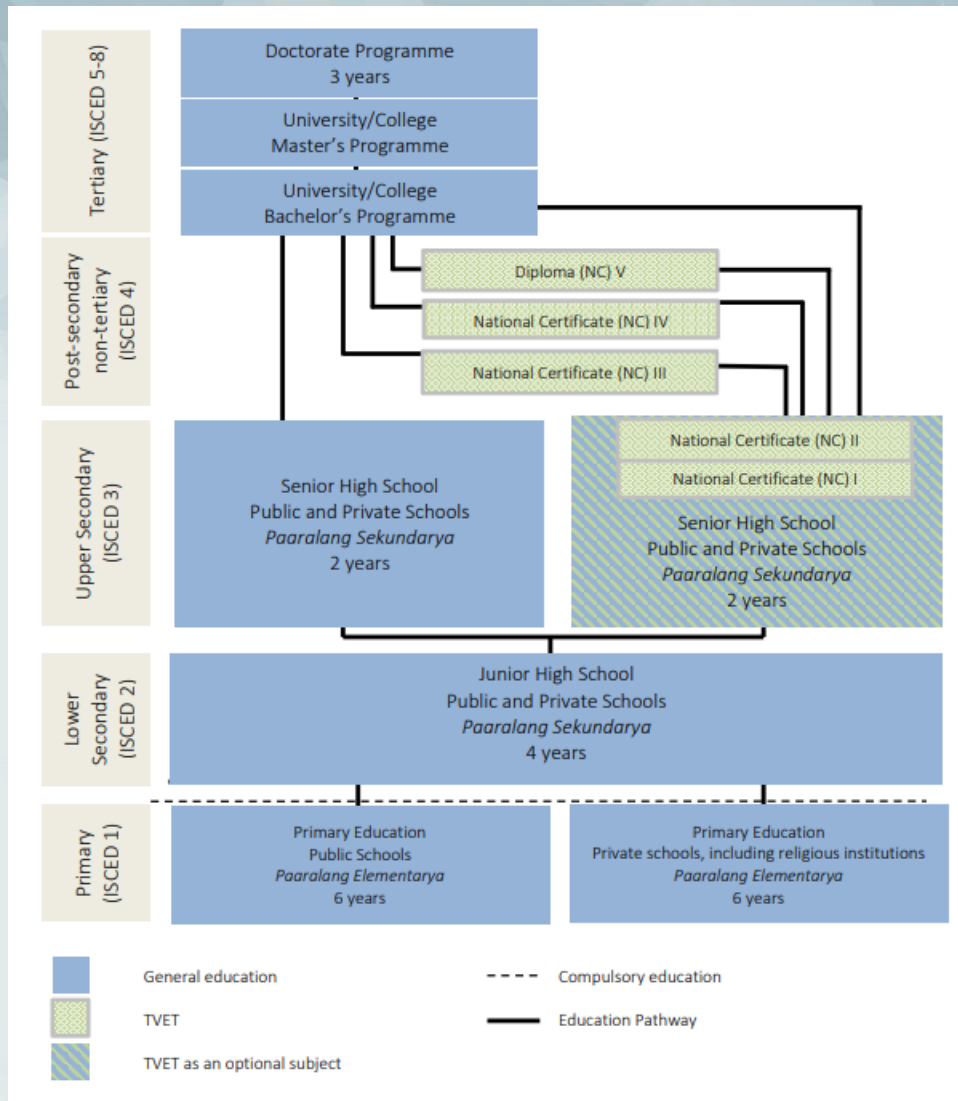
Source: UNESCO

IV.   Key Takeaways

In summary, definitions for formal, informal, and non-formal education are still debated by scholars throughout the world, thus leaving educators elsewhere at a loss for what universal standard they should follow. In practice, education systems in every country have their own definitions for these three types of learning, and the Philippines is no different. For now, it may be more prudent for TESDA to resolve some immediate issues regarding these three types so that a measure of consistency could be achieved when awarding or recognizing certificates:

- **TESDA, DepEd, and CHED needs to come up with their own unifying definitions for the three types of education** similar to Table 2, considering that the current definitions used by these agencies are derived from other sources such as the PQF. A more comprehensive and consistent definition for formal, informal, and non-formal TVET will reduce ambiguity regarding these terms, especially for "informal" and "non-formal" TVET that are sometimes interchanged with each other. Further, these definitions would be used

as indicators to determine success of various education plans and programs moving forward, both locally and internationally. It is recommended that this should be discussed on various Inter-Agency Groups where TESDA is a member, so as to ensure common understanding about formal, non-formal and informal, not only in TVET but in the whole of the education sector.

- **TESDA needs to consider measuring all forms of learning in Recognizing Prior Learning**, since this is currently one of the avenues where informal learning could be achieved and recognized. At present, the recognition of prior learning in TVET is governed by TESDA Circular No. 090, s. 2021 (Implementing Guidelines on the Recognition of Prior Learning in TVET (RPL-TVET)). A student's prior knowledge or experience of a particular skill can be assessed through a set of guidelines without having to apply for a particular training course themselves.

  However, the Guidelines on RPL limit recognition through the documentary requirements, which according to the definitions provided in the previous discussion in this paper, is not applicable for informal learning. as this can be experienced through watching videos, self-study, reading articles, participating in forums and chat rooms, among others. With the current trends as an impact of the pandemic, people are more likely to learn using YouTube, listening to vloggers, or reading about step-by-step procedures from Google. Learning from these forms can still be used by individuals however, can only be recognized once performed and observed through demonstrations.

- **Learning Methodologies should be established or linked to the concept of formal, non-formal and informal learning.** Ergo, TESDA's policies have to consider these concepts and link relevant provisions that will clarify how the learning methodologies apply, as certain learning environments may be more suited for a formal way of teaching, while others require informal and non-formal to be more effective.

- **TESDA needs to establish a system for monitoring non-formal and informal learning.** This is related to the need for better methods for measuring a student's learnings in RPL-TVET, but an entirely new system for monitoring non-formal and informal learning for other TVET programs may prove useful in the long run. As said before, these two types of learning are difficult to measure since they do not often happen in a controlled environment, and can occur beyond a learner's typical study hours. If TESDA can somehow find a way to monitor and measure what a student has learned through non-formal and informal means, these can pave they way for recognizing how much more knowledge and skills they have accumulated beyond their time at school, and perhaps pave the way for them to earn higher competencies.

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