

The Role of 'Souplesse' in Non-Formal Education: Key Aspects in Practice – A Case Study at a Community Center in Fes Prefecture, Morocco

Naoko Mori

Graduate school of Business Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan

Abstract:

This study aims to elucidate how the policy concept of "learner-centered education" is implemented in non-formal education at a community center in Fes Prefecture, Morocco (hereinafter referred to as "a center"), with a focus on "flexibility (souplesse)" as a key concept.

As a response to the issue of out-of-school children, the Moroccan government established a dedicated department in 1997 and launched a full-scale policy on non-formal education in 2004. While most existing research on non-formal education has taken a quantitative approach—primarily evaluating the effectiveness of policies, little attention has been paid to the micro-level dynamics involving the teachers who implement these policies and the students who benefit from them. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of addressing learners' diverse backgrounds in shaping inclusive education. In this context, it is crucial to examine and clarify the realities of non-formal education practice through the lens of "learner-centered education."

This study is based on field research conducted at a center from January 31 to May 2, and from June 5 to August 6, 2018. Data collection includes interviews with staff, beneficiaries, and their families, as well as participatory observations in classrooms. The findings indicate that teachers in non-formal education effectively adapt to their students' needs by demonstrating flexibility (souplesse) in rules and job responsibilities. This approach allows children who have left the formal education system to reconnect with an educational environment. However, the study also found that the curriculum, designed to "bring education closer to the children," was overly simplified and contextualized. This modification created challenges for children transitioning from non-formal to formal education settings. The results underscore the importance of flexibility in settings to foster a truly inclusive educational system. However, it also suggests that flexibility in content might limit beneficiaries' future opportunities.