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GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE: CHARACTERISTICS OF FORMAL, NON-FORMAL, AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Maria Cristina L. Nudalo-Gonzaga, Dr. Regina P. Galigao

ABSTRACT

This study explored the learner characteristics that influence educational outcomes across various learning contexts – formal, non-formal, and informal – within six continents: Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Europe, and Australia. By analyzing peer-reviewed literature and empirical studies, the research identifies key learner traits such as motivation, cognitive style, self-regulation, and socio-emotional background, as well as the cultural and systemic factors that shape them. Findings reveal that although these characteristics are universally present, their manifestations and implications differ based on geographic, cultural, and economic contexts. The study concludes with recommendations for educators, policy-makers, and curriculum designers to adopt learner-centered approaches that respect and respond to global diversity in learning characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right and a powerful driver of individual and societal development. Across the globe, formal, non-formal, and informal learning environments play critical roles in equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to thrive in complex societies. While much attention is given to the content and structure of education systems, learner characteristics—such as cognitive abilities, emotional intelligence, motivation, and learning preferences—are equally pivotal in determining educational outcomes. These characteristics influence how individuals engage with instructional materials, interact with peers and educators, and apply their learning in real-world contexts.

In recent years, the importance of considering learner variability has been highlighted in pedagogical literature, with growing recognition that educational success is not solely determined by curricula or teaching methods but also by the unique traits of each learner. In this light, the concept of learner-centered education has gained traction globally, urging educators to adapt their teaching strategies based on the learners' needs. As global societies become increasingly interconnected, it becomes more essential to examine how learner characteristics are shaped by sociocultural, economic, and geographic factors across different world regions.

Global studies suggest that learner characteristics are influenced by a confluence of factors, including family background, cultural norms, educational policies, and access to resources. In countries with advanced education systems such as Finland and Japan, learners tend to exhibit high self-regulation and autonomy, while in developing contexts such as parts of Africa and South America, socio-economic conditions significantly influence motivation and school attendance. Moreover, the rise of hybrid and digital learning environments has introduced new dimensions to learner characteristics, such as digital literacy and self-paced learning capabilities.

Focusing on the global landscape, this study investigates the characteristics of learners in formal, non-formal, and informal educational contexts across six continents—Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Europe, and Australia. By examining peer-reviewed studies from representative countries, this research aims to provide insights into how these learner traits are shaped and how they impact educational practices and outcomes in different global settings.

OBJECTIVES

1. To identify and analyze the dominant learner characteristics in formal, non-formal, and informal education settings across various continents.

2. To explore the cultural, socio-economic, and environmental factors influencing these learner characteristics.
3. To compare and contrast how these characteristics affect learner engagement and academic performance across different regions.
4. To recommend learner-centered educational strategies that are adaptable to diverse global contexts.

METHODS

This qualitative meta-analytical study employed a documentary research approach, reviewing scholarly articles, peer-reviewed journals, and institutional reports that address learner characteristics in different educational settings. The countries analyzed were chosen to represent the six inhabited continents: the Philippines, China, and Japan (Asia); Nigeria (Africa); the United States (North America); Brazil (South America); Finland (Europe); and Australia (Oceania). Studies were selected based on relevance, credibility, and publication within the last 20 years. Data were synthesized thematically to identify patterns and contextual differences in learner traits and their educational implications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the Philippines, Mustafa (2022) emphasized the need for adaptive and personalized teaching strategies, noting that Filipino learners are diverse in cognitive and socio-emotional profiles. Motivation and environmental support emerged as critical in influencing learner engagement and achievement. This is reflective of broader Asian educational trends, where collectivist values and familial expectations play a role in shaping student behavior.

China's learners, according to Vandewaetere et al. (2011), benefit significantly from computer-based adaptive environments when their cognitive abilities, prior knowledge, and self-regulation are considered. The study points to the need for feedback-rich, dynamic systems to enhance engagement—especially for learners navigating digital platforms. Similarly, Japan's learners, as examined by Minoru et al. (2007), thrive in hybrid systems when they exhibit self-discipline and intrinsic motivation. Their performance is strongly tied to time management and engagement with digital resources.

In Africa, Afolabi and Loto (2020) found that Nigerian learners' characteristics are heavily influenced by socio-economic status, gender, and parental education. Students from economically stable families display more confidence and motivation, underlining the importance of community support and resource availability in shaping learner traits.
The United States, as reported by CAST (2018), highlights learner variability as a central consideration in education. Using Universal Design for Learning (UDL), American schools accommodate neurodiversity, cultural identity, and emotional development, promoting inclusivity through customized learning paths. In Brazil, Ferreira and Lima (2019) documented the dominance of kinesthetic and interpersonal intelligence, especially in rural learners, suggesting the relevance of experiential and collaborative learning in non-formal settings.

Europe's Finland showcases an education model that promotes learner autonomy, well-being, and creativity. According to Karppinen and Saloviita (2021), Finnish learners benefit from inclusive policies and low-stress environments that allow for early independence and self-expression. Meanwhile, in Australia, Bliuc et al. (2012) demonstrated the significance of ICT literacy and reflective learning for success in blended education, highlighting learner adaptability and emotional resilience as essential traits.

FINDINGS

1. Learner characteristics are universally influential but vary in expression and impact depending on cultural, socio-economic, and systemic factors.
2. Motivation, self-regulation, and cognitive ability consistently emerge as significant traits across all continents.
3. Digital literacy and independent learning skills are increasingly relevant, especially in hybrid and online education.
4. Socio-emotional and environmental factors such as family support and school climate substantially shape learner engagement and outcomes.
5. Culturally responsive and personalized instructional approaches are necessary to address the diversity of learner profiles globally.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the characteristics of learners across global education systems is essential in creating inclusive, effective, and responsive learning environments. While core traits such as motivation, self-regulation, and adaptability appear universal, their manifestations and educational implications are contextually driven. Socio-economic status, digital access, cultural norms, and educational policies all influence how learners interact with and benefit from education. Thus, recognizing and responding to learner diversity is not only a pedagogical imperative but also a moral one in the pursuit of equitable education.

Recommendations

1. Educational institutions should incorporate learner-centered and differentiated instruction methods tailored to diverse learner characteristics.
2. Policymakers should invest in inclusive and flexible learning environments that support students from varying socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.
3. Further research should be conducted on emerging learner characteristics in digital and hybrid learning environments, particularly in underserved regions.
4. Teacher training programs must include components that enhance educators' capacity to identify and respond to learner variability.
5. Collaboration among countries through educational exchange programs and comparative studies should be encouraged to build a more inclusive global education framework.

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