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Informal Learning and Aspiration: A Study of Motivational Factors Among University Students in Kuwait

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Amna Hafsan et al.

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between academic and career aspirations and informal learning engagement among undergraduate students in Kuwait. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study surveyed 366 students and analyzed open-ended responses to explore the benefits and motivations behind informal learning. Results indicate that academic aspiration is a significant predictor of informal learning engagement, while career aspiration shows a weaker correlation. Notably, informal learning is found to be widespread across academic ability levels, challenging the notion that it is exclusive to high-achieving students. Qualitative analysis reveals that students perceive informal learning as a source of personal development, skill acquisition, and career preparation. The findings suggest that informal learning complements formal education by enhancing students' confidence, creativity, and professional readiness. This study underscores the importance of fostering environments that support informal learning as a key element in students' overall educational and career success, particularly in preparing them for lifelong learning and workplace challenges.

Keywords: Informal Learning, Academic Aspiration, Career Aspiration, Academic Ability, Lifelong Learning.

التعلـم غـير الـرسمـي والطمـــوح
دراسـة العوامـل التحفيزيـة بين طـلاب الجامعـات في الكـويـت

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ملخـــــــص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف العلاقة بين الطموحات الأكاديمية والمهنية والمشاركة في التعلم غير الرسمي بين طلاب المرحلة الجامعية في الكويت. اعتمدت الدراسة على منهجية الأساليب المختلطة، حيث استطلعت آراء ٣٦٦ طالبا وحللت إجاباتهم المفتوحة للكشف عن الفوائد والدوافع وراء انخراطهم في التعلم غير الرسمي. أظهرت النتائج أن الطموح الأكاديمي يعد مؤشرا رئيسيا للمشاركة في التعلم غير الرسمي، بينما أظهر الطموح المهني ارتباطا أضعف. تجدر الإشارة إلى أن التعلم غير الرسمي منتشر على نطاق واسع عبر مستويات القدرة الأكاديمية، مما يناقض التصور بأنه مقتصر على الطلاب المتفوقين. كشف التحليل النوعي أن الطلاب ينظرون إلى التعلم غير الرسمي كمصدر للتنمية الشخصية واكتساب المهارات والاستعداد المهني. أشارت النتائج إلى أن التعلم غير الرسمي يعد مكملا للتعليم الرسمي من حيث تعزيز ثقة الطلاب وإبداعهم واستعدادهم المهني. تؤكد هذه الدراسة على أهمية تعزيز البيئات التي تدعم التعلم غير الرسمي كعنصر أساسي لتحقيق النجاح التعليمي والمهني الشامل للطلاب، وخاصة في إعدادهم للتعلم مدى الحياة ومواجهة تحديات بيئة العمل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعلم غير الرسمي، الطموح الأكاديمي، الطموح المهني، القدرة الأكاديمية، التعلم مدى الحياة

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Introduction:

After leaving the formal education system, adults experience most of their growth and learning through informal learning. This research explores the views on informal learning among undergraduate students planning for their education and career in the State of Kuwait. In a meta-analysis, Cerasoli and colleagues (2018) found that 70 to 90 percent of work-related learning is acquired informally. Informal learning is self-directed, lacks institutional sponsorship, and can be a byproduct of other experiences (Merriam et al. 2007; Allaste et al., 2021). Less personal development takes place through formal or non-formal learning. Non-formal learning is also a form of lifelong learning, however; it differs in that it is systematic, planned, and can be associated with institutional sponsorship (Johnson & Majewska, 2022).

Both informal and non-formal learning are being increasingly supported through legislation globally (Yang, 2015). The United Nations made adult learning a priority in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development justifying that lifelong learning leads to nationwide social and economic transformation (UN 2015). Within the State of Kuwait, progress towards the Vision Kuwait 2030 goals will require a flexible workforce to participate in the new information-based economy. In the State of Kuwait, formal continuing education programs are available for adults and have positive career and social benefits (Alshebou, 2010); however, not all professions have formal educational opportunities. Within the management and leadership field, Alenezi (2019) found managers in the State of Kuwait were able to effectively find the knowledge they needed through informal learning despite formal workplace training being unavailable.

1.1 Literature Review :

Student aspirations and continuing education both contribute to students' success after they leave school. High career attainment has long been predicted by students' career aspirations (Holland & Lutz, 1967; Schoon & Parsons, 2002). High educational aspirations while in school have similarly been associated with high educational attainment (Gorard et al., 2012). Informal learning is a third potential early predictor of successful adulthood. Young professionals with high engagement with informal learning are more likely to seek out resources that align with their academic goals and career goals, which enhances their aspirations (Van Noy, 2016). In turn, motivation to achieve goals gives energy to engage with informal learning (Alnajashi, 2020). Adults with academic success (higher academic degrees) and those with career success (higher incomes) have been found to do more informal learning in adulthood (Lai & Wu, 2011; Smith & Smith, 2008).

The relationship between learning behaviors, educational aspirations, and career aspirations has previously been demonstrated in Arab states. Lee (2016) studied grade 7 and 8 students in Qatar. It was found that students with higher internalized learning and greater display of learning behaviors inside and outside the classroom, both measures related to informal learning engagement, also had higher academic aspirations and more positive attitudes towards attending school. Khattab and colleagues (2022) found Qatari students in grade 7 and 8 with high educational aspirations also had high career expectations and were more likely to have decided on a career path.

The potential for informal learning to lead to career success is well recognized in the literature of economics. Informal learning capacity is

seen as a defining characteristic of a high-performance workplace (de Grip, 2015). The modern economy relies on workers who are multiskilled, able to avoid skill obsolescence, and cross-trained. These are the goals of the high-performance management paradigm, which is growing in popularity (Butler et al., 2004). Under the paradigm, a major function of management is to encourage workplace learning around both the employee's own role and their colleagues' roles (Butler et al., 2004). Formal professional development programs have the potential to achieve this goal; however, they frequently fail to impact on the job behaviors (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Irgatoglu, 2021). Encouraging informal learning requires learners to take initiative themselves (Torabi et al., 2013) and has the benefit of also contributing to a community of practice within the workplace that sustains employee motivation (Wegner, 2000).

Within the education profession of Kuwait, there is evidence of the link between informal learning and career success. Among teachers in Kuwait, career enhancing participation in professional growth was predicted by engagement in informal learning, which the authors measured as positive attitudes towards lifelong learning and self-directed learning (Said & Abdallah, 2024). In another study, Kuwaiti teachers who participated in informal learning were found to be more innovative in the classroom (Al-Awidi & Al-Furaih, 2023).

Qualitative analyses have been conducted to examine the benefits gained from experiencing informal learning. Seylani and colleagues (2012) conducted interviews with fourth year nursing students in Iran and asked them about the learning they experienced outside the 'theoretical and practical knowledge' of nursing. Students reported experiencing growth in personal maturity and values, improved social

connections, and an awareness of the diversity of human experience. Much of the students' personal development of resulted from work-based learning in nursing clinicals, which replicate the experience students will have in the workforce when they continue their informal learning. In a review of research on health profession student training, Barradell et al., 2024), also identified work-based environments as the main driver of informal learning.

Jacobs (2017) observed evidence of behavior change through interviews in a study abroad Islamic teacher education program in Cape Town. The students were part of a community of practice with both structured and spontaneous meetings. It was noted that participants gained confidence in communicating their own ideas, discovered new perspectives on teaching, and improving their teaching practice. The informal discussions led to some transformative experiences for some participants, who decided to change their teaching philosophy.

The benefits of informal learning are also seen in interviews with adult learners. An analysis of American adults who learn informally through listening to podcasts found the learners reported using the information they learned to improve their habits and decisions (Shamburg et al., 2023). The improvements to their lives spanned bother personal and work life, and it was motivated initially by interest in learning or in the podcast topics. Informal learning generated further informal learning as new interests were emerged from the initial engagement.

1.2 Research Questions :

Given the importance of informal learning to students' future success, the present study examines the informal learning engagement of

undergraduate students. This include an exploration of the relationship between informal learning and aspiration factors, career aspiration and academic aspiration, known to be related to success in adulthood. It is hypothesized that aspirations toward career or educational success are motivating factors encouraging students to engage with learning informally as they seek to enhance their knowledge and skills. To complement the quantitative results, a qualitative analysis of student motivations is conducted by asking open-ended questions about the benefits students perceive in their engagement. The existing academic abilities of students are also considered. Participants are grouped into levels from 'underachiever' to 'Academically gifted' to examine if academic ability is related to aspirations or informal learning engagement.

1- How does academic ability relate to aspirations and informal learning engagement?
   a) Are student academic aspirations related to academic ability?
   b) Are student career aspirations related to academic ability?
   c) Is student informal learning engagement related to academic ability?
2- Are academic and career aspirations predictive of informal learning engagement?
3- What do students seek to gain from informal learning?

Methodology

2.1 Terminology

1- **Informal Learning:** Learning that occurs outside of a structured educational environment. It is autonomous, unorganized, and not officially endorsed, frequently arising as a consequence of routine

activities or individual pursuits (Merriam et al., 2007). This study defines informal learning as the participation of undergraduate students in activities that enhance their knowledge or skills without formal instruction.

2- **Academic Aspiration:** The extent of educational attainment that students seek to achieve, sometimes expressed as their ambition to pursue further education or achieve academic excellence. This study quantifies academic aspiration through students' intentions to seek further academic qualifications, which is seen as an indicator of their learning practices (Gorard et al., 2012).

3- **Career Aspiration:** The goals or ambitions that students hold for their future professional accomplishments. Career aspiration reflects the degree to which students pursue achievement and advancement in their selected professions. It is frequently associated with students' drive to enhance career-related competencies and knowledge (Schoon & Parsons, 2002).

4- **Academic Ability:** The extent of a student's academic performance, generally assessed through grade point average (GPA) or other standardized metrics of academic achievement. This study categorizes participants into several academic ability groups, including academically gifted, high achievers, and underachievers, based on their GPA.

2.2 Research Sample

A survey was distributed to 500 undergraduates. The return rate was 78.4% (392 returned surveys). However, 26 participants' survey were excluded due to incomplete responses. Participants with complete

surveys included 366 undergraduates (284 females and 82 males) from five colleges in Kuwait. The participants were recruited by contacting a random selection of faculty members at the five colleges. Faculty members agreed to contribute class time, and the researchers distributed the paper surveys in those classrooms.

The sample represents a diverse set of students. The age range was 18 to 50 years (*M*= 21.96 years, *SD*= 3.77). Students pursuing a variety of majors including Arabic Education, Pharmacy, Math Education, Islamic Studies, General Nursing, French Language, Science Education, Geography, and Social Studies. Each class level was represented: 19.7% freshman, 33.3% sophomore, 16.4% junior, and 30.6% senior.

Participant academic ability, measured through GPA, spanned the full range and was used to categorize participants into groups for analysis according to the scoring system of higher education in Kuwait (see Table 1).

Table (1)

Demographic Information

Groups	4-point GPA	Equivalent in percentage	N	Percentage
Academically Gifted	3.75 and higher	95% and higher	35	9.6%
High achiever	From 3.5 to 3.74	From 90% to 94%	50	13.7%
Merit	From 3 to 3.49	From 80% to 89%	103	28.1%
good	From 2.5 to 2.99	From 70% to 79%	116	31.7%
pass	From 2 to 2.49	From 60% to 69%	46	12.6%
Underachiever	1.99 and lower	59% and lower	16	4.4%

Several statistical analyses were applied to the informal learning engagement scale such as histograms, probability plots, boxplots, and the

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The distribution of scores appeared to be reasonably normal, as it is demonstrated in the histogram (see Figure 1).

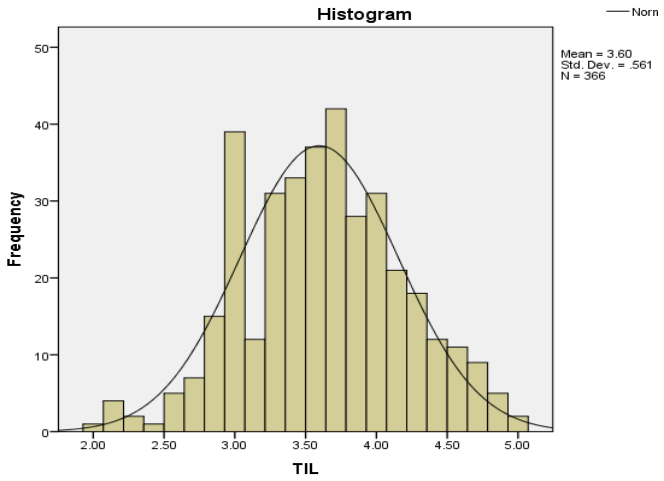

Figure (1)

Normal distribution

Moreover, the normal Q-Q plot illustrates a straight line, indicating a reasonably normal distribution of the scores. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests demonstrated that the scores of the informal learning engagement scale are normally distributed, where $p > .05$ in both tests.

Table (2)

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Scores of Informal Learning Scale	.045	366	.066	.994	366	.210
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

2.3 Questionnaire

The Informal Learning Engagement scale was developed by the authors to measure the extent to which students spend their time and energy engaging with educational content outside the formal learning environment. The scale consists of fourteen statements on informal learning engagement, each with a 5-point response scale ranging from

'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Three steps were followed to develop the inventory before pilot testing: first, a review of related literature on informal learning; second, a review of similar instruments; and finally, the content validity was assessed by two local, gifted education researchers. The resulting survey instrument was tested in a pilot study to examine internal reliability. The responses from 34 undergraduate participants showed that the reliability of the three scales was over 0.7 with academic aspiration, career aspiration, and informal learning scored (.844, .792, & 7.28) respectively.

Academic aspiration was measured by a revised Educational Aspiration Scale (Hafsyan, 2015) which asks students the extent to which they plan to achieve higher academic certifications. The original scale was reduced to ten items with a 5-point response scale ranging from 'always' to 'never'. The development of the academic aspiration scale was based on adopting and reducing items of educational aspiration scale developed by Hafsyan (2015).

Career aspiration was measured by a revised Career Aspiration Scale (O'Brien, 1992) which asks students the extent to which they have goals of moving to the top of their chosen careers. The original scale was translated and reduced to eight items with a 5-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

The survey included two open-ended questions exploring participants' view of the impact of informal learning on their academic and occupational lives. Demographic information of participants was also collected including gender, age, academic major, college name, and GPA.

2.4 Data Analysis

The open-ended survey responses were analyzed through content analysis. The conceptual analysis identifies how often themes appeared in the participant responses.

For the quantitative analysis of survey scales, raw data were entered the SPSS software program (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), version 23.0. Through the SPSS program, two types of statistical analysis were be performed: descriptive and inferential. The descriptive analysis is represented by percentages, standard deviations, means, and frequencies. Meanwhile, the inferential analysis includes variance analysis and correlation analysis, which facilitates the identification of any possible statistical comparisons and relationships among the overall responses.

1- Findings

3.1 Quantitative results

To answer the first research question, group differences based on academic ability were examined for each survey scale.

Table (3)

One-Way ANOVA for Informal Learning Engagement

Groups	M	SD	F(5, 360)	Sig
Academic Aspiration			7.798*	.000
Academically Gifted	4.09	.53		
High achiever	3.80	.55		
Merit	3.76	.50		
Good	3.69	.62		
Pass	3.33	.62		
Underachiever	3.59	.51		
Career Aspiration			3.79*	.002
Academically Gifted	4.36	.57		
High Achiever	4.23	.50		
Merit	4.24	.48		
Good	4.11	.49		
Pass	4.00	.65		
Underachiever	3.84	.73		
Informal Learning Engagement			.996	.42
Academically Gifted	3.72	.49		
High Achiever	3.64	.51		
Merit	3.58	.58		
Good	3.61	.53		

Pass	**3.46**	**.61**		
Underachiever	**3.57**	**.56**		

Note: The scales were measured on a 5-point scale. High mean scores indicate higher aspiration, or more engagement in informal learning activities. *p<.05

The one-way analysis conducted for academic aspiration indicated a statistically significant univariate effect F(5,360) = 7.798, p<.05. Post-hoc analysis (Gabriel) revealed that this effect was due to differences between the gifted undergraduate and their counterparts. As Table 3 demonstrates, the gifted undergraduate held particularly high academic aspiration (*M* = 4.09, *SD* = .53). Similarly, the one-way analysis conducted for career aspiration indicated a statistically significant univariate effect F (5,360) = 3.79, p =.002. Post-hoc analysis (Gabriel) revealed that this effect was due to differences between the gifted undergraduates (*M* = 4.36, *SD* = .57) and the last two groups (i.e. undergraduates with low achievement (*M* = 4.00, *SD* =.65) and underachievers (*M* = 3.84, *SD* = .73)).

However, as Table 3 demonstrates, the one-way ANOVA for informal learning engagement did not reveal any statistically significant effect. Indeed, the mean scores reported by the groups were quite similar; although, gifted undergraduate reported the highest mean of informal learning engagement (*M* = 3.72, *SD* = .49).

To answer the second research question, the relationship between aspirations and informal learning engagement was examined through correlation and regression analysis.

Table (5)

Correlation between Types of Aspiration and the Informal Learning Engagement

		Academic Aspiration	Career Aspiration	Informal Learning Engagement
Academic Aspiration	**Pearson Correlation**	**1**	**-**	**-**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		**.-**	**.-**
Occupational Aspiration	**Pearson Correlation**	**.228****	**1**	**-**

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.-
Informal Learning Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.388**	.157**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.003	
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

The correlation results illustrate that all three correlations were positive and statistically significant. Informal learning engagement and academic aspiration were moderately correlated, r = .388, p < .01. Whereas Career aspiration was weakly correlated with both academic aspiration (r = .228, p < .01) and informal learning engagement (r = .157, p = .003).

The statistical criteria of multicollinearity, singularity, and outliers showed that there is no violation of assumptions; moreover, the output of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity meet the statistical criteria. Thus, a standard multiple regression was conducted to examine the predictors of the participation on informal learning activities (see Table 4).

Table 6.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Variable	Model	Anova		coefficients			
	R^2	F(2,363)	P	*B*	*β*	*t*	*p*
Career Aspiration	.156	33.52	.000	.075	.072	1.46	1.45
Academic Aspiration				.354	.372	7.51	.000

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the two dimensions of aspirations significantly predicted the participants' ratings of informal learning engagement (R^2 = 0.156, F (2,363) = 33.52, p <.05). The results of the regression indicated that academic aspiration significantly

predicted informal learning scores, β =.372, t = 7.51, p <.05. Meanwhile, career aspiration did not significantly predict informal learning scores, β =.072, t = 1.46, p =1.45 > .05.

3.2 Qualitative Themes

To answer the third research question, students' open-ended responses were analyzed for content and themes were extracted. Themes related to the benefits students saw in informal learning included: psychological well-being, environmental factors, fostering creative thinking, personal identity and skills, educational development, formal learning outcomes, and employment preparation that goes beyond the formal curriculum.

Professional Skill Development. Students discussed the development of skills specifically for their aspiring careers. Responses mentioned the pragmatic idea that not all information needed to succeed can be obtained within their academic program. Students realized they would need to continue learning in the workplace and saw informal learning as the solution. Informal learning was particularly valued for helping students learn to think creatively within their field and be aware of multiple approaches to their tasks. The connection between continuous learning and promotions in the workplace was frequently cited.

Emotional Development. Within this theme, students discussed on improvement in their self-confidence, independence, and motivation to excel. Highlighted here is self-directed nature of informal learning along with the availability of relevant feedback on personal performance. Students reported feeling more confident they would perform well during the beginning of their careers. They also see informal learning as giving them the energy and motivation to succeed in the workplace.

Personal Development. The development of abilities for personal use was seen to come from informal learning. The improvement of critical thinking skills and creativity was valued both in relation to and outside of academic and career success.

Social Development. Informal learning is seen an increasing awareness of the ideas and motivations of others. The ability to understand and communicate with a greater range of people is valued. Some students mentioned the benefit of being able to pass along their own acquired knowledge to others.

It is important to note that the qualitive analysis of the open-minded responses provided rich insights into the perceived benefits of informal learning. The themes that emerged reflect a broad range of personal, emotional, and professional developments that students experience as a result of engaging in informal learning. These findings help us understand not only how students engage in informal learning but also why they value it so highly, regardless of their academic performance levels. Table 7 presents these findings in a structured way, categorizing the various thematic benefits under psychological well-being, environmental factors, creative thinking, personal factors, aspirations for further learning, formal learning outcomes, and employment preparation. Each thematic category is supported by exemplary quotes from students, providing a clear picture of how informal learning contributes to their overall development.

Table (7)
Thematic Findings Related to the Role of Informal Learning

Thematic Categories (Total codes)	Subcategories	Frequently Coded	Exemplary Codes

Thematic Categories (Total codes)		Subcategories	Frequently Coded	Exemplary Codes
The Impact of Participating in Informal Learning Activities	Psychological Well-being (82)	Building Confidence	15	Yes, to benefit more from the field and develop the profession, as well as for training and preparing oneself for the work community and reducing fear and increasing self-confidence, knowledge and experience (P 17)
		Filling Curiosity	19	Yes, gaining confidence and experience, making friends, seeing different points of view, and a love of learning (P 281)
		Personal Autonomy	34	Yes, I learn how to rely on myself and benefit from myself and how to develop my skills; it enhances my ability to deal with others and gaining experiences, skills and methods that contribute to raise my performance level (P 46)
		Comfy	14	Yes, because it changes the learner's psychology and helps him make discussing other topics comfortable (P 22)
	Environmental-related Factors (74)	Unrestricted and Free Learning Environment	23	Feeling free because education outside the college framework is without restrictions and according to one's own desire (P 341)
		Enjoyable Learning Environment	10	Yes, because college represents 40% of a person's life; one must obtain sufficient education outside the college for a more enjoyable and beneficial experience (P 178)
		Motivate Students to Learn	13	Yes, it always encourages me to learn, persevere, avoid laziness, and love learning (P 211)
		Differentiating Teaching Approaches	28	Yes, because other methods of learning, like the Internet, complement what we learn in college; there may be new, more interesting ways of learning. We must change and diversify our study methods (P 313)

Thematic Categories (Total codes)		Subcategories	Frequently Coded	Exemplary Codes
	Fostering Creative Thinking (62)	Being Creative Person	31	Yes, it helps me to be creative in my future job and invent new educational ideas and achieve ambition. I want to obtain the highest educational qualifications in the future. (P 104)
		Being Updated toward New Discoveries	16	Yes, because science is constantly evolving and there are programs that serve my specialization that are constantly evolving and can be used (P 21)
		Meet my Interest	15	Yes, I see that I have an ambition inside me that I seek to achieve regardless of circumstances, including academic performance, to reach the highest average. (P 75)
	Personal-Related Factors (132)	Increase Awareness	18	Yes, to increase awareness and know the thinking of people around me (P 152)
		Building personal identity	20	Yes, it enriches my information and develops me and my knowledge and adds a beautiful aspect to my personality (P 181)
		Building up personal skills	49	Yes, because it develops and improves me. And gaining experience about specialization (P 79)
		Building Communication and Social Skills	37	Yes, because it develops my culture in other areas and helps in dealing well with people and aids my progress (P 69)
		Leadership Skills	8	Yes, gaining new information and experience in work fields helps in choosing the best workplace destination (P 102)
	Further Learning Aspiration	Learning New Fields	11	Yes, it increases our knowledge and awareness of the specialization and other fields, and contributes to expanding our culture, whether in the field of specialization or other fields. (P 150)

Thematic Categories (Total codes)		Subcategories	Frequently Coded	Exemplary Codes
		Lifelong Learning	11	Yes, to gain more information, as the information acquired in college alone is not enough, as a person needs experience and knowledge at all stages of his life. (P 247)
		Seeking Graduate Degrees	8	Yes, it has a role in increasing cognitive awareness, increasing educational attainment, and encouraging completion of studies. (P 72)
		Being Well-educated	44	Yes, because it will develop our culture and education, and we will become a cultured and educated society (P 118)
		Understanding Different Perspectives	22	Yes, to increase experience, learning, and acquiring experience, skills, and other arts (P 37)
	Improving Formal Learning Outcomes	Elaborating my Knowledge	57	Yes, to gain more experience and information and I will have a great scientific background in my field of specialization (P 43)
		Graining More Experiences in my Study Area	61	Yes, I learned many useful things in the major, and it helps me to be proficient in my field of specialization (P 290)
		Enhancing Formal Learning	17	Yes, it strengthens my academic performance (P 137)
		Practicing Formal Learning	20	Yes, because the profession requires field work (P 28)
	Dissatisfaction with Provided Formal Syllabus (55)	Insufficient Practice in Formal Learning	24	Yes, to increase academic and cultural experiences, because education in the college alone is not sufficient (P 99)
		Limited Time in Formal Learning	14	No, because of the lack of time, as I spend half my day in college (P 123)
		Breaking Formal Routine	17	Yes, because this learning is by my will and changes the way of gaining information and routine (P 25)

Thematic Categories (Total codes)		Subcategories	Frequently Coded	Exemplary Codes
	Employment Preparation (198)	Learning Career Skills	38	Yes, yes because I will gain experience of the profession that will benefit me in the future (P 56)
		Exchange Experience	31	Yes, more exposure to the field of work (P 298).
		Career Preparation	74	Everything we learn outside or inside the college that is related to the specialization, we will sometimes apply it in the profession, and we will benefit from it while teaching or working in the profession, such as information about the subject (P169)

Psychological Well-being. A prominent theme is psychological well-being, evidenced by 82 total codes, which include frequent references to confidence building (15 codes) and personal autonomy (34 codes). Students highlighted that informal learning enhanced their confidence in academic and professional environments, enabling them to surmount worries and more effectively prepare for future problems. Students report feeling more confident they will perform well during the beginning of their careers. They also see informal learning as giving them the energy and motivation to perform in the workplace. Numerous individuals indicated that informal learning enhanced their independence as learners, enabling them to steer their own development and make decisions regarding skill enhancement.

Environmental Factors. Environmental influences appeared as a significant topic, encompassing 74 codes in all, underscoring the importance students attribute to the autonomy and adaptability of informal learning. The subtheme "unrestricted and free learning environment" was often coded (23 codes), indicating that students valued

the self-directed nature of informal learning. They had the opportunity to learn at their own speed and investigate topics of interest without the limitations of formal schooling. Furthermore, 28 students indicated the necessity to vary pedagogical strategies, with numerous respondents highlighting informal learning as a means to access innovative and more engaging educational techniques, such as via the Internet or other autonomous resources.

Fostering Creative Thinking. Creative thinking was highly esteemed, as seen by 62 codes indicating that students perceived informal learning as a catalyst for innovation. The subtheme of "being a creative person" was particularly salient, comprising 31 codes, as students associated informal learning with their capacity for inventive thinking and the generation of novel ideas and approaches to tasks within their prospective career or academic endeavors. They acknowledged the dynamic nature of knowledge, with 16 students explicitly highlighting the significance of being informed about new discoveries in their respective professions.

Personal Identity and Skills. The theme of personal development garnered the highest frequency of codes, totaling 132, indicating the significant influence of informal learning on students' personal progress. Subthemes such as the development of personal skills (49 codes) and communication and social skills (37 codes) were very significant. Students consistently emphasized that informal learning enhanced their proficiency in their academic discipline while also refining their interpersonal skills, so broadening their social consciousness and cultural comprehension. This personal growth was crucial in forming their identities and equipping them for life outside academia.

Educational Development. Additional educational ambitions were closely linked to informal learning, as evidenced by 96 codes indicating students' motivation to pursue education beyond formal schooling. The concept that "learning is a lifelong process" was referenced 11 times, suggesting that informal learning ignited a pursuit of continuous intellectual development. Students correlated their informal learning experiences with goals for advanced degrees (8 codes), indicating that informal learning established a basis for future formal education.

Formal Learning Outcomes. Regarding the enhancement of formal learning outcomes, 155 codes indicated that students perceived informal learning as beneficial to their success in formal schooling. "Expanding my knowledge" (57 codes) and "enhanced experiences in my field of study" (61 codes) were commonly cited, as students believed that informal learning enabled them to explore subjects more thoroughly, acquiring further insights that enriched their understanding of academic material. This indicates that informal learning is not merely an adjunct but an essential instrument for facilitating student success in formal educational settings.

Employment Preparation Beyond Formal Curriculum. Ultimately, the issue of work preparation was prominently included, with 198 codes, underscoring students' perception of informal learning as essential for cultivating career-related abilities. The terms “learning career skills” (38 codes) and “career preparation” (74 codes) were often referenced with the pragmatic idea that not all information needed to succeed can be obtained within their academic program (38 codes). They valued the chance to share experiences with others (31 codes), which enhanced their comprehension of professional requirements and

workplace dynamics. Students realized they would need to continue learning in the workplace and saw informal learning as the answer. The connection between continuous learning and promotions in the workplace was cited.

The elevated frequency of codes in Table 7 demonstrates that informal learning yields substantial advantages in both academic and non-academic domains. It promotes psychological growth, encourages creative thinking, facilitates personal development, and equips pupils for lifetime learning and eventual job success. These findings emphasize the significant significance of informal learning in developing well-rounded, flexible people prepared to confront the challenges of the contemporary world.

Discussion

This study provides significant insights into the correlation between informal learning engagement, academic and career objectives, and the boarder benefits of informal learning for undergraduate students in Kuwait. The analysis of quantitative data and open-ended qualitative responses reveals the complex role of informal learning in fostering academic, personal, and professional growth. This discussion synthesizes the study's findings with the existing literature on informal learning, aspirations, and educational outcomes.

4.1 Scholarly Ambition and Non-Formal Learning Participation

The research indicates that academic aspirations are a crucial predictor of informal learning participation, aligning with the conclusions of Gorard et al. (2012), which demonstrated that students with elevated educational objectives are more inclined to engage in activities that foster academic achievement. The moderate association between academic aspirations and informal learning ($r = .388$, $p < .01$) suggests that students

with higher educational ambitions are more likely to pursue informal learning opportunities. This findings corresponds with Van Noy's (2016) claim that informal learning elevates students' expectations by facilitating access to resources that support their academic objectives.

Gifted students exhibit markedly higher academic goals than their counterparts, corroborating previous research by Schoon and Parsons (2002), which indicates that high-achieving students tend to be more ambitious in their educational endeavors. Nonetheless, despite elevated academic ambitions, gifted students did not demonstrate markedly increased participation in informal learning compared to their peers, indicating that informal learning is not confined to high achievers but is, in fact, prevalent across the academic spectrum (Smith & Smith, 2008). This research supports Lai and Wu's (2011) assertion that informal learning is accessible to all students, irrespective of academic capability, thereby emphasizing its widespread presence in educational settings.

4.2 Diminished Significance of Career Aspiration

The correlation between career aspirations and informal learning was positive but modest ($r = .157$, $p = .003$). This indicates that students might prioritize academic achievement over career readiness during their undergraduate education, a conclusion that contradicts de Grip's (2015) research, which highlighted the significance of informal learning for career success in contemporary workplaces. Kuwaiti students may view formal education as the primary pathway for career advancement, while informal learning may be perceived as a supplementary resource. Qualitative responses revealed that students recognized the importance of informal

learning in developing professional skills, emphasizing its practical advantages, although it was not the main motivation for their engagement.

4.3 Informal Learning Across Varied Academic Proficiencies

A primary conclusion is that informal learning engagement did not vary considerably among different academic ability levels. This outcome aligns with the findings of Smith and Smith (2008) which suggest that informal learning is not exclusive to high-achieving students, but is instead an activity in which students of all academic ability engage. The qualitative research supports this, as students from diverse academic backgrounds indicated that informal learning bolstered their self-confidence, critical thinking, and life skills. These results are consistent with the findings of Seylani et al. (2012), which demonstrated that informal learning promotes personal development and maturation in nursing students.

4.4 The Advantages of Informal Learning

The qualitative themes derived from the open-ended responses demonstrate the extensive benefits students associate with informal learning, corroborating previous research findings. Students emphasized the psychological, emotional, and professional advantages gained through informal learning, aligning with Wenger's (2000) concept that such learning fosters individual development within communities of practice, thereby enhancing augmenting their sense of belonging and motivation.

Psychological well-being emerged as a recurrent theme, with students noting that informal learning enhanced their confidence,

autonomy, and ability to confront challenges. This supports Merriam et al.'s (2007) claim that informal learning is a self-directed process that empowers learners to govern their educational experiences.

Personal growth emerged as a significant theme, with numerous students emphasizing how informal learning facilitated the enhancement of their communication, social, and leadership skills. These findings correspond with Jacobs' (2017) research, which indicated that informal learning in community contexts can lead to transformative experiences, particularly in students' interactions and understanding of others.

Students regarded informal learning as an essential means of acquiring practical skills and preparing for the workforce, aligning with research identifying informal learning as a vital aspect of professional growth (Al-Awidi & Al-Furaih, 2023). Students frequently noted that informal learning allowed them to stay informed about new findings and methodologies in their disciplines, reinforcing the notion that informal learning is crucial for maintaining relevance in rapidly evolving professional landscapes (de Grip, 2015).

5. Implications for Educational Practice

The results of this study hold significant implications for educators and policymakers. The pivotal influence of academic ambitions on predicting informal learning engagement suggests that fostering strong academic objectives in students can promote lifelong learning behaviors. According to Alshebou (2010), lifelong learning is essential for developing adaptable individuals capable of contributing to the information-driven economy outlined in Kuwait's Vision 2030.

Given the extensive availability of informal learning, educators must to acknowledge and endorse its role as a complement to formal education. Initiatives that encourage student participation in informal learning activities, such as self-initiated projects or extracurricular activities, may help bridge the gap between academic instruction and practical application, as emphasized by Alenezi (2019) in his research on leadership development.

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