



Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) Operating in the Field of Biology Education in Germany

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ABSTRACT

In the era we live in, humanity is faced with numerous problems that transcend national boundaries and affect all of humanity. These issues include global climate change, warfare, terrorism, epidemics like Covid-19, immigration, and income inequality. However, most of these problems are the result of human actions, which means that they can be resolved by human beings. Active citizenship, by its very nature, entails individual responsibility. However, shirking or ignoring this responsibility allows these problems to persist and worsen. Such indifference and avoidance not only undermine the hard-fought rights of the past but also inflict irreparable damage upon nature and humanity as they exist today. This has significant implications for democracy and life itself. Supporting formal education in developing these competencies is of utmost importance. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also play a crucial role in providing the necessary support for formal education to meet these expectations. The aim of this study is to examine NGOs operating in the field of biology education in Germany. The research employs document analysis as a qualitative research method, utilizing descriptive analysis for data analysis. The research findings indicate that NGOs operating in biology education in Germany play a vital role in promoting educational equality of opportunity. It is believed that German NGOs can provide valuable insights into the biology education activities of NGOs in Turkey.

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1. Introduction

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) contribute to society by supplementing the services provided by the state and private sector (Krimmer, 2019). Germany is known for its strong collaboration between the state and NGOs (Özdemir, 2004). It consistently ranks highest among OECD countries in terms of social expenditures (Zimmer et al., 2005). Germany follows the "Welfare Partnership Model" in civil society, a model also adopted by some other European Union countries such as the Netherlands. According to this model, civil society activities focus on service provision rather than protest and advocacy, with services heavily subsidized by the state (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2018, s.72). Non-governmental organizations in the welfare sector are protected from potential commercial competition and have privileged access to finance through legal regulations (Zimmer & Pahl, 2018).

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In Germany, the collective term for all socially-oriented assistance provided in a nonprofit and organized manner is "Independent Welfare Services" (Freie Wohlfahrtspflege) (Zimmer et al., 2005). These services are planned and implemented in the public interest on a nonprofit basis, aiming to support those in need or at risk in areas such as health, education, and economic welfare, with the goal of prevention or improvement (Bundesministerium der Justiz, 2002). Nonprofit status requires that an organization's activities serve the general public interest, as specified in relevant laws (Bundesministerium der Justiz, 2002).

Nonprofit organizations in Germany derive their budgets from various sources. These resources can include funding from associations, membership fees, additional donations, and grants from the public sector. Additionally, income can be generated through cultural, sports, or social events, as well as from operating association-owned restaurants (Ministerium für Finanzen Baden Württemberg, 2018). Charitable organizations enjoy tax exemptions (Zimmer et al., 2005) but are required to spend their income within two years (Birkhölzer et al., 2015). Donations to charitable organizations and association membership fees are tax-deductible as private expenses (Mathou, 2010).

In Germany, there are six "top associations" (Spitzenverbände) to which all welfare organizations are affiliated (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege (BAGFW), 2014). Most NGOs operating in the health and social sectors are members of one of these top associations (Lange, 2007). The top associations are Caritas, Diaconia, the German Red Cross, the Workers' Welfare Association (AWO), Parity (Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband), and the Central Welfare Agency for Jews in Germany (Zimmer et al., 2005). Independent welfare services organizations and top associations are structured on a federal level and have legal independence (BAGFW, 2014). The member organizations of top associations are major providers of social services and primary employers in the nonprofit sector. Additionally, top associations play an important role in advocating for the interests of their member organizations and members (Lange, 2007).

The history of NGOs in Germany reveals that these top associations have existed for over a century (Lange, 2007). After Bismarck's governments implemented new social rights, value-based associations such as the church-affiliated Caritas and Diaconia, which had been providing social services to the public, aimed to maintain their independence from the state and cut their ties with it regarding charity work. In 1931, the Catholic Church issued a circular that established an important principle in the management of social welfare services, which was later expanded further. This allowed the state to pass laws at the federal and state levels and allocate funds at the municipal or state level, while independent welfare organizations continued to be the main providers of services. These organizations were granted charity (Gemeinnützigkeit) status and tax exemption (Birkhölzer et al., 2015).

In the late 1960s, nonprofit/philanthropic welfare service organizations held a significant position alongside the state as providers of social services in terms of service units and number of employees. However, in the 1990s, due to various economic and political criticisms, significant changes were made to social laws, partially removing the privileged position of these organizations. This resulted in private institutions and charitable organizations having equal conditions in certain areas of social assistance, such as elderly care (Zimmer et al., 2005).

Today, there is considerable uncertainty regarding numerical data on NGOs in Germany. Unlike other countries, Germany does not have a uniform registration requirement. In 2017, the "transparency register" was introduced as a joint registration portal of the federal states (www.register-portal.de) and the German Foundations Directory (das Verzeichnis Deutscher Stiftungen) to address this issue. These two sources contribute to determining the inventory of NGOs, but the information obtained from them is approximate due to the inconsistency of association records. In Germany, NGOs operate as registered associations, foundations, nonprofit companies, and cooperatives. Although there are other legal forms such as nonprofit corporations and nonprofit entrepreneurial corporations, these play a minor role in quantitative terms. Recent years have shown that associations are the most active type of NGOs in Germany, while the number of cooperatives has decreased, and the number of associations,

foundations, and nonprofit companies has increased. According to a survey conducted in 2017, the most active fields of NGOs in Germany are sports (22%), education (19%), and culture (16%) (Primier & Mohr, 2017). Education is a popular area for civic engagement, and the number of organizations operating in this field has increased compared to previous years. These organizations collaborate with various entities, including educational institutions such as schools, universities, and vocational training centers; preschools and after-school care centers; associations for education professionals; school development associations and parent initiatives; student exchange program organizers; remedial education and special education associations and foundations focused on education (Primier & Mohr, 2017).

NGOs operating in fields other than education also engage in educational activities. For example, an environmental protection organization dedicated to climate preservation may offer training programs for this purpose. While such organizations use educational activities as an important tool to achieve their goals, they often identify themselves primarily as organizations operating in the environmental protection field rather than education. Similar situations occur in cultural and sports associations, which can also provide financial support to education-focused NGOs and educational institutions (Primier & Mohr, 2017).

The purpose of this research is to examine NGOs operating in the field of biology education in Germany. It is believed that German NGOs can provide valuable insights into the biology education activities of NGOs in Turkey.

2. Method

2.1. Model of the research

In the research, document analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, was used to provide a detailed introduction to the activities. Document analysis involves analyzing written sources or materials that contain information about the phenomenon or cases under investigation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In this context, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) operating in the field of biology education in Germany were examined through document review, focusing on the teaching methods and developmental goals of these NGOs (Yecke, 2005).

It should be noted that document analysis may not cover all the sources or materials included in the research. Therefore, a sample is usually selected from the available data (Yecke, 2005). However, in this research, document selection was not based on the subject matter to be analyzed, as the document analysis focused on NGOs operating in the field of biology education in Germany.

2.2. Data analysis

Content analysis was used to analyze the research data. This involved supporting and explaining the subject matter by providing examples from the NGOs operating in the field of biology education examined in the research.

To ensure the validity of the qualitative data obtained from the research, the strategies stated by Creswell (2017) used within the scope of the research are indicated below:

Depth-Focused Data Collection: A researcher can reveal events, phenomena, situations, and interpretations deeply through data collection and verification mechanisms from the perspective of the participants. In this context, the researcher tried to reveal the meanings of the events and phenomena learned within the scope of the research from the perspective of the research question, their relationships with each other, and the patterns they display as a whole, in a depth-focused manner.

Expert Review: Asking people who have general knowledge about the subject of the research and are specialized in qualitative research methods to examine the research in various dimensions is another precaution that can be taken in terms of credibility.

3. Findings

3.1 Education Foundation (Stiftung Bildung)

Established in 2012, the Education Foundation is a donation-financed foundation that aims to strengthen civil society participation in the education sector. Its main objective is to improve and develop conditions for the education of children and young people, as well as promote civic engagement for charitable causes. The Education Foundation collaborates with the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, as well as parent associations at the federal and state levels, and development associations of preschool institutions and schools (Education Foundation, n.d.).

The foundation focuses on supporting socially disadvantaged children, emphasizing that aiding the weakest members of society will strengthen the community as a whole and raise the overall education level. Despite the state's efforts, the Education Foundation recognizes the need for improvement in the education system in Germany (Education Foundation, n.d.).

The foundation provides funding for projects implemented by the development associations of preschool institutions and schools, with a maximum amount of 5,000 Euros per project. The supported projects aim to create vibrant, diverse, fair, and sustainable preschool institutions and schools. The foundation offers several support funds, including the "crafts fund" for hands-on experiences, the "democracy fund" for youth projects and ideas, and the "equal opportunity fund" for promoting diversity, fairness, and inclusivity in society. Future funds will include the "love/living in diversity fund" for addressing sexual and gender differences in preschool institutions and schools, the "entrepreneurship fund," the "nutrition fund," and the "action fund at school" for promoting independent, creative, and forward-thinking actions.

To date, the Education Foundation has reached 20,000 children and youth across the country. The projects supported by the foundation include homework assistance, reading support, providing healthy breakfasts, organizing leisure activities such as research projects, cooking, painting, music, dance, and mentoring programs. The foundation also supports children and youth who develop projects related to climate and environment. For preschool institutions and development associations of schools, the foundation provides support for arts and cultural trips, registration parties, summer festivals, concerts, teacher/children/youth/educator training programs (e.g., non-violent school), parent activities (meetings, educational courses), improving the school's exterior, and renting games and sports equipment (Education Foundation, n.d.).

The Education Foundation also advocates for high-quality education for all. Their #LobbyFürBildung (education lobby) campaign, launched before the 2021 federal elections, aims to highlight the weaknesses of the education system, including insufficient digitalization, equipment, and staff in schools, as well as the growing inequality of educational opportunities. The foundation demands greater participation of children and young people in shaping education policies under the new coalition government formed after the elections.

The foundation supports preschool institutions and schools through the "Help and Empower" fund, recognizing that children and young people are particularly affected by global events such as war, migration, pandemics, and climate change. For instance, during the pandemic, children and young people faced isolation and lack of support while learning from home. The foundation emphasizes the importance of support from preschool institutions and development associations in addressing the needs of these children and young people. Additionally, these organizations should have the necessary technical knowledge, networks, and financial resources to meet the new challenges they face. The Education Foundation also provides various forms of assistance to the children of Ukrainian asylum seekers who are enrolled in preschool institutions and schools in Germany, addressing the societal impact of the Russia-Ukraine war (Education Foundation, n.d.).

The Education Foundation plays a significant role in non-governmental education by raising awareness of the unique challenges faced by children and young people, collaborating with development associations of preschool institutions and schools, and supporting activities that promote equal educational opportunities for all.

3.2. Robert Bosch Foundation (Robert Bosch Stiftung)

Robert Bosch, born on September 23, 1861, in Albeck, near Ulm, established the Robert Bosch Foundation with the aim of improving people's living conditions. The foundation, active in social issues for nearly 60 years, seeks to promote public health services and international understanding, support education and vocational training, contribute to arts and culture, advance science and research, and address youth and elderly well-being, civic engagement, collaboration development, and environmental protection (UWC Robert Bosch College, n.d.).

The foundation operates in three different areas: health, education, and global issues. It has implemented 163 projects in 99 countries, including 28 projects in the field of education. Notably, the foundation has been running the "Der Deutsche Schulpreis" (German School Award) project for 15 years. This project recognizes schools in Germany as role models for school development based on a comprehensive education approach encompassing six qualification areas: performance, coping with diversity, teaching quality, responsibility, school life, and the school as a learning institution.

The current project of the Robert Bosch Foundation, open for applications until June 12, 2022, is called "Welcome Diversity (Vielfalt Willkommen)." The project aims to include children from different cultural backgrounds, including those from families who have fled or migrated to Germany, in preschool education. However, only 10% of educators working in existing preschools nationwide have an immigrant background. The project seeks to address this imbalance by providing employment opportunities for pedagogues from immigrant backgrounds. The project, a joint effort of the Robert Bosch Foundation and another educational association, focuses on supporting these individuals' German language learning, recognition of their professional qualifications from their countries of origin, and additional vocational and integration training in a preschool institution. The pilot project will be launched in the state of Baden-Württemberg (Robert Bosch Stiftung, n.d.).

Within the Robert Bosch Foundation, there are several institutions, including the German School Academy and the UWC Robert Bosch College. The German School Academy offers educational activities to all schools in Germany, sharing the practical experiences of award-winning schools and focusing on the six qualification areas (performance, coping with diversity, teaching quality, responsibility, school life, and the school as a learning institution). The academy provides training materials based on best practices and offers advice to schools and teachers on improvement-related matters (UWC Robert Bosch College, n.d.).

The UWC Robert Bosch College, founded in 2014 in collaboration with the UWC Foundation, is a two-year high school that admits students aged 16-19 from different nationalities based on merit, regardless of family income or socio-economic background. The college aims to unite people, nations, and cultures for peace and a sustainable future. The curriculum focuses on intercultural understanding, peace, and sustainability. Students follow the international baccalaureate (IB) program and receive an internationally accredited diploma upon completion. The college currently educates 200 young people from over 100 countries, with 50 of them being German students (UWC Robert Bosch College, n.d.).

The support provided by the Robert Bosch Foundation in the field of education is crucial for the development and advancement of educators, students, and institutions. By showcasing successful schools and standardizing success criteria through the German School Award Project, the foundation guides schools and teachers on how to achieve success. The foundation's projects address current education-related challenges, such as increasing the number of children in preschool institutions and meeting the demand for educators by integrating Ukrainian (and other immigrant) pedagogues into the

workforce. These initiatives demonstrate the valuable contributions that non-governmental organizations can make to education and society as a whole (UWC Robert Bosch College, n.d.).

3.3. Environmental Education Association Baden-Württemberg (Gesellschaft für Umweltbildung Baden-Württemberg e.V. (GUB))

Established in 2004, the Environmental Education Association operates in the Rhine-Neckar region of the state of Baden-Württemberg. The association consists of six individuals from various backgrounds, including biology, music, geography, medical-technical assistance, philology, and visual arts. The association aims to foster children's curiosity about scientific facts, promote environmental and nature awareness, and support scientific research projects conducted in a child-friendly manner in preschool institutions.

The association conducts scientific research lessons twice a month, lasting 30-40 minutes, in preschool institutions. These lessons involve conducting science experiments with children, and educators also participate to specialize in scientific experimentation through further training in natural sciences and environmental education. The association focuses on using everyday objects for scientific research courses, covering areas such as biology, chemistry, physics, geography, ecology, and mathematics.

Each child maintains a research diary, which is created through collaboration between the child, parents, and educators. The association also provides guidance on establishing scientific research corners and designing outdoor spaces in preschool institutions, emphasizing the opportunities that outdoor environments provide for natural sciences. Moreover, the association recognizes the importance of promoting inclusive learning environments where children with and without disabilities can approach scientific questions in a fun and interactive way.

Preschool institutions interested in implementing these research activities can apply to the association. Some of the projects carried out by the association include establishing 19 scientific model preschool institutions, launching two YouTube channels featuring nature-related projects and research videos for children, collaborating with artists to create engaging art projects using natural materials, implementing a game project that combines natural sciences, exercise, and play, organizing "research holidays" during summer breaks for children aged 5-8, and conducting ecological projects in Hamburg and Prague involving educators, parents, and children from both countries, focusing on energy, forests, and water.

Today, the environmental challenges resulting from human activities necessitate greater environmental sensitivity and knowledge. Environmental and nature education, particularly when conducted through scientific research, serves as an effective means to foster children's interest in nature. The GUB association's work exemplifies the significance of early environmental and nature education and emphasizes the importance of educators' scientific research expertise. By addressing these aspects, the association contributes to environmental and nature education through teacher training and support for suitable research-oriented learning environments.

3.4. Youth Association in the Museum (Jugend im Museum e.V. (JiM))

Founded in 1972, the Youth Association in the Museum (JiM) offers diverse activities for preschool institutions and schools. JiM provides children, young people, and families with opportunities to engage with art and culture in various Bertin museums, allowing them to explore both the past and present through artistic and creative activities. The association's financial resources come from membership fees, course fees, support from foundations, associations, and institutions, as well as donations (Youth in the Museum (JiM), n.d.).

The association's objectives, outlined in its statute, include supporting adolescents in their educational, cosmopolitan, and civic-based development, promoting cultural education/study projects, workshops, courses, and further education for children and youth, fostering international

understanding, providing necessary knowledge and competences, motivating active citizenship, and supporting the educational mission of museums through public relations, lobbying, and fundraising.

The Youth Association in the Museum collaborates with preschool institutions and schools to design individual project weeks upon request. Additionally, the association organizes three-hour courses in Berlin museums and galleries. These courses, aligned with the early childhood education program in Berlin and school curricula, engage children and young people (ages 4-18) in various activities combining arts, culture, natural sciences, history, or architecture. Experienced instructors guide participants through museum expeditions and practical experiments in workshops (Youth in the Museum (JiM), n.d.).

The Youth Association in the Museum exemplifies the notion that learning should extend beyond the classroom. By establishing strong partnerships with schools and offering individual access to families, the association has built a well-established network. Through art and culture, children and young people can learn about history and culture in an enjoyable and engaging manner, contributing to their overall development.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This study aimed to explore non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the field of biology education in Germany. The findings highlight the significant role of NGOs in Germany, their diverse range of services, and their contributions to education. Based on the results, the following points have been discussed:

- **Diversity of NGOs in Biology Education in Germany:** Germany exhibits a remarkable diversity of NGOs operating in the field of biology education. These organizations engage in activities in various sectors such as sports, culture, environment, and health, and they also play a vital role in biology education. For example, the Environmental Education Association Baden-Württemberg focuses on fostering early interest in nature and the environment among children through projects and providing support to educators.
- **Promoting Equality and Equal Opportunities:** NGOs in Germany contribute to equality and equal opportunities in education. In an educational system where students primarily attend public schools, NGOs play a crucial role in enhancing opportunities. For instance, the Education Foundation supports projects that aim to assist disadvantaged children and improve overall education levels in society. These projects not only enhance academic achievement but also foster social and cultural development.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** NGOs in Germany collaborate with government institutions and other NGOs. The Education Foundation, for example, cooperates with the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, as well as parent associations and development associations of preschool institutions and schools. Such collaborations enable NGOs to reach wider audiences and deliver effective services.
- **Importance of Non-Governmental Organizations:** Non-governmental organizations in Germany play a crucial role in complementing the services provided by the state and private sector. They bridge gaps in service delivery and cater to the needs of individuals who may not have access to services due to economic limitations or the limitations of government resources. The trust and cooperation between NGOs, individuals, and the state create a system of mutual support and control, ensuring transparency and accountability.

The findings of this study shed light on the significant role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in biology education in Germany. These organizations contribute to various aspects of education, including promoting equality of opportunity, fostering collaboration, and providing diverse services to support the educational needs of children and young people.

One of the key findings is the remarkable diversity of NGOs operating in Germany. These organizations cover a wide range of sectors, including sports, culture, environment, health, and

education. While each NGO has a specific focus and mission, they all share the common goal of enhancing education and making a positive impact on society. For example, the Education Foundation (Stiftung Bildung) aims to improve and develop educational conditions for children and young people, with a particular emphasis on supporting socially disadvantaged children. The foundation collaborates with various government ministries, parent associations, and development associations to achieve its objectives.

NGOs in Germany play a crucial role in promoting equality of opportunity in education. In a system where public schools are the primary choice for students, NGOs contribute to enhancing educational opportunities and reducing disparities among students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Through their projects, initiatives, and collaborations with schools, NGOs provide additional support, resources, and enrichment activities that complement formal education. For instance, NGOs organize excursions, cultural events, and mentoring programs, and they provide educational materials and resources to schools. These efforts contribute to a more inclusive and equitable education system.

Collaboration and partnerships are fundamental aspects of NGOs' work in Germany. NGOs collaborate with government institutions, other NGOs, and various stakeholders to maximize their impact and effectiveness. By working together, they can leverage resources, share expertise, and address complex educational challenges more comprehensively. The Education Foundation's collaborations with government ministries and development associations exemplify the importance of such partnerships in implementing effective educational programs and initiatives.

The significance of non-governmental organizations in Germany lies in their ability to complement the services provided by the state and the private sector. They fill gaps in service delivery and cater to the needs of individuals who may not have access to certain services due to economic constraints or limitations in government resources. The mutual trust and cooperation between NGOs, individuals, and the state create a system of support, transparency, and accountability. Furthermore, the tax-deductible donations made to NGOs empower individuals and institutions to direct their contributions towards causes they believe in, thus allowing citizens to actively participate in shaping education policies and initiatives.

The insights gained from the German context and the activities of NGOs in biology education can serve as valuable lessons for other countries seeking to enhance the role of NGOs in education. By studying the strategies, collaborations, and programs implemented by NGOs in Germany, policymakers and educational stakeholders in other countries can gain inspiration and guidance for fostering partnerships, promoting equality, and creating an inclusive education system.

In conclusion, the findings emphasize the significant contributions of NGOs operating in the field of biology education in Germany. These organizations play a pivotal role in promoting equality, providing diverse educational opportunities, and fostering collaboration within the education sector. The lessons learned from the German context can serve as valuable insights for other countries seeking to enhance the role of NGOs in education.

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