Contributions of Non-Formal Education in the Scout Movement to Peacebuilding: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of Young People's Experiences in Peace Education

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Abstract

Peace education seeks to transform cultures of violence into cultures of peace by fostering values, knowledge, and skills for nonviolent living. However, research remains largely centred on formal education, often overlooking the role of non-formal education (NFE). This study addresses this gap by examining the World Scout Movement as a lived model of peace education.

Using transcendental phenomenology, the study followed a two-phase design: documenting Scouts' lived experiences and analysing them through selected peace education frameworks. Eleven co-researchers from Costa Rica, Colombia, and Honduras participated in semi-structured interviews, memoing, and informal writing.

Findings reveal seven interrelated themes shaping young people's development in Scouting: Personal Growth and Inner Peace, Leadership Development and Social Responsibility, Environmental Awareness, Global Awareness and Intercultural Competence, Interpersonal Skills Development, Understanding and Advocacy of Human Rights, and Political Awareness and Active Citizenship. These align strongly with peace education domains such as conflict resolution, human rights, environmental stewardship, and civic engagement. The Scout Method's experiential, participatory approach ("learning by doing") clearly operationalizes peace education principles.

Youth also reported transferring competencies to family, academic, professional, and community settings, demonstrating sustained, cumulative development.

Keywords. Scouting, non-formal education, competence development, peace education, peacebuilding

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Introduction

Peace education serves as a cornerstone for developing the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to transform cultures of violence into cultures of peace (Harris & Morrison, 2003; UNESCO, 2001). Recent scholarship suggests that peace education research continues to be largely centred on formal education contexts, with comparatively less attention given to non-formal settings (International Alert, 2020; Kester, 2022; Hantzopoulos & Zakharia, 2021). Earlier foundational work (Harris, 2004; Stomfay-Stitz, 1993) similarly emphasized the role of formal schooling in peace education. This emphasis leaves a significant gap in understanding how non-formal education (NFE)—structured, voluntary, and learner-centred educational processes occurring outside formal institutions—contributes to peacebuilding and competence development. Although early literature framed NFE as supplementary to formal schooling (Coombs, Prosser & Ahmed, 1973), contemporary research increasingly recognises it as a key site for the development of social, civic, and peace-related competences (European Commission, 2018; UNESCO, 2015; Council of Europe, 2016; Almeida & Morais, 2024).

Although formal education remains limited in accessibility, non-formal education expands learning opportunities for underserved groups (Almeida & Morais, 2024; Mishra, 2013). Nevertheless, academic research continues to frame non-formal education merely as a supplement to formal schooling (Almeida & Morais, 2024; Bekerman, Burbules & Keller, 2006; Cobos, 2006; Romi & Schmida, 2009), emphasizing technical competencies over life skills. Yet, life skills—such as communication, adaptability, cooperation, and intercultural understanding—are central to peace education (Souto-Otero et al., 2011).

Recognizing peace education as an essential strategy for peacebuilding (Fitzduff & Jean, 2011; Harris & Morrison, 2013), which equips individuals with the knowledge, values, and abilities required for nonviolent conflict transformation (Seitz, 2004; UNESCO, 2001; UNESCO-IICBA, 2017; Harris & Morrison, 2003; Reardon, 1988), this article builds upon the author's doctoral research examining the lived experiences of young people in the World Scout Movement—one of the largest global providers of non-formal education. The study explored how youth participants develop competences aligned with peace education frameworks and how their experiences contribute to peacebuilding at personal, interpersonal, and societal levels. Employing a transcendental phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994), the research investigated how meaning is constructed through experience and how Scouting's non-formal educational structure fosters peace-oriented values and behaviors.

Previous research has linked Scouting to global citizenship (Vallory, 2012; Wangdi & Tenzin, 2021), civic participation (Lundberg, 2018; Springhall, 1987), youth agency (Bornhoft, 2022), community building (Ramos, 2014), and intercultural understanding (Lundberg, 2022). Moreover, a substantial body of evidence has documented its positive influence on youth development (Polson et al., 2013; Louis Harris & Associates, 1995, 1998; Wang et al., 2015; Jang et al., 2012; Scouts Australia, 2018; World Scout Bureau / Jacobs Foundation, 1995; Harris Interactive, 2003; Hilliard et al., 2014; PACEC, 2011; WAGGGS & WOSM, 2013). However, many of these studies are geographically or culturally limited, often focusing on Western or Global North contexts. While this scholarship underscores Scouting's contributions to civic engagement and intercultural competence, few studies explicitly examine its peacebuilding dimension. As Berents (2018) emphasizes, centring youth narratives is essential for developing contextually grounded and inclusive peacebuilding frameworks.

Although the World Scout Bureau (2005, 2018a) highlights Scouting's contributions to peacebuilding, human rights, global solidarity, interreligious dialogue, and environmental awareness, research

examining these contributions empirically remains scarce. This gap is particularly notable given Scouting's century-long history and its reach among millions of young people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. As a non-formal educational movement, Scouting intentionally nurtures dialogue, coexistence, and personal growth by providing youth with meaningful opportunities to explore purpose, values, and identity (World Scout Bureau, 2005, 2018a).

This research contributes to the field in two main ways. First, despite recognition of non-formal education's social impact, there remains limited academic understanding of how Scouting cultivates peace competences and contributes to peace education and peacebuilding. Second, it underscores the role of non-formal education as a vital actor in peace education—an area traditionally dominated by formal schooling paradigms. The study calls for a re-evaluation of how societies conceptualize education for peace, advocating for policies that legitimize and integrate non-formal educational practices as complementary yet autonomous dimensions of peacebuilding.

The Scout Movement

The World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM) is a global, voluntary, non-political educational movement for young people that operates through non-formal education (World Scout Bureau, 2017). Since its origins in the early twentieth century, Scouting has aimed to support the holistic development of young people—physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually—through a values-based approach to education (Vallory, 2007; World Scout Bureau, 2019).

Its educational approach is guided by the Scout Method, defined as a system of progressive self-education combining elements such as learning by doing, small-group teamwork, personal progression, adult support, community involvement, and engagement with nature (World Scout Bureau, 2017). This method emphasizes experiential, participatory learning and positions young people as active agents in their own development.

Scouting is typically organized into age-based sections reflecting developmental stages. While names and age ranges vary by country, these commonly include Cub Scouts (approximately 7–11 years), focused on play and foundational values; the Scout section (approximately 11–15 years), emphasizing skills, teamwork, and responsibility; Venture Scouts (approximately 15–18 years), centred on leadership and project-based learning; and Rover Scouts (young adults), focusing on autonomy, community engagement, and active citizenship (World Scout Bureau, 2017; Oficina Scout Interamericana, 1998, 2005, 2007).

This structured yet flexible progression provides a continuous educational pathway through which young people engage in non-formal learning experiences aligned with personal development and social responsibility.

This developmental structure is reflected in participants' narratives, which draw on experiences across different sections of the Scout programme.

Methodological and Analytical Approach

The central research question guiding this study was: *How do non-formal educational programmes within the Scout Movement contribute to peacebuilding through peace education?*

The research followed a two-phase strategy: first, documenting lived experiences of youth phenomenologically (Cordes, 2014), and second, analysing these accounts through selected peace education frameworks. Participants were initially engaged without thematic priming to avoid theoretical bias. Interviews were conducted in two

stages—open narratives, followed by thematic probing once participants had naturally introduced relevant concepts.

To address the overarching research question, four specific questions were developed. It was anticipated that answering these would collectively illuminate the main phenomenon under study: young people's lived experiences within the non-formal educational programmes of Scouting and their contribution to developing competences within the key thematic areas of peace education frameworks.

The first two specific research questions—(1) *What are the lived experiences of young people participating in non-formal educational programmes within the Scout Movement?* and (2) *In what ways do these experiences demonstrate that non-formal education practices constitute peace education, in terms of their pedagogical approaches and key thematic areas within peace education frameworks?*—served as the principal drivers of this study, embracing the phenomenon of interest (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990).

The third and fourth research questions—(3) *How do young people perceive these experiences as having shaped their competence development (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours) within the key thematic areas of peace education frameworks?* and (4) *In what ways have young people applied these competences and contributed to peacebuilding?*—were designed to examine how participants understand the impact of their Scouting experiences on competence development. These questions aimed to capture participants' perspectives on personal growth, assess the depth and nature of their experiences, and explore how they have applied the competences acquired through non-formal education to contribute to peacebuilding.

Methodological Framework

This study relied on a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore how participants experienced and made meaning of peace education within the Scout Movement. Phenomenology was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of lived experience from the perspective of those who have directly encountered the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

The research emphasizes rich textural and structural descriptions to capture both what participants experienced and how they experienced it. In line with this approach, the researcher engaged in epoche (bracketing) to suspend prior assumptions and remain open to participants' meanings. The process followed a systematic procedure of identifying significant statements and developing themes that reflect the essence of the phenomenon.

A modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) was used to structure the analysis, moving from the identification of significant statements to the development of composite textural and structural descriptions. This process enabled themes to emerge inductively through sustained engagement with interview transcripts, memos, and reflective materials.

This phenomenological method emphasized the participants' lived experiences as expressed through their perceptions, narratives, and voices (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The textural descriptions captured *what* co-researchers experienced, while the structural descriptions explored *how* those experiences occurred (Creswell, 2013). Synthesizing these individual accounts into a composite description provided a universal understanding of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), representing the essence of the shared experience among youth in Scouting's educational programmes.

Peace Education Frameworks

This study draws on five key peace education frameworks selected for their relevance to non-formal, participatory youth education and competence development: UNESCO (2001), Harris (2004), the Flower-Petal Model (Toh, 2004), the Peace Education Competence Framework (Belousa et al., 2016), and the World Scout Movement framework for Peace (2005). These frameworks were chosen because they collectively integrate pedagogical, thematic, and competence-based dimensions of peace education, aligning with the experiential and learner-centred nature of Scouting.

Rather than treating these frameworks independently, the study adopted an inductive comparative approach to identify common conceptual ground. Across the five frameworks, eight recurring thematic domains were identified: inner peace; environmental education; social and development education; intercultural and international education; relationships with others; the political dimension; conflict resolution; and human rights education. These domains provided the analytical structure through which participants' experiences were interpreted.

To enhance conceptual clarity, Table 1 summarizes the key contributions of each framework and their convergence across thematic domains.

Table 1. Convergence of Peace Education Frameworks

Framework	Key Focus	Relevant Domains
UNESCO (2001)	Holistic peace learning	Intercultural, conflict resolution, human rights
Harris (2004)	Pedagogical approach	Dialogue, empathy, cooperation
Flower-Petal Model	Thematic peace areas	Human rights, environment, development
Competence Framework (2016)	Skills/competences	Knowledge, attitudes, behaviours
WOSM (2005)	Applied youth practice	Citizenship, service, leadership

In addition to these frameworks, Galtung's (1996) Conflict Triangle and the TRANSCEND approach (Webel & Galtung, 2007) were used as interpretive lenses to contextualize how competences relate to conflict dynamics. While the selected peace education frameworks focus on the development of knowledge, skills, and values, Galtung's model provides a conceptual link between attitudes, behaviours, and underlying contradictions in conflict situations. This allows the findings to be interpreted not only in terms of competence development but also in relation to processes of conflict transformation and the construction of positive peace.

Participants (Co-researchers)

In phenomenological studies, researchers and participants are understood as interdependent, leading Moustakas (1994) to conceptualise participants as co-researchers. Within this approach, co-researchers provide rich, first-person accounts of their lived experiences, while the researcher engages in *epoche* to describe and understand these experiences without imposing prior assumptions. The relationship is mutually constitutive: the essence of the phenomenon emerges from participants' narratives, while the researcher is responsible for explicating these meanings through textural and structural descriptions.

In this study, the designation of participants as co-researchers reflects their central role in meaning construction. Although they did not participate in the design of the research questions or in the formal stages of analysis, their contributions extended beyond conventional participation. Through iterative semi-structured interviews, informal writing, and reflective engagement, co-researchers articulated, refined, and expanded their experiences, shaping the depth and direction of the inquiry.

Consistent with the process of explicitation (Hycner, 1999), themes and essential structures were derived inductively from these narratives. In this sense, co-researchers were not involved in conducting the research procedures themselves, but were fundamental to the generation and clarification of meaning, upon which the entire analysis was based.

Eleven young people (six women and five men) participated in the study, with gender self-identified. Participants were purposively selected from Costa Rica, Colombia, and Honduras to ensure diversity of experience. These countries were chosen to fill the Latin American research gap, represent varied socio-political contexts, and feature National Scout Organizations (NSOs) with established non-formal educational programmes.

Eligibility criteria required substantial Scouting engagement: completion of the youth programme within the past four years; participation in at least three sections (e.g., Cub Scouts, Scouts, Venturer, Rover); and attainment of the highest progressive award in one section. Depth of participation was emphasized due to its link to measurable developmental outcomes (Polson et al., 2013).

Sample size was determined by phenomenological principles of data richness and saturation (Creswell, 1998, 2009, 2013; Boyd, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988; Moustakas, 1994; Dash, 2015). Purposive sampling (Welman & Kruger, 1999) identified participants capable of providing detailed, reflective accounts (Babbie, 1995; Kruger, 1988; Creswell, 2013). The final sample had a median age of 23 years and included participants with diverse educational backgrounds and religious affiliations. On average, each co-researcher had nearly 14 years of involvement in Scouting's educational programmes. Their experiences spanned multiple sections of the Scout Movement (Cub Scouts, Scouts, Venture Scouts, and Rover Scouts), reflecting sustained engagement across different developmental stages.

While socio-economic status was not systematically collected, Scouting in the selected contexts is generally accessible across socio-economic groups, although participation may still be shaped by factors such as geographic location, access to resources, and organizational capacity. Nevertheless, participants' narratives suggest a degree of socio-economic diversity within the sample. For instance, some co-researchers reflected on experiences of relative privilege, such as Rocio's awareness of her social position through encounters with others in Scouting, while others, such as Mario, described growing up in contexts marked by financial hardship. These accounts indicate that, although not formally measured, participants engaged with Scouting from varied socio-economic backgrounds, which in turn shaped their perspectives on community, inequality, and peacebuilding.

Data Collection

Data collection involved a total of **16 semi-structured interviews**, conducted in two phases. Each of the eleven co-researchers participated in **1–2 interviews each**, depending on the need for clarification and depth. Interviews lasted between approximately **60–90 minutes** and were conducted online via Zoom due to geographical distribution. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

In addition to interviews, **memoing** was conducted by the researcher throughout the data collection and analysis process. This included both descriptive

memos (documenting observations during and immediately after interviews) and analytical memos (capturing emerging interpretations, patterns, and conceptual reflections). Memoing was carried out continuously during the research process to support reflexivity and analytical transparency.

Finally, **informal writing assignments** were used as a complementary data source. These were completed by **ten participants** and consisted of short, guided reflective exercises in which participants described specific experiences related to their development in Scouting. Participants completed these assignments independently, typically in written narrative form, with no strict length requirements, although most responses ranged between **1–3 pages**. These writings allowed participants to elaborate on experiences that may not have fully emerged during interviews.

Data Analysis

Data processing followed the two-phase strategy guiding this study. First, participants' lived experiences were documented and examined phenomenologically. Second, these accounts were interpreted through selected peace education frameworks.

Consistent with transcendental phenomenology, the study employed the process of **explicitation of the data** (Hycner, 1999). This approach was adopted deliberately instead of conventional "data analysis," as explicitation focuses on investigating the constituents of a phenomenon while preserving the integrity of the experience as a whole, rather than fragmenting it into isolated parts (Groenewald, 2004). The aim was therefore to illuminate the essential structure of participants' lived experiences while maintaining their contextual and experiential coherence.

The explicitation process was operationalized through a modified version of the van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994), applied across all data sources, including interview transcripts, memoing, and informal writing assignments. The process followed several iterative steps.

First, all materials were read multiple times to achieve immersion in the data. Significant statements relevant to the research questions were identified through horizontalization, treating each statement with equal value. These statements were then examined to remove redundancies and identify invariant constituents.

Next, invariant constituents were clustered into thematic units through iterative comparison across participants and data sources. Memoing supported this process by capturing emerging patterns, relationships, and reflexive insights throughout the explicitation.

Following this, individual **textural descriptions** (what participants experienced) and **structural descriptions** (how the experiences occurred) were developed. These were then synthesized into composite textural-structural descriptions representing the shared essence of the phenomenon.

In the second phase of the study, these emergent themes were interpreted through selected peace education frameworks. This step enabled the linking of phenomenological findings with broader conceptual understandings of competence development and peacebuilding, without imposing theoretical structures during the initial stage of explicitation.

This two-stage approach ensured that participants' lived experiences remained the primary source of meaning, while allowing for theoretically informed interpretation in a subsequent analytical layer.

Findings and Discussion

Lived Experiences in Scouting

Seven interrelated themes emerged from the co-researchers' lived experiences in Scouting: (1) personal growth and inner peace, (2) leadership development and social responsibility, (3) environmental awareness, (4) global awareness and intercultural competence, (5) interpersonal skills development, (6) understanding and advocacy of human rights, and (7) political awareness and active citizenship.

Together, these themes describe a holistic process of personal and social transformation through which participants develop competences associated with peace education.

The findings of this study reinforce the literature that situates non-formal education as an effective platform for peacebuilding, particularly in conflict-affected or divided societies (Leija, 2016). The co-researchers' experiences revealed how Scouting fosters self-esteem, mutual understanding, dialogue, community cohesion, and decision-making—qualities consistent with peace education outcomes. Many co-researchers either came from or became aware of communities affected by inequality and social tension. Through Scouting, they developed competencies corresponding to key peace education domains, reflecting Berents' (2018) view that "everyday peace" emerges through the ordinary, yet profound, ways individuals navigate conflict and create spaces of solidarity.

Moreover, co-researchers described pedagogical structures that promoted critical reflection, decision-making, and peer learning. They spoke of finding belonging and purpose within a global community, supported by Scouting's *personal progression system*, which links experiential challenges to self-development. Recognition through badges, ceremonies, and peer validation reinforced their sense of achievement. In line with Jones et al. (2014), projects and community initiatives allowed them to construct social identities as *agents of change*, cultivating responsibility, initiative, and civic engagement.

The seven themes that emerged through phenomenological analysis align closely with the core areas of peace education frameworks. Some, such as *Understanding and Advocacy of Human Rights*, directly correspond to thematic pillars of peace education. Others, including *Leadership Development*, *Interpersonal Skills*, *Active Citizenship*, and *Personal Growth*, serve as cross-cutting foundations for learning and applying peace principles in all dimensions of human interaction.

Applying the Modification of the Van Kaam Method (Moustakas, 1994), all individual textural-structural descriptions were synthesized into a comprehensive "universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole" (p. 122). This analysis revealed that the lived experience of Scouting encompasses a transformative process—personal, social, and civic—that shapes youth as reflective, responsible, and peace-oriented individuals.

The seven themes representing this essence are summarized below.

1. Personal Growth and Inner Peace

Through reflective practices and personal challenges, co-researchers developed self-awareness, emotional resilience, and a sense of purpose. Experiences such as solitude camps, ethical reflection sessions, and symbolic ceremonies offered space for introspection and self-mastery. These activities provided participants with confidence and inner strength, fostering an enduring sense of calm and balance. Scouting thus became a "laboratory" where they could test and strengthen their values in a supportive environment.

Camilo described a profound transformation from childhood trauma and resentment toward

peacebuilding and active citizenship through Scouting:

> "[Thanks to Scouting], I had the possibility to travel, to give myself one or several opportunities for reflection and reconciliation regarding episodes from my childhood related to the conflict. (…) I will always remember the murder of my uncle. He was murdered in front of me, and I grew up with quite a bit of resentment toward everything related to the war, with a desire to become a soldier. In fact, I joined the Scouts because, when I saw them in uniform, I thought they had a connection to the military. I was like, 'These are mini soldiers,' and, well, it turned out they were not. I began to shape myself more as an active citizen, which is what I wanted to be. My initial dream was kind of wanting to kill the bad guys. And then I was like, 'I want to transform the bad guys; maybe they can somehow become good, like all of us together doing something better for the world.' That perspective seemed much more meaningful to me. (…) I chose to work for peace, clearly because of the episodes in my life. I had the — let's call it — bias of wanting peace. I said, 'I don't want any child to live through what I lived through in my childhood.' It would seem very painful to me, and I would like to prevent it."

Andrea described a deep change in confidence and self-expression through Scouting:

> "I used to be that typical girl at school who never spoke, who would sit at the back and not participate. And in reality, I owe the ability to do this — let's say, to present myself in front of an audience or socialize more, etc. — to the Scouts, basically. Because it teaches you what it means to work in a team; it teaches you that, at certain moments, you're going to have to be a leader. And these are things that help you day by day. Even though you see it, let's say, only in the scout meetings, it helps you in all aspects of your life."

Kate similarly linked her Scouting journey to healing and self-acceptance:

> "I went through a lot of bullying when I was in school. So, for many years, I kind of hated myself for being the way I was. (...) But there came a point when I said to myself, 'Well, I like it — why is that wrong?' And then, when I was in the Rover Scouts, it was one of the best things that happened to me, because that's where I found a friend (...) And it was thanks to the Rover Scouts that I was able to find peace with myself. It was my way of finding myself."

Mario emphasized the importance of relational support in his experience of inner peace:

> "There are also moments that one lives outside the Movement that complement what is lived within the Movement. So, this also leads to a lot of inner peace. For example, when I was in the Cub Scouts, we experienced a very tough economic situation at home. Resources were scarce, and we had to limit ourselves in many ways. Then, many people in the Scouts reached out to us, and this caused us a lot of security and calmness because we felt we were not alone. This leaves a significant mark on one."

These accounts show that inner peace emerged not as passive tranquillity, but as an active process of self-knowledge, emotional healing, and supportive belonging, enabling participants to face life's challenges with greater confidence and resilience.

2. Leadership Development and Social Responsibility

Participants consistently described Scouting as a formative space for developing leadership through action and service. By assuming roles such as patrol guide, peer leader, event organizer, and community project coordinator, they acquired decision-making, planning, and problem-solving skills. Leadership was conceptualized not as authority but as collaborative service, oriented toward the common good.

Andrea described the responsibility she experienced early in leadership:

> "I was chosen as patrol guide about six months after joining the Scout Troop (…) and it was curious because you felt this pressure because previously, the group of The Lions had maintained the honor flag with them all the time. So, there was this legacy, so to speak."

Wendy also emphasized the relational and pedagogical dimension of leadership:

> “Being a guide in the Scout Troop, that was also a learning experience for me, because of course, being a [Scout] guide, I have to teach the other girls who were with me (...) we did social projects related to education (...) What we did was go to fix it up [schools], visually... we took care of bringing books, collecting financial resources to help them too. (…) And it wasn’t just a one-day thing, but we really took several trips there and stayed overnight until the classroom project was finished and it was somewhat nicer for the students and teachers.”

Esteban highlighted the scale of responsibility he assumed in service projects and organizational roles:

> “Service projects that I have participated in, for example, have included going to schools and teaching younger children about the Scout Movement, to see if they would like to join, as well as carrying out activities for them. I’ve also had other experiences such as blood donation projects and food collection projects. And the project I participated in every year was the Telethon. So, it’s a very human experience, because you interact with so many people. (…) I had to organize many activities personally. In Venture Scouts, we have the tradition of setting up a camp every year (…) We invited many people from different groups, and the biggest camp I organized had about 200 Scouts. So, in Venture Scouts, I was organizing those camps.”

These experiences show that leadership in Scouting is developed through participation, responsibility, and peer service. Community service projects, environmental action, and local initiatives further reinforced participants’ sense of civic duty and social responsibility, helping them to see themselves as active citizens capable of contributing to positive social change.

3. Environmental Awareness

Nature-based experiences were central to the co-researchers’ formation. Conservation activities such as reforestation, clean-ups, ecological education, and direct engagement with natural spaces cultivated both environmental knowledge and stewardship. Participants consistently described environmental awareness as a lived practice rather than a merely cognitive outcome.

Maria Luisa embraced the Scouts' guiding principle of leaving the world better than we found it, seeing it as a crucial foundation for the movement's environmental education.

> "The strongest basis for environmental education carried out in the movement is the Scouts' phrase 'Leave the world better than we found it.'"

She recognized the essential role of natural spaces for both recreational purposes and the preservation of the natural environment.

> "Because those spaces are not only necessary for us to camp and have a good time, but they are necessary for the world itself."

Maria Luisa has learned about the vital role of trees in the ecosystem and the misconception that water is an unlimited resource.

> "One starts to realize the importance of a tree. Trees are needed because of the drought... they help prevent rivers from drying up."

Maria Luisa has developed waste management skills through active participation in cleanup activities.

> "So, you pick up rubbish, right? You come across a tiny piece, and you think, 'It's all this way; I have to bend down to pick this up,' but then you start to think of the nature around you, and you say, 'No, it's worth it'."

She engaged in activities related to environmental cleanliness.

> "Every time we went somewhere, we cleaned up and collected all the trash we found, which for me became almost as natural as breathing."

Her participation in organized cleanup tasks, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas like

biological reserves, showed her ability to collaborate effectively in conservation efforts.

> "Once at a camp in a biological reserve near where I live, we spent three days and on the last, we divided tasks to clean the whole place."

Maria Luisa gained her understanding of environmental issues through hands-on practice and involvement in sustainability and conservation activities.

Wendy's involvement in environmental activities within the Scouts marked a turning point in her attitude towards environmental awareness, motivating her to take a proactive role in educating and engaging others:

> "This is one of the parts that influenced me the most to change or take a certain position or attitude towards others because, as I already mentioned, by learning to share this knowledge with others, I not only became aware but, without realizing it, I became the person to whom they would turn for help or simply everyone started giving me their plastic caps because they knew I saved them to give to a foundation."

Francisco reflected on the practical and educational dimension of environmental action:

> "We did several reforestation activities... We filled countless bags of paper, cardboard, plastics that people brought to the central square of [my community]. (…) We went to schools to talk to young people about recycling, reusing, reducing, recycling as part of environmental support."

These accounts show that environmental awareness was not limited to knowledge acquisition, but extended to behaviour, advocacy, and a sense of ethical responsibility toward ecological sustainability.

4. Global Awareness and Intercultural Competence

Participation in local, national, and international events enabled co-researchers to encounter cultural diversity firsthand. Intercultural exchanges, jamborees, camps, and transnational friendships fostered empathy and respect for difference while reinforcing a sense of shared belonging within a global Scout identity.

Jean mentioned about his contact with scouts from Nicaragua, Mexico, France, and indigenous communities in Costa Rica; he explained how his cultural diversity broadened:

> "…it was like our first point of: 'Let's see other cultures' (…) Intercultural education allowed me to connect and learn from many young people from different parts of the country and even other countries, changing my thinking, erasing stigmas."

Mario gained understandings about the varied cultural contexts and practices between his own country and others, such as the Dominican Republic. He expressed this understanding by noting,

> "I spoke a lot with them regarding their cultural context, the realities they lived in, the size of their country, their culture, things that can make it very different there."

This helped him grasp how cultural practices could be similar yet distinct across borders, as seen in his interactions with Mexican Scouts,

> "We've talked a lot about their culture, customs, which in traditions are very similar to ours, but those indigenous cultures are very much different."

He demonstrated the ability to facilitate and engage in cultural exchange, sharing and learning about various traditions, customs, and culinary preferences.

> "We had the opportunity to share with their culture, talking with their friends, and ended up building a very strong friendship."

His narrative shows the value placed on building and maintaining international friendships within the Scout community, which transcend cultural differences.

> "Even though we are from different cultures, I speak with any Scout at the international level, and they open the doors of their homes."

Rocio emphasized the global fraternity created through the Movement:

> “I believe the most important thing, what summarizes or encompasses my entire experience, is that brotherhood and shared values. I think that, in the end, that's what makes it feel so special (...) knowing that anywhere in the world, you're going to find a Scout brother.”

These narratives show how intercultural learning became a lived practice of peace education. Rather than remaining abstract ideals of tolerance or diversity, global awareness was built through concrete encounters, communication across differences, and a shared identity grounded in mutual respect and cooperation.

5. Interpersonal Skills Development

Working in small teams and collaborative settings provided fertile ground for developing communication, cooperation, empathy, and conflict resolution skills. Participants described learning how to express disagreement, listen to others, negotiate respectfully, and manage tensions constructively.

Andrea has acquired the ability to solve conflicts peacefully, with emotional control and good communication being two of the very important skills learned.

> "I believe that this is part of my experience in the Scouts because it helps you to manage those emotions, to say if it really is worth it, to act in that violent manner or to get into a fight over it, or just let it pass or show my opinion, but in a peaceful way, not necessarily with violence."

She mentioned about one of the workshops she attended in Scouts regarding conflict resolution, where she learned in an organized manner about the stages involved in a conflict resolution process:

> "There was a girl who gave us a talk specifically related to conflict resolution. (...) She talked to us about all the stages of being able to resolve a conflict that you have."

This basic knowledge not only prepared her but also equipped her with a tool for use in other areas in her life.

Hector understood the importance of direct communication and the application of the Safe from Harm policy in conflict resolution. He stated:

> "It is learned that when there is a problem, it is better to sit down and talk."

He also noted that conflicts, particularly ego clashes, are common in leadership roles, reflecting,

> "I feel like that's every day if you deal with more people, especially when you're a guide, coordinator, president, or leader, it's like the most basic thing, to have good coexistence."

He engaged in an innovative conflict resolution exercise, which involved spending 24 hours in the shoes of a person with whom there were conflicts, aiming to foster empathy and understanding:

> "...my chief at the time, with our parents' permission, made an exercise of living 24 hours in someone else's shoes, specifically of the person with whom we had the most conflicts."

Hector appreciated experiential learning methods as effective in mitigating conflicts, aligning with the Scouting methodology of learning by doing

> "...and although it did not help to completely fix the conflict, I believe it was something that laid the foundations for doing so."

Kate described a more intense mediation experience that required emotional and practical skills:

> “We had to sit them down to sort it out because there was a lot of tension. When we sat them down, we explained that it wasn't about who to believe because two people were involved and there were two completely different stories.”

These experiences suggest that interpersonal competence in Scouting developed through lived group dynamics rather than abstract instruction. The capacity to navigate disagreement constructively became one of the most transferable outcomes, extending beyond Scouting into participants’ everyday lives.

6. Understanding and Advocacy of Human Rights

Co-researchers demonstrated a growing respect for equality, justice, dignity, and inclusion as integral to Scouting principles. Human rights were not treated primarily as abstract legal categories, but as lived values expressed through reflective dialogue, respect for others, social awareness, and everyday advocacy.

Francisco has a comprehensive understanding of various human rights issues, which he learned through forums and discussions within the Scout Movement:

> "In the events, the same topics about the rights of children, women's rights, and human rights in a global form were always touched upon."

He is aware of the cultural challenges in Honduras affecting human rights, especially regarding the LGBTQ+ community and gender equality:

> "I feel that many times, even the Scout Movement, due to the cultural problems we have in Honduras, it seems that more could be done, sometimes there is a lot missing in terms of human rights for the lesbian, gay community, in truly fair and equal rights for women."

Francisco developed advocacy skills through his active participation in educational forums and discussions, speaking on significant issues affecting his community:

> "Inside the forums at the camp, in the Rover Scout group there were always these topics, even now within the human rights organizations of Honduras, there are many, many former Scouts who are in charge of these institutions."

Mario participated in discussions about several issues:

> "We discussed the issue of in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, and abortion. We also talked about a very interesting topic, which is euthanasia."

His involvement in projects related to gender identity and LGBTQ+ communities enhanced his understanding.

> "In the National Network of Young Scouts, on the Youth, Education and Culture team, we worked on a project about gender identity. We also worked in the Venture Scouts on a project focused on the LGBTQ community."

Mario's experiences in this area focused on the rights of children and adolescents within the Scout Movement, highlighting the importance of respecting these rights.

> "In various meetings, I remember, we talked about the rights of children and adolescents. As young adults in the movement, we are taught about the things that cannot be denied to the kids, the protagonists of the programme."

His advocacy for training all leaders in special needs to ensure inclusion within the Scouts demonstrated his commitment to inclusivity.

> "I said that all leaders should have training in special needs so that people can join the Scouts."

His participation in Model UN discussions and national campaigns against racism and violence

shows his proactive approach to human rights advocacy.

> "Now there are more people from the Scout movement participating in Pride month, in marches against violence, and other protest spaces."

Maria Luisa framed peace and human dignity through empathy and non-judgment:

> “One feels that peace begins with empathy above all. And having empathy and making it count when it merits, I feel, makes a big difference.”

Together, these accounts suggest that Scouting served as an entry point for developing rights consciousness and moral responsibility. Participants described becoming more attentive to inclusion, fairness, and respect, even when these themes were not always formalized as “human rights education.”

7. Political Awareness and Active Citizenship

Democratic processes embedded in Scouting, such as elections, assemblies, voting, project planning, and collective decision-making, introduced participants to principles of governance, participation, and civic responsibility. These practices cultivated political awareness anchored in fairness, deliberation, and service.

Maria Luisa deepened her understanding of democratic processes through her involvement in selecting the scouting group's governing board. She recognized the importance of voting and the responsibilities it entails, noting,

> "...it is always by voting and always chosen, that always the 'that person is not suitable, this, that the other,' but it is always given that 'you voted, you chose'."

She emphasized the importance of being informed before making decisions, highlighting that democracy relies on well-informed choices by individuals.

> "...while it's not for you to blame yourself, it's for you to inform yourself and make a more informed choice next time."

Maria Luisa acknowledged the significance of participating in the democratic process. She learned about the importance of being an informed voter and the role of individuals in democracy.

> "In the movement, we are always taught the importance of participating in the democratic process, from helping as electoral guides to voting when we are of age."

Her experience assisting in national elections from a young age taught her the practical aspects of democratic participation and the importance of each vote.

> "...from the [Scout] troop, you start to see the importance and responsibility of this."

Maria Luisa's experiences fostered a sense of responsibility in voting, recognizing that the outcomes of democratic processes rest on individual decisions.

> "...the only responsibility falls on you, that's what democracy is based on."

Her eagerness to exercise her right to vote upon reaching legal age reflects her commitment to her country,

> "I was happy when I came of age because then I could vote, and I would be that person whom I usually see vote, plus, of course, besides the scouts, we have duties to God, Country, and Home. Voting is just one of the manifestations of my performing my duty to my country."

Rocio enhanced her skills in group decision-making, emphasizing the value of collective thought and the democratic process in reaching consensus and making informed choices. She described,

> "It was something very logical, very simple. You always had the right to expose and to vote for what you wanted and believed."

Rocio mentioned about how her Scout experiences reflect a deep respect for democracy and civic values, highlighting the Movement's implicit teachings on living within a democratic society and fulfilling one's civil duties. She said,

> "It taught the responsibilities and civil duties, about how to live in democracy, to vote, to reach agreements and to argue to always reach the fairest way of things."

Finally, her narrative shows a strong sense of civic-awareness and a commitment to considering the impact of one's actions on the community, showcasing the Scouts' emphasis on developing responsible and thoughtful citizens. She said,

> "I am convinced that in [my country], at least in [the capital], the existing civic culture is the huge problem. People do not care, people do not think about others. And I think that's what I learned in the Scouts, to worry about things around (...) For example, thinking that if I'm going to park here. Who could I be bothering? Who could I be affecting? It's like I learned that (...) So it was about learning about that collective responsibility I believe in the Scouts, beyond the rules of the good citizen as such. They were putting them into practice."

Wendy was introduced to the basic principles of democracy and active citizenship at an early age within her Scout group. Participating in the choice of leaders and group activities showed her the mechanisms of participatory democracy.

> "Since I arrived, it was like a key element in my group because we always chose. I chose the group to join. We voted for who we wanted to be our leader."

The concept of doing a daily good deed was ingrained in Wendy as a form of political action, emphasizing that one does not need to be a party member to be a good citizen.

> "I realized that one does not have to belong to a political party but can be a good citizen, and what I say is that doing a good deed every day is a political expression."

Wendy realized that the lessons of the Scout Movement have a political dimension, which broadened her awareness of global issues such as climate change and social inequality.

> "I never realized, I just didn't think that something we were taught could have a political dimension (...) I can say that everything we learned and did is a political stance, whether it's in the face of climate change, social inequality, etc."

Wendy's ability to view and interact with the world through a political lens was developed through her experiences in Scouting. This includes understanding how personal and collective actions have political ramifications.

> "It helped me build myself as a citizen of the world and for the world in which I live, knowing that every action I take, whether direct or indirect (such as choosing my president, mayor, etc.), will have repercussions for me and for others."

Wendy's experiences created a commitment to active citizenship both within and outside the Scout environment. She extended the principles of Scouting to her school and family life.

> "I realized that it is not only to practice this within the Scouts, or only every eight days at Scout meetings or camps but really externalize it."

These accounts show that participants did not experience citizenship as a distant or purely formal concept. Rather, they learned it through participatory practice, shared responsibility, and concrete involvement in projects and governance processes. In this sense, Scouting functioned as a practical school of democracy, helping young people understand that peace also depends on active, responsible participation in social life.

In summary, the seven themes identified in this study encapsulate the essence of young people's lived experiences within the Scout Movement's non-formal educational programmes. Together, they reveal a holistic process of *personal transformation and social engagement*, through which Scouts internalize the values of peace, service, and solidarity. Scouting thus emerges as a powerful non-formal learning context that supports individual growth, strengthens communities, and contributes meaningfully to peacebuilding across local and global dimensions.

Scouting as Peace Education Practice

The second research question examined how the experiences of young people within Scouting demonstrate that non-formal education practices constitute peace education—particularly regarding their pedagogical approaches and alignment with the key thematic areas of peace education frameworks. This question explored the context, methods, and strategies used in Scouting's non-formal educational programmes, assessing how they embody and operationalize peace education in practice.

Drawing on the individual structures of experience and the textural-structural descriptions, this analysis shows that Scouting provides a structured yet flexible educational framework that fosters personal transformation, responsibility, and a sustained commitment to peacebuilding. Through participatory learning, dialogue-based activities, experiential learning, and the consistent application of the Scout Method, Scouting enables young people to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours that align directly with peace education principles.

Non-formal Pedagogies as Peace Education Practices

The experiences of the co-researchers illustrate how Scouting's non-formal pedagogical model mirrors and reinforces peace education frameworks. The Scout Method—anchored in *the Scout Promise and Law, learning by doing, team system, symbolic frameworks, adult support, nature, community involvement, and personal progression*—creates the conditions under which peace competences can flourish. Participants' narratives consistently revealed that Scouting functions as a lived pedagogy of peace, where ethical values, emotional growth, and civic engagement are learned through experience rather than instruction.

One of the most prominent pedagogical approaches identified was *democratic participation and leadership development*. Scouting encourages youth to practice democratic decision-making and assume leadership responsibilities that nurture active citizenship. For instance, Andrea's experience illustrates how leadership in a supportive environment fostered confidence and cooperation: Scouting challenged her to live according to "a code of life," strengthening her sense of identity and responsibility. Similarly, Wendy (another co-researcher) described acquiring negotiation and teamwork skills through her leadership roles, demonstrating how the conditions of non-formal education stimulate both individual and collective transformation.

Experiential Learning as Transformation

Experiential learning emerged as a foundation of Scouting's peace education practice. Camilo's account demonstrated how immersive, reflective experiences promoted reconciliation and helped him find purpose and vocation. His story exemplifies the transformative potential of experiential education in non-formal contexts—enabling youth to process past experiences, develop life skills, and internalize peace values.

Hector's outdoor and survival training highlighted creativity and real-world application, revealing how experiential activities develop empathy, environmental awareness, and practical leadership. Similarly, Mario's "learning by doing" through games and volunteer projects illustrated how

Scouting translates theoretical notions of peace into tangible, lived experiences. These narratives confirm that Scouting's pedagogy nurtures *peaceful agency*—equipping youth to act with compassion, responsibility, and confidence in their communities.

Development of Soft Skills for Peacebuilding

The co-researchers' experiences also demonstrate the intentional cultivation of *soft skills* crucial to peacebuilding, including empathy, communication, conflict resolution, and resilience. Francisco's story reflected how engaging with diverse perspectives enhanced adaptability and mutual respect. Kate's experiences in group mediation and dialogue-based problem solving revealed the deliberate embedding of conflict transformation processes within Scouting activities.

Jean's participation in reflective environmental initiatives illustrated the link between personal reflection, ecological consciousness, and social responsibility—core elements of peace education frameworks. The integration of reflection into Scouting activities fostered both emotional regulation and interpersonal understanding, reinforcing the affective and relational dimensions of peace education (Harris, 2004).

Personal Progression, Reflection, and Value Internalization

Structured personal progression and recognition mechanisms were also central to Scouting's peace-oriented pedagogy. Esteban's experience illustrated how goal-setting and badge recognition fostered perseverance and long-term self-improvement, supporting intrinsic motivation and ethical growth. Jean's reflections highlighted how symbolic ceremonies deepened the internalization of shared values such as respect, cooperation, and responsibility.

Maria Luisa's narrative exemplified how the Scout Promise and Law guided her moral development and sense of global citizenship, while Rocio's experience showed how belonging to a values-based community strengthened her self-esteem and leadership. Together, these accounts demonstrate that value internalization and spiritual development are key outcomes of Scouting's non-formal education, directly resonating with the *affective and moral education* emphasized in peace education theory.

Civic Engagement and Global Solidarity

The research also found that Scouting's civic engagement and global networking fostered *solidarity across cultures*. Participation in national and international events—such as Jamborees—broadened participants' understanding of cultural diversity, while local community projects fostered social cohesion. Through these activities, co-researchers developed practical skills in organization, dialogue, and social advocacy. These experiences exemplify how Scouting bridges the *personal and political dimensions of peacebuilding*, preparing youth for ethical leadership and participatory citizenship.

The *Principles of the Scout Movement* and the *elements of the Scout Method* were consistently identified by co-researchers as essential to creating belonging, pride, and achievement. These components collectively function as *peace pedagogies*: they cultivate identity, relational ethics, and social participation.

Alignment with Peace Education Frameworks

This study draws on a selected set of peace education frameworks to guide the analysis of participants' competence development within the Scout Movement. Given the breadth of peace education theory, the research intentionally focuses on a limited number of frameworks that are conceptually aligned with non-formal, experiential, and youth-centered education.

Specifically, the frameworks developed by UNESCO (2001), Harris (2004), Toh Swee-Hin's Flower-Petal Model (2004), and Belousa et al. (2016) were selected due to their comprehensive and complementary approaches to peace education. These frameworks collectively conceptualize peace

as a multidimensional process encompassing personal, interpersonal, social, ecological, and global dimensions, all of which resonate with the educational philosophy of the Scout Movement.

Rather than adopting a predefined categorization, this study identified eight thematic areas through a comparative analysis of these frameworks: **inner peace, environmental education, social and development education, intercultural/international education, relationships with others, political dimension, conflict resolution, and human rights education**. These themes represent the most recurrent and conceptually significant dimensions across the selected frameworks and serve as the analytical lens for examining participants' lived experiences.

Among the selected frameworks, Toh's Flower-Petal Model provides a particularly useful integrative perspective. It conceptualizes peace as a "culture of peace" composed of interconnected dimensions, including inner peace, intercultural solidarity, environmental sustainability, social justice and compassion, human rights, and the dismantling of cultures of violence. These dimensions closely correspond to the thematic areas identified in this study and offer a holistic framework for interpreting how peace is experienced and enacted through non-formal education.

Similarly, UNESCO (2001) emphasizes holistic, values-based, and experiential learning, while Harris (2004) highlights the importance of addressing multiple forms of violence through participatory, affective, and skills-based education. Belousa et al. (2016), in turn, provide a competence-based perspective, focusing on participation, interdependence, and diversity as key elements of peace education in non-formal youth settings. Together, these frameworks converge around the importance of experiential learning, dialogue, reflection, and active participation.

The Scout Movement operationalizes these principles through its non-formal educational approach, particularly the Scout Method, which emphasizes "learning by doing," teamwork, reflection, and progressive responsibility. As such, the thematic areas identified in this study provide a bridge between peace education theory and the lived experiences of participants.

To clarify this alignment, Table 2 summarizes how the selected peace education frameworks correspond to the thematic areas used in this study and how these are reflected in the findings.

Table 2. Alignment Between Selected Peace Education Frameworks, Thematic Areas, and Findings

Thematic Area	**Corresponding Dimensions in Frameworks**	**Evidence from Findings**
Inner Peace	UNESCO: self-awareness; Harris: affective learning; Toh: inner peace	Development of self-confidence, emotional healing, and reflection through solitude and group support
Relationships with Others	Harris: conflict resolution; Belousa: interdependence; Toh: compassion	Communication, empathy, and conflict mediation skills developed through teamwork
Social & Development Education	Harris: development education; Toh: justice and compassion	Engagement in community service and social projects fostering responsibility
Environmental Education	UNESCO: care for the planet;	Participation in conservation,

Thematic Area	Corresponding Dimensions in Frameworks	Evidence from Findings
	Toh: ecological peace	reforestation, and environmental awareness activities
Intercultural/ International Education	Harris: international education; Toh: intercultural solidarity	Intercultural exchanges and global events fostering respect for diversity
Political Dimension	Belousa: participation; UNESCO: civic responsibility	Experiences of democratic decision-making, voting, and leadership roles
Conflict Resolution	UNESCO: nonviolent conflict resolution; Harris: mediation skills	Practical experiences in resolving conflicts through dialogue and negotiation
Human Rights Education	Harris: human rights education; Toh: human rights	Awareness of equality, justice, and inclusion through discussions and activities

Gaps and Less Visible Aspects

Despite these strengths, certain dimensions of peace education remained less visible in participants' accounts, particularly those related to the structural and systemic nature of conflict. While co-researchers demonstrated strong competencies in interpersonal, environmental, and community-based aspects of peace, there was limited explicit engagement with broader structural conditions shaping conflict in their respective contexts, such as social inequality, exclusion, or institutional forms of violence.

Using the distinction between negative and positive peace proposed by Galtung (1969), participants' experiences largely reflect contributions to *negative peace*, especially through conflict resolution, dialogue, and the promotion of harmonious relationships. For example, Andrea described reflecting on whether "it's worth fighting over that, or better, just talk to this person peacefully," while Maria Luisa emphasized the importance of mediation and dialogue in resolving group conflicts. Similarly, Kate recounted extended efforts to mediate tensions within her group, highlighting the development of practical conflict resolution skills. These examples demonstrate a strong orientation toward managing interpersonal conflict and maintaining group harmony.

However, engagement with *positive peace*—understood as the transformation of structural inequalities and systems of injustice—was less consistently articulated. While some participants hinted at broader social issues, these were rarely framed in terms of structural analysis. For instance, Hector reflected on socioeconomic inequalities observed between Scout groups, noting differences in access to resources, yet this awareness did not translate into a deeper critique of systemic inequality. Likewise, Wendy and Francisco described community service initiatives, such as improving schools or supporting vulnerable populations, but these actions were generally framed as acts of service rather than as responses to underlying structural conditions.

A similar pattern emerges when considering Toh Swee-Hin's Flower-Petal Model. Several of its dimensions are clearly reflected in participants' experiences. Inner peace is evident in narratives such as Kate's process of self-acceptance and emotional healing, and Maria Luisa's reflections on solitude camps and spirituality. Intercultural solidarity is illustrated through experiences shared by Jean,

Wendy, and Francisco in international Scout events, where they encountered and learned from diverse cultures. Environmental peace is strongly represented across participants, including Andrea's tree-planting activities and Francisco's reforestation and recycling initiatives. Human rights awareness also appears in accounts such as Andrea's engagement with women's empowerment initiatives and Francisco's reflections on gender equality.

In contrast, other dimensions of the model were less visible. In particular, there was limited evidence of engagement with disarmament education or critical reflection on the "culture of war," including militarism, structural violence, or consumerist influences. Camilo's narrative represents a notable exception, as his personal experience with violence and his statement that he wanted to "transform the bad guys" reflects a profound shift toward peacebuilding. However, even in this case, the transformation is primarily framed at the individual and relational level, rather than as part of a broader structural critique.

Locating participants within their socio-cultural contexts further highlights these gaps. Several participants referred to issues such as migration (Hector), social inequality, or community vulnerability, yet these experiences were not consistently connected to an understanding of systemic or institutional dimensions of conflict. This suggests that while the Scout Movement effectively fosters values, attitudes, and interpersonal competencies for peace, there is less emphasis on developing critical awareness of structural violence and the skills needed to address it.

Finally, although diversity and inclusion were present as lived experiences within the Scout environment, explicit engagement with intersectionality and structural discrimination remained limited. For example, Andrea expressed respect for differing perspectives on sensitive social issues, and Maria Luisa emphasized empathy in dealing with others, yet these reflections were not extended into deeper analyses of power relations or systemic inequalities.

Overall, these findings suggest that while the Scout Movement provides a strong foundation for interpersonal and community-level peacebuilding, greater emphasis on structural dimensions of conflict, positive peace, and critical social analysis could further strengthen its contribution to transformative peace education.

Scouting's Distinct Contribution to Peace Education

The Scout Movement's unique contribution lies in its ability to *translate abstract peace education principles into lived, community-rooted practices*. Unlike many formal education systems, Scouting offers a continuous and developmental process from childhood to young adulthood. Its intergenerational structure provides mentorship and continuity, reinforcing personal growth and civic participation.

This approach embodies a *practical ethics of care and service* that nurtures civic-mindedness, solidarity, and resilience—qualities essential for both inner and societal peace. By fostering *education from within* rather than *education from without*, Scouting positions young people as self-educators responsible for their own development (World Scout Bureau, 2017). The Scout Method functions as a coherent, learner-centred system that guides youth along a pathway of moral and social maturity.

In conclusion, the findings provide evidence that Scouting's non-formal education practices are linked directly to peace education practices. They combine experiential learning, participatory pedagogy, reflective practice, and value internalization to cultivate the competencies necessary for peaceful living. Scouting thus exemplifies how value-driven, youth-centred, and socially engaged non-formal education can act as a transformative mechanism for peacebuilding—empowering young people not only as learners but as *co-creators of cultures of peace* within their communities and beyond.

Competence Development in Peace Education

The study demonstrates that co-researchers perceive Scouting's non-formal educational programmes as formative for their competence development across knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours aligned with the key thematic areas of peace education—inner peace, environmental education, social & development education, intercultural/international education, relationships with others, the political dimension, conflict resolution education, and human rights education. In line with Fitzduff and Jean's (2011) emphasis on appropriate learning, teaching, and skills development, participants described a sustained, practice-rich pathway in which explicit knowledge (often gained in participatory games, workshops and practices) complemented gradually internalized skills and behaviours accrued through years of progressive participation—which is consistent with Seitz's (2004) argument that behavioural change requires activity-based, long-term engagement.

All co-researchers reported acquiring core knowledge (e.g., human rights; environment and sustainability; civic processes; interfaith and intercultural learning; conflict management) and cultivating behaviours (e.g., open-mindedness, empathy, solidarity, responsibility, gender sensitivity) alongside skills (e.g., conflict resolution, dialogue, mediation, active listening, non-violent communication, negotiation, teamwork, reflection, leadership). Their narratives and experiences collectively mapped onto the comprehensive repertoire of competences for peacebuilding (Belousa et al., 2016; Henning et al., 2024; Gittins, 2024; OECD, 2016; UNESCO: International Bureau of Education, 2004; UNHCR, UNESCO, INEE, 2005; UNICEF, 2016; UNESCO, 2001; Harris, 2004; Flower-Petal Model, 2004; Peace Education Competence Framework, 2016; World Scout Movement framework for peace, 2005). Leadership development emerged early through role-based learning in small groups: as Wendy put it, teaching others meant "learning more things" oneself, while Rocio highlighted deliberative problem-solving—"If there was a problem it was resolved in the Council of Scouts." These micro-democratic practices scaffolded the dispositions and capabilities needed for sustained cooperation and shared decision-making.

Personal identity work and self-esteem were equally significant. Through reflective practices and supportive peer cultures, participants translated adversity into agency. Kate's journey—from bullying-induced self-rejection to self-acceptance—captured this inner work: "I was able to find peace with myself. It was my way of finding myself." Co-researchers also demonstrated situated understandings of global, national, and local issues through lived encounter. Rocio's recognition of privilege—developed by stepping beyond a "bubble" into socially mixed Scout spaces—mirrored others' accounts (Jean, Maria Luisa, Esteban, Camilo, Kate) of learning through community service about poverty, vulnerability, and social inequity.

Taken together, these experiences portray Scouting as an integrated, experiential ecosystem in which competence development is iterative, contextualized, and cumulative. Young people described becoming active citizens who not only know about peace-related domains but also do peace through everyday practice—cooperating, mediating, serving, and leading—within the Movement and beyond. In this sense, Scouting not only promotes peace education; it enacts it, equipping youth with enduring attitudes and skills—tolerance, environmental responsibility, reflective leadership, and values-sharing in a global community—so that they are "Be Prepared" and, indeed, "Ready for Life."

Application of Competences and Peacebuilding

This study examined how young people apply the competences developed through Scouting's non-formal educational programmes to peacebuilding, revealing that the Movement provides a sustained, experiential environment for translating peace education frameworks into lived practice. Peace

education shares common ground with citizenship education through its belief in global interdependence and its emphasis on tolerance, respect for difference, and the rights of others as foundations for peace (Harris, 2002; Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 2000; Mahrouse, 2006). The findings demonstrate that Scouting creates a tangible space for young people to become "global citizens" (Vallory, 2007; Wangdi & Tenzin, 2021), grounded in shared values and educational experiences across diverse cultural contexts.

The research found that all co-researchers applied the competences they developed—knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours—across the key thematic areas of peace education: inner peace, environmental education, social and development education, intercultural and international education, relationships with others, political engagement, conflict resolution, and human rights. This reflects Scouting's integration of peace education principles into everyday practice. Yet, echoing Anderson & Nesterova (2024), the findings also reveal that young people often struggle to articulate how their actions contribute to peacebuilding. Many participants reported that this research marked the first time they had consciously linked their Scouting experiences to peace. This underscores the need for Scouting to make these connections more explicit, even though programmes such as Messengers of Peace, Dialogue for Peace (World Scout Bureau, 2022), the Scouts of the World Award (World Scout Bureau, 2014), and the Better World Framework already embed peacebuilding opportunities within the Movement.

The literature consistently recognizes youth as essential actors in societal transformation (Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, 2016; Del Felice & Wisler, 2007). The findings align with this perspective, revealing that co-researchers viewed Scouting as a catalyst for civic participation and community action. Their experiences illustrate how non-formal education supports youth agency in peacebuilding—empowering them to act as "conscious and committed young peacebuilders" (Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, 2016). Importantly, the study extends existing research by highlighting voices from Latin America—specifically Colombia, Costa Rica, and Honduras—where Scouting operates within contexts shaped by inequality, democratic engagement, and post-conflict reconciliation. This regional lens enriches global understandings of peace education by foregrounding culturally embedded, context-responsive practices.

Across cases, the co-researchers' narratives revealed consistent patterns of transformation and civic engagement, despite diverse social and economic backgrounds. This commonality can be attributed to Scouting's universal principles and shared educational method. Their accounts support existing research on Scouting's role in fostering lifelong civic participation and community commitment (Polson et al., 2013; Jang et al., 2012), and they confirm that the competences acquired are effectively applied to social, environmental, and leadership initiatives.

The study also resonates with theoretical frameworks of peace and conflict transformation. The co-researchers' experiences illustrate the practical realization of Galtung's (1996) Conflict Triangle and the Peace by Peaceful Conflict Transformation: A TRANSCEND Model (Webel & Galtung, 2007), as Scouts learned to transform negative attitudes and contradictions through empathy, dialogue, and cooperation. Their experiential learning reflected how non-formal education can cultivate the attitudinal and behavioural shifts necessary for sustainable peace.

Through the individual narratives of co-researchers—including Camilo, Andrea, Esteban, Francisco, Hector, Jean, Kate, Maria Luisa, Mario, and Wendy—the study captures the diverse yet interconnected pathways through which peace competences are applied. Camilo's transformation from vengeance to forgiveness illustrates "deep personal transformation" and "commitment to social impact and peacebuilding." Andrea demonstrated "environmental awareness and caring for nature," alongside "democratic participation and community

engagement." Esteban embodied environmental stewardship through "YUNGA programmes" and sustainability projects. Francisco combined "environmental responsibility" with ethical reflection and adaptability. Hector showed that "laughter can also be an antidote," exemplifying empathy through community service. Jean highlighted ethical growth and civic participation through service initiatives like the Telethon. Kate applied peace competences in "leadership in community service," environmental activism, and "advocacy for human rights and personal autonomy." Maria Luisa reflected "intercultural dialogue and appreciation of diversity" and learned "democratic participation and civic responsibility." Mario's journey toward "inner peace and emotional resilience" through community support underscored Scouting's psychosocial dimensions, while Wendy's commitment to "active citizenship and long-term community engagement" illustrated sustained service and environmental responsibility.

These personal accounts collectively show how Scouting's educational system fosters active citizenship, empathy, and moral resilience—key peacebuilding competences applied across individual, community, and environmental domains.

In connecting these findings with the broader literature, this study supports Vallory's (2007) assertion that Scouting contributes to peace by fostering strong personal identity, mature interpersonal relationships, and social justice. It extends Vallory's framework by evidencing how Scouts internalize and apply democratic agency and civic responsibility in daily life. Furthermore, it complements the World Scout Bureau's (2020) claim that Scouting "fosters dialogue and both personal and collective growth by supporting young people in their search for meaning, purpose in life, and inner strength." However, while the Bureau frames these outcomes as guided support, this study finds that young people often take the lead—creating, not merely receiving, peacebuilding opportunities. Inner peace was cultivated not through formal instruction, but experientially—through reflection, adversity, and supportive relationships.

Ultimately, the findings affirm that the competences developed through Scouting are actively and meaningfully applied beyond the Movement. Co-researchers engaged in community service, environmental activism, intercultural dialogue, human rights advocacy, and democratic participation—demonstrating the practical realization of peace education frameworks. Scouting thus functions as a "flexible and strong educational programme" (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006), complementing formal education (YMCA, YWCA, WOSM, WAGGGS, IFRC and IAA, 2000) by offering experiential pathways to develop and apply peace competences. The evidence presented in this study confirms that Scouting contributes to peacebuilding not only by teaching peace but by enabling young people to live it—transforming personal growth into sustained, collective action for a more just and peaceful world.

Implications of the Study

Implications for Individuals

Participation in the study prompted deep reflexive meaning-making among co-researchers, who recognized Scouting's role in shaping ethical identities and peace orientations—echoing Berents' (2018) case for taking youth lived experience seriously. Narratives emphasized belonging and shared humanity (e.g., Rocio), value formation (e.g., Mario's "trustworthy, honourable, and loyal"), and transformative trajectories (e.g., Camilo's shift toward envisioning "a day in Colombia without any violent deaths"). Scouting functioned as an emotionally secure space that normalized dialogue, inclusion, and empathy—supporting trust and resilience through psychologically safe relationships.

Implications for Practice

Findings position Scouting as a non-formal peace education system whose experiential pedagogy (learning by doing, small groups, symbolic framework, progressive self-development, service) translates values into habits. Because many youth did not initially label their learning as "peacebuilding," programmes should more deliberately frame experiences against peace competences and embed structured reflection. The treatment of "obedience" warrants critical reframing toward informed, ethical responsibility (e.g., "rational obedience"), aligning practice with contemporary youth empowerment and democratic, participatory cultures. These insights strengthen the case for recognizing Scouting as a values-based, youth-led complement to formal schooling in peace education.

Implications for Theory

The study provides empirical evidence that long-term, structured NFE like Scouting sustains cumulative development of peace competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes/behaviours), challenging views of NFE as merely supplementary or transient. It answers calls to study peace education "in action" (Seitz, 2004), showing how empathy, dialogue, cooperation, and reflection are practiced in situ—bridging theory and practice consistent with Galtung (1996) and Harris & Morrison (2013). Methodologically, centring youth voices through phenomenology repositions young people as agents and interpreters of peace whose narratives refine and extend peace education theory.

Implications for Social Change

At scale, Scouting's 60-million-member infrastructure in 176 National Scout Organizations[2] advances the Youth, Peace and Security agenda (UNSCR 2250, 2015) by enabling meaningful civic participation and local peacebuilding. The study demonstrates how NFE provides flexible, community-based spaces that cultivate communication, teamwork, empathy, and intercultural understanding—competences vital to peaceful coexistence—and argues for NFE's recognition as a driver of social transformation and sustainable peace.

Limitations

This study presents three principal limitations that help frame the interpretation of its findings. First, as a phenomenological inquiry, the results are deeply embedded in the specific lived experiences of young people participating in non-formal educational programmes of the World Scout Movement in Latin America. As Moreno (2002) notes, phenomenological findings can only be generalized to contexts that share essential characteristics with the original research environment. Thus, while the study offers valuable insights, its conclusions cannot be assumed to apply to all global Scouting settings, and extending the research to other regions would help assess broader transferability.

Second, the researcher's positionality (Sun Yee Yip, 2024; Brown, 2022). Prior professional involvement in the World Scout Movement facilitated access and rapport with participants but may also have shaped elements of data collection and interpretation. To reduce potential bias, the researcher engaged in reflexivity (Goodall, 2000), practiced bracketing to set aside personal assumptions (Finlay, 2014), and used member checking to enhance credibility.

Third, the study encountered limitations related to sampling. Recruitment challenges in Honduras led to uneven representation across countries, limiting the ability to draw context-specific conclusions for that setting. Nonetheless, data saturation was achieved with 11 participants, aligning with phenomenological guidelines (Creswell, 2013). Although gender balance was considered, no meaningful gender-related differences appeared, consistent with the mixed-gender nature of Scout programmes.

[2] https://www.scout.org/scout-movement

Together, these limitations do not undermine the study's value but instead establish appropriate boundaries for interpreting its findings and inform avenues for future research.

Conclusion

This study brought together the central insights of a phenomenological inquiry into the lived experiences of young people in the Scout Movement and their competence development within key thematic areas of peace education frameworks. By employing a phenomenological approach, the research foregrounded participants' perceptions and understandings, emphasizing subjective meaning-making rather than externally imposed interpretations.

The research provides evidence that the Scout Movement makes a significant contribution to peacebuilding through its structured yet flexible non-formal educational environment. Within this framework, young people develop knowledge, skills, and behaviours aligned with peace education principles—including conflict resolution, intercultural understanding, environmental responsibility, and civic engagement. Across all narratives, co-researchers described Scouting as a transformative process that shaped their personal growth, ethical development, and social consciousness. They reported transferring these competences into family, academic, professional, and community domains, illustrating the enduring and transferable nature of Scouting's educational impact.

A recurrent realization among participants was that peace education in Scouting occurs primarily through experiential learning—*learning by doing*. Many recognized for the first time, during reflective engagement, that their long-standing participation in service, teamwork, and leadership activities had constituted peace education in practice. This experiential process highlights Scouting's distinctive pedagogical model wherein values such as cooperation, empathy, and responsibility are not only taught but lived and enacted. Jean's reflection captures this transformative journey:

> "The Scouts adopted me into a way of life, giving me a plan for peace and making me its utmost advocate. I am extremely grateful to the Scouts, and my heart is filled with so many cherished memories and experiences."

In conclusion, the study provides evidence that recognizes Scouting, in essence, as an **active form of peace education** that contributes to peacebuilding. Beyond its immediate educational outcomes, Scouting emerges as a lived form of peace education that fosters personal agency, critical reflection, and a sustained commitment to constructing a more peaceful world.

Finally, the research calls for further studies to extend this understanding beyond the Scout Movement, exploring how non-formal education more broadly can nurture and sustain peace competences across diverse youth contexts and cultural settings.

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This study is dedicated to the young participants who served as co-researchers. Their openness, trust, and willingness to share their experiences enriched this work in profound ways. All are identified by pseudonyms, except Camilo from Colombia, who chose to be named as part of his reconciliation and peace process. Their stories reflect the joys and challenges of Scouting, and this dissertation honours them and the many young people whose lives have been shaped by similar experiences.

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Author details
This research, developed as part of my PhD in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University for Peace (UPEACE), reflects a lifelong commitment to Scouting and to advancing youth development through non-formal education. My professional journey has focused on empowering young people, promoting inclusive leadership, and strengthening volunteer-based organizations.

Between 2004 and 2010, I held key roles at the World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM) in Geneva, where I contributed to global youth programmes, strategic partnerships, and institutional capacity. As Project Officer and later Unit Manager for Adolescents and Young Adults, I led the creation and worldwide expansion of the Scouts of the World Programme, strengthened youth participation mechanisms, and supported key governance bodies. I coordinated major educational events, collaborated with UN partners on global advocacy initiatives, managed international youth programmes, and delivered capacity-building in more than 30 countries. I also played a role in WOSM's early digital transformation and cultivated cross-sector partnerships with UN agencies, NGOs, and private sector stakeholders.

My academic background combines a PhD in Peace and Conflict Studies from UPEACE with a Master's degree in International Negotiation and Policy Making from the Graduate Institute in Geneva, complemented by studies in Childhood and Youth Studies (Open University, UK), nonviolent conflict (Fletcher School), and specialized training in conflict resolution, negotiation, and peacebuilding.

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Ethics Declarations
This study followed rigorous ethical standards to ensure the safety, dignity, and well-being of all co-researchers. Because qualitative research involves sharing personal experiences, participants may feel vulnerable; therefore, data were kept confidential but not anonymous, meaning identities were known to the researcher but protected through pseudonyms. One exception was a participant from Colombia who explicitly requested to be named as part of his

personal reconciliation process; this was approved and documented by the University for Peace Ethics Committee.

The full research proposal—covering methodology, risks, benefits, confidentiality, informed consent, and data use—was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the UPEACE before recruitment began. All co-researchers provided informed consent and were informed of their rights, including the ability to decline participation, pause interviews, or withdraw at any time. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, with clear explanation of privacy protections for online data collection.

Although no harm was expected, participants could review and edit their interview transcripts, and procedures were in place to stop interviews and refer individuals to professional support if distress occurred. Raw data remained accessible only to the researcher, while findings were made public through the dissertation.

All co-researchers participated voluntarily, and the study aimed to amplify young people's voices, offering benefits that outweighed any minimal risks.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Since all interviews were conducted in Spanish, the quotes used in this research were translated from Spanish to English using ChatGPT, and I subsequently proofread them. Additionally, as English is not my mother tongue, I used ChatGPT as a language assistant to proofread and review some parts of this document. This was done in accordance with the UPEACE GenAI Policy of 2024. The use of ChatGPT for text review did not introduce any new content, as stipulated by the UPEACE Policy.

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