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Practices and Challenges of Integrated Functional Adult Education Program in Gamo Zone, Ethiopia

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Abstract Integrated Functional Adult Education Program was less effective in promoting development in Ethiopia compared with the expectation government has placed on it. The purpose of this study was, thus, to investigate its practices and challenges in Gamo Zone. The study employed mixed research method with sequential exploratory design. The quantitative data were collected from 123 school principals and 181 facilitators, and were analyzed via mean, standard deviation and independent samples t-test. The qualitative data, on the other hand, were obtained through interview conducted with four experts and 24 adult learners. The study disclosed that although the program benefited the adult learners significantly in their social, economic, legal and technological needs, its implementation level was impoverished impeded by the practitioners' skill gap, low partner commitment, shortage of resources, less effective operational system and failure to plan effectively. Thus, to revitalize the benefits, its challenges need be addressed through integrated intervention aided by memorandum of understanding to be signed by all parties, close oversight procedure of the zonal government and scholarly endeavors of converting research outputs into community engagement projects to be supported by more collaborators. The best experiences need further be cascaded to other areas preceded by further study.

Index Terms adult, challenge, functional literacy, integrated program, practice

I. Introduction

Although education is a fundamental building block for human development and means of poverty reduction, formal education system alone failed to address the needs of the entire population: [1], [2]. Scholars contend that people who miss the opportunity of formal education, due to different reasons, should be provided with alternatives of accessing education. As shown by [3], in this regard, the contribution of non-formal and informal modes of gaining knowledge besides formal education. The term 'non-formal' education is often used as a substitute of adult education and lifelong learning, and it is offered outside the formal school system to those who could not afford formal education including adult learners who are a country's major work force [4]. Adult education is usually offered to mature people outside the formal system, less expensive and more flexible in terms of time and place, thus, is the best option in fulfilling the demand of basic reading, writing and computing skills to citizens in an organized manner [5].

Scholars also contend that non-formal education contributes to national development and it benefits the individual learners as well. In this regard, [6] stated that adult education leads to satisfaction of the needs of individual learners by providing them with competencies that enable them perform

effectively even in insecure environment. Similarly, other scholars contended that literate adult society significantly contributes to national development and poverty alleviation: [7], [8].

Integrated Functional Adult Education Program (IFAEP) is among the most pertinent forms of non-formal education practiced in many countries including Ethiopia [9]. It is connected to the context of daily life like income generation, health, literacy, numeracy, life skills and problem solving gearing the society towards active involvement in economic, social and political life: [10]–[12]. In cognizant of these facts, the Government of Ethiopian has focused on ensuring literacy by the virtue of IFAEP through developing partnerships essential to sustain adult education program as stipulated in ESDP IV: [13], [14].

However, reports regarding the status of adult education indicated that the program remained inadequate in terms of accessibility and it did not play its role in the national development up to the level it was trusted to contribute [15], [16]. In this regard, scholars contend that IFAEP couldn't be effective mainly due to ineffective operational system. According to [10], the adult education initiatives of the country lack consistency and The National Adult Education Strategy (NAES) lacks a clear framework for stakeholders to effec-

tively collaborate in the provision of the program. Moreover, no study was conducted on the benefits, implementation status and challenges of the implementation of IFAEP in the study area. In the light of the statement of the problem, this study examined how adult learners in the study area used to benefit from IFAEP, the status of implementation of IFAEP and the existing challenges of its implementation. Thus, the study was conducted with the intention of addressing the basic questions related to identification of the implementation status of IFAEP, the major challenges of the implementation of IFAEP and the partners' perception on the benefits of Integrated Functional Adult Education program in the study area.

II. Literature Review

A. The Concept of Adult Education

Education is a process by which people transmit their experiences, new findings and values accumulated over the years [17]. Education comprises learning opportunities for early childhood development, primary and secondary school level studies as well as non-formal, technical-vocational and adult education [18]. Adult education, on the other hand, denotes the entire body of ongoing learning process, formal or otherwise, whereby people develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or professional qualifications to meet their needs and that of their society [19]. It encompasses both formal and non-formal learning, and the spectrum of informal and incidental learning. The concept adult education is used interchangeably with literacy program, adult basic education, lifelong learning and non-formal education [20]. Thus, adult education is education for every individual which contributes to the development of individual and the wider community [21].

Literally, it seems that the primary purpose of adult education is to attain literacy though scholars link its ultimate goal with its functionality. Basic adult literacy skills comprising reading, writing and computing are the foundation skills enabling people to function effectively in today's text mediated knowledge society and to make informed life choices [22]. In practice, however, two different understandings of functional literacy have existed: the first one being functional literacy as reading and writing acquiring at a level of enough competence to be put to use and actually put to productive use, and the second being functional literacy as reading and writing plus knowledge and skills in other fields [11]. The second understanding is a functional education aiming at knowledge, understanding, changes in attitude and motivation of learners for solving different problems, etc. In this regard, [23] stated the importance of two-fold integration. At the community level, the program must integrate basic literacy and life skills.

B. Uses of Integrated Functional Adult Education

Contemporary studies prove that adult education is the key to enter development as education in general is. According to [13], adult education is an essential weapon to address the global challenges such as work force development, educational access, prevention of HIV/AIDS, conflict resolution,

human right and ecological issues. This opinion encompasses economic, social, legal, technological and environmental benefits of adult education.

According to [24], a literate population is a precondition for any nation to become competitive within a global economy. In this regard, [13] stated that adult education run through IFAL program brings about the desired development of a country in a short period of time. Besides, [20] argued that growth would not reduce poverty unless poor people are able to participate in adult education. In this relation, it was confirmed that the farmers who take part in the adult education plan, acquire more benefit contrasted to those individuals who do not partake in adult literacy [25]. Moreover, [26] discovered significant relationship among investments in human capital, economic growth and labor productivity. They concluded that a rise of 1 percent in a country's literacy score relative to the international average is associated with an eventual 2.5 percent relative rise in labor productivity and a 1.5 percent increase in GDP per head.

Another vital benefit of adult literacy was its critical social advantages. According to [21], adult education stabilizes one's educational attainment as it provides constant refinement of knowledge, skill and it plays a supplementary role as it takes over from where the formal school system stops. With respect to this dimension of its benefit, increasing adult literacy rate supports other development goals: children with literate parents stay in schools longer and achieve more [24]. As to [27], adult literacy class graduates were about twice strong to examine their children's school work than the non-literates in Uganda.

In addition, adult education brings health benefits and lower health cost for both individuals and societies [28]. In this regard, [29] stated that literate mothers have better family health practices compared to their counter illiterate mothers. As stated by [30] the impacts of adult basic education in Nicaragua over ten years and discovered the factual critical drop in child mortality among mothers who had participated in the adult literacy program. Moreover, [31] found that 67 percent of educated women interviewed in her study in Nigeria reported that they have utilized family planning strategies in contrast to just 11 percent of uneducated women who said they had utilized some family planning routines, but not all. The previous group was more probable, for instance, to look for therapeutic help for themselves and sick children, receives deterrent health measures like vaccination and knows more about family planning routines: [31], [32].

C. Implementation Status of Integrated Functional Adult Education Program

There are different opportunities for IFAEP implementation in Ethiopia. The commitment made by the Ethiopian Government to meet MDGs, shift of focus towards Integrated functional adult Education Program (IFAEP) to ensure the active participation of the newly literate population, and availability of health and agricultural extension workers in the rural areas of the country are some of the opportunities for the

implementation of IFAEP. Besides, various training manuals were prepared in Amharic, Tigrigna, Oromigna and Somali and collaboration scheme between government, community and NGOs was established to implement the program [33].

Under the federal system of government, education is a shared responsibility of the federal, regional state and the local government structures. The relationship between the federal and regional state governments is not hierarchical. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education has line authority over the Regional Education Bureaus. It has the responsibility of initiating policy matters and promulgating laws to be implemented by sector offices in the regions. According to [13], Education and Training Policy had given recognition to non-formal education; however, the subsequent five - year Education Sector Development Programs, started in 1997, to meet the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals by 2015 paid less attention to adult education except the recent Education Sector Development Program, that is ESDP IV [2]. Consequently, the implementation of IFAEP remained low; and, thus, it hardly played its role in the national development [16].

D. Challenges of the Implementation of Integrated Functional Adult Education

There are a number of challenges in implementing functional adult education program in Ethiopia. Lack of motivation among adults to attend literacy program, poverty in deprived and drought prone areas, life style of communities in pastoral area, inadequate supervisory service and shortage of budget and logistic are among the challenges of implementation of IFAEP [34]. Studies revealed that some of the challenges are operational and others related with facilities, trainees, partners and facilitators. Unlike children, adult learners have much accumulated experiences, skills and knowledge. Therefore, the facilitation of adult learning differs from teaching children. The adult program teachers require certain characteristics like unique knowledge of the educational process, philosophy, attitudes and personal skills in order to help adults learn [35]. Adult learners may not be motivated by traditional teaching methods which is boring and the learning process depends on the talk of the teacher while the learner becomes a passive listener. Modern teaching methods comprising problem solving, case studies, simulation, dramatization, etc. need be utilized to stimulate learning in the adults [35].

The curriculum of functional adult literacy contains reading, writing and numeracy, on one hand side and a wide range of life skills and non-formal need-based skills training on the other. Basic literacy and livelihood skills are taught interdependently. Integration of basic literacy and life skills in daily learning requires special preparation of materials and lessons. The curriculum should be designed according to learners' needs and priorities. However, studies indicated that adequacy of organization of the content in accordance with the learners' priorities, and integration of basic literacy and life skills has not been discovered [10].

Adult learning places vary depending on the local conditions and teaching material can be prepared from local material at low costs [36]. The teaching places can be buildings of churches or mosques, village halls, formal school buildings or any other convenient place. Although, it is essential to begin the provision of adult education in these centers, it seems reasonable to equip them with adequate facilities like benches, desks, toilet, teaching learning materials, etc. in order to improve the education in those centers. Instructional materials are used to make learning experience more tangible, practical and active thereby giving life to the lesson.

The way by which facilitators are recruited may differ from place to place. However, [5] states, most of the facilitators are para-professional including part time and volunteers recruited from the localities. In the Educational Sector Development Program (ESDP), the government committed itself to link the training of non-formal education facilitators with existing regional teacher education college. Yet there is currently no national framework for the training of IFAE trainers. Monitoring and evaluation, which are the responsibilities of all partners, are important tools to keep up the progress and effectiveness of the program. Though the ESDP document of MoE stresses the importance of monitoring for academic performance, in increasing access and internal efficiency, it was practiced inadequately [37].

III. Methodology

A. Design and Method

Mixed research method with sequential exploratory design was employed to conduct this study. Sequential exploratory design was preferred so as it would enable the investigators to explore the existing situations and the relationship existing between the status of implementation of Integrated Functional Adult Education Program and its determinants [38]. In other words, sequential exploratory design was employed so that the qualitative data obtained through interview would enable the investigators to stress the focus area on the existing problems during instrument construction and quantitative data collection.

B. Sampling Technique

The study areas and participants of the quantitative data were selected using simple random sampling technique to provide equal chance of being selected to every member of the population, whereas the interviewees for qualitative data were selected purposively in order to include the best informants. The study area comprised 14 woredas among which four sample woredas were selected randomly. Next, four adult education experts and 24 adult learners were purposively selected as interviewees, and 304 respondents composed of 123 school principals and 181 IFAEP facilitators were selected via simple random sampling technique to fill questionnaire.

C. Methods of Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation among descriptive statistics and independent sample

t-test among inferential statistics. On the other hand, the qualitative data were treated thematically in integration with the quantitative data. Finally, the findings discovered through primary data and the primary data were discussed in the categories of their respective theme.

IV. Result

A. Benefits of Integrated Functional Adult Education Program

The weighted mean values of the perceptions of the principals and that of the facilitators were 3.22, 3.56, 3.34, 2.86, 2.73 and 3.16 for economic, social, legal, technological, environmental, and for the overall benefits of Integrated Functional Adult Education Program respectively (Depicted in Table 1). In this regard, there was no statistically significant mean difference between the perceptions of the two groups of respondents except for legal benefits. The qualitative data obtained through interview confirmed that the community members who attended Integrated Functional Adult Education Program experience better living standard, social interaction, better utilize mobile phones and describe environmental concerns including the effect of mismanagement of forest on the trend of rain fall. Thus, the integration of the quantitative and that of the qualitative data revealed that Integrated Functional Adult Education Program had moderate legal, economic & technological benefits and high social benefits to adult learners in the study area as was depicted in Table 1.

B. Implementation Status of IFAEP

As is shown in Table 2, the weighted mean values of the perceptions of the principals and that of the facilitators were 3.13, 2.44, 2.79, 2.36, 2.44 and 2.63 for the implementation status of concerns related with facilitators, adult learners, supervisory system, resource availability, stakeholders' engagement and overall implementation status of Integrated Functional Adult Education Program respectively. The result of the independent samples t-test indicated that there was no statistically significant mean difference between the perceptions of the two groups of respondents for the concerns related with resource availability and stakeholders' engagement, and there was statistically significant mean difference between the two groups of respondents for the concerns of facilitators, adult learners and supervisory system. In this regard, the interview conducted with the adult education experts and that of adult learners confirmed that the integration of different sectors, as stakeholders, in stressing on the program was not satisfactory. They further indicated that coordination of the stakeholders in terms of contributing professional support to the adult learners and supervisory procedures was not well established. Thus, the implementation of Integrated Functional Adult Education Program was not effective in the study area.

C. Challenges of IFAEP

Impoverished implementation status of Integrated Functional Adult Education Program was accounted for by gaps in plan-

ning, practitioners' skill, resource supply, partners' commitment and operational system. As is depicted in Table 3, the weighted mean values of the perceptions of the principals and that of the facilitators were 4.03, 3.35, 3.63, 2.93 and 4.08 for gaps in practitioners' skill, partners' commitment, resource supply, operational system and in planning effectiveness respectively. This was confirmed by the interview conduct with the adult learners and that of adult education experts. In general, the overall effect of the factors affecting the implementation of Integrated Functional Adult Education Program was high with the weighted mean value of 3.60 in the study area.

V. Discussion

In this section, all data obtained via different approaches and analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods were brought together in order to harmonize and coalesce the findings. Data secured through literature review, questionnaire and interview regarding the benefits, implementation status and challenges of Integrated Functional Adult Education were combined for discussion.

The quantitative data obtained through questionnaire revealed that Integrated Functional Adult Education had high social benefits to adult learners in the study area. Besides, the interview result coincided with the quantitative result in that the community members who went IFAE centers were effective in social interaction. This was also in line with the findings of some previous studies. According to [24], children with literate parents stay in schools longer and achieve more and each extra year of education for mothers is also associated with a significant decline in infant mortality and improved child health. Some other scholars are also in favor of the opinion that adult education brings health benefits [28], [29], [32], utilization of family planning strategies (Egbo, 2000) and reduction of child mortality [30].

The integration of the quantitative and that of the qualitative data revealed that IFAEP had moderate economic, legal & technological benefits. The interview result pointed out that IFAEP was recognized for benefiting better utilization of mobile phones and recognize environmental concerns including the effect of mismanagement of forest on agricultural practices. A number of studies was found to be in favor of this opinion. According to [13], IFAEP program brings about the desired development of a country in a short period of time and to [24], a literate population makes a nation competitive within a global economy. Besides, [20] argued that poverty would never be reduced significantly unless poor people are actively participated in production practices equipped with the skills gained via adult education. Moreover, [26] discovered significant relationship among investments in human capital, economic growth and labor productivity.

The analysis result of both the quantitative and qualitative data indicated that the implementation status of IFAEP was inadequate. The weighted mean values of the respondents' perceptions concerning each of the dimensions including the overall mean value fell within the range of low level of status,

No	Items	Principal		Facilitator		WM	T	Df	Sig
		X	SD	X	SD				
1	Economic Benefit	2.89	.377	3.55	.452	3.22	-13.52	302	.000
2	Social Benefit	3.34	.456	3.78	.371	3.56	-9.39	302	.000
3	Legal - Political Benefit	3.29	.407	3.38	.430	3.34	-1.84	302	.067
4	Technological Benefit	2.70	.778	3.02	.925	2.86	-3.18	302	.002
5	Environmental Benefit	2.61	.735	2.85	.679	2.73	-2.92	302	.004
	Overall Benefit	2.97	-	3.32	-	3.16	-	-	-

Key: Benefit is poor if $x < 2.75$, moderate if $2.75 < x < 3.50$, & high if $x > 3.50$; $p > 0.05$ no significant mean difference, $p < 0.05$ significant mean

Table 1: Benefits of IFAEP gained by adult learners

No	Items	Principal		Facilitator		WM	T	Df	Sig
		X	SD	X	SD				
1	Facilitators' Concerns	3.31	.547	2.94	.570	3.13	5.556	302	.000
2	Adult Learners' Concerns	2.68	.559	2.19	.556	2.44	7.515	302	.000
3	Supervisory support system	2.71	.404	2.88	.554	2.79	-3.091	302	.002
4	Resource Availability	2.43	.821	2.28	.903	2.36	1.466	302	.144
5	Stakeholders' Engagement	2.50	.987	2.37	1.09	2.44	1.095	302	.275
	Overall Implementation Status	2.73	-	2.53	-	2.63	-	-	-

Key: Status is low if $x < 2.75$, moderate if $2.75 < x < 3.50$, & high if $x > 3.50$; $p > 0.05$ no significant mean difference, $p < 0.05$ significant mean

Table 2: Implementation status of IFAEP

No	Items	Principal		Facilitator		WM	T	Df	Sig
		X	SD	X	SD				
1	Skill gap	4.00	.627	4.06	.679	4.03	-.753	302	.452
2	Commitment gap	3.68	.445	3.01	.398	3.35	13.70	302	.000
3	Resource gap	3.55	.610	3.71	.681	3.63	-2.093	302	.037
4	Operational system gap	3.15	.947	2.70	1.03	2.93	3.855	302	.000
5	Planning gap	4.27	.736	3.88	.680	4.08	4.742	302	.000
	Overall challenge	3.73	-	3.47	-	3.60	-	-	-

Key: Low if $x < 2.75$, moderate if $2.75 < x < 3.50$, & high if $x > 3.50$; $p > 0.05$ no significant mean difference, $p < 0.05$ significant mean

Table 3: Major challenges of the implementation of IFAEP

which is below 2.75, except for facilitation and supervisory system of IFAEP. This result was supported by some previous studies. According to [13], unlike the Education and Training Policy of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the subsequent Education Sector Development Programs paid less attention to adult education except ESDP IV. Consequently, the implementation of IFAEP was inadequate; and, thus, it did not play significant role in promoting national development [16].

The study revealed that the practitioners' skill gap, low partners' commitment, inadequacy of resources, poor operational system and failure of effective planning were major challenges of the implementation of IFAEP in the study area. The weighted mean value of the respondents' perceptions for each of these variables was high except for operational system, which fell within the range of moderate. In general, the overall effect of the factors affecting the implementation of IFAEP was high with the weighted mean value of 3.60 in the study area. The factors enumerated in this study were also declared as challenges of IFAEP in previous studies. Concerning gaps in practitioners' skills, some scholars stated that adult program teachers require skills unique to address the characteristics of the adult learners introducing modern teaching approach which stimulates the adult learners for engagement [35]. Regarding resource availability, [5] indicated that shortage of budget and logistics were among the challenges of implementation of IFAEP. With respect to supervisory system, [34]

indicated that monitoring which was used as a tool to keep up the progress of the program, was not effective as perceived at national level.

VI. Conclusion

The study indicated that Integrated Functional Adult Education Program had high contribution to the learners' daily life thereby improving their skills in social, economic, legal and technological perspectives, and yet, its implementation status was impoverished in the study area. From this, it was deduced that most of the adults those who miss the opportunity of attending Integrated Functional Adult Education Program were losing social, economic, legal and technological benefits due to failure of effective implementation of Integrated Functional Adult Education Program. The study also brought forth that effective implementation of Integrated Functional Adult Education Program was impeded by low partners' commitment, insufficient resource supply, ineffective operational system, poor planning and gaps in the facilitators' skill. In cognizant of the past & present scholarly findings and the recognition of the Government of Ethiopia to the importance of Integrated Functional Adult Education Program, immediate intervention is required to reverse the situation. Therefore, first and foremost, all the stakeholders need come together and set a memorandum of understanding to undertake their respective responsibilities specified in the document. Then, it needs coordinated follow up system overseen by the zonal govern-

ment of the study area. Moreover, collaborators and higher education institutions need involve in the implementation of Integrated Functional Adult Education Program through converting research outputs into community engagement projects inviting more stakeholders to work together. Further studies are of great importance to cascade the best implementation mechanisms to other areas.

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