

Stakeholders' Participation in Adult Education Policy Document Formulation and Implementation in Ethiopia

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess stakeholders' participation on adult education policy document formulation and implementation in Ethiopia. Qualitative method was used for this study. As a result, qualitative data was collected by using interview and document analysis. Qualitative data, including respondents' views and findings from document analysis, were presented by describing the responses in phrases. The finding of this study reveals that there are different categories of stakeholders are involved in implementing adult education program in the country. In Ethiopia, although significant efforts have been made by the government and NGOs, illiteracy rates remain high, and the implementation of related programs is still inadequate. This situation implies that there is no established system that coordinates stakeholders' effort and resources towards the effective implementation of adult education program. This brings about a duplication of efforts and wastage of resources. Therefore, it is recommended that adult education centers and district education offices, in collaboration with other stakeholders such as district agriculture and rural development offices and district health offices, should mobilize the community to promote adult education programs.

Keywords: Stakeholders, participation, policy documents, implementation

Introduction

Basic education, such as literacy, broadens people's perspective and leads learners more open towards change, innovative concepts and approaches. It enables individuals to adopt new production techniques and methods, thereby improving their income (McCaffery *et al.*, 2007). Literacy and basic education prepare individuals to accept changes in various aspects of their lives, including lifestyle, production methods, and health practices. These tools allow them to utilize new technologies and benefit from advancements.

Functional literacy programs aim beyond simply teaching adults how to read and write but also to enhance their productivity. Through work-focused literacy initiatives, these programs strive to impact participants' overall lives and transform their social, economic, and

value systems (Barton, 2007). Recently, Kebede (2024) emphasized the significance of literacy programs, noting that such initiatives empower participants by enhancing their self-confidence and encouraging more outgoing behaviors. Acquiring skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic is seen as a stepping stone toward achieving broader goals. The literacy program successfully reduced dropout rates among adult learners; improved their self-esteem, and motivated participants to pursue better living conditions. Learning becomes more appealing to adults when the programs are relevant to their lives; involve practical problem-solving, and lead to improvements in their socioeconomic status.

However, in Ethiopia, previous adult education (AE) programs have been inconsistent, poorly coordinated, and failed to bring meaningful change to participants' lives (MoE, 2008). Ethiopia faces several challenges in delivering

adult education programs, including a high dropout rate, cultural barriers, population mobility, heavy workloads especially for women, poor-quality facilitators, lack of incentives for educators, and limited interest from beneficiaries, as outlined in the National Adult Education Strategy (MoE, 2008). Additionally, the lack of collaboration and commitment from key stakeholders remains a significant obstacle to the success of adult education programs in the country.

Despite Ethiopia have been implemented adult education programs since the 1890s recognizing literacy and basic education as tools for development and modernization, the illiteracy rate in the country remains alarmingly high (Mammo and Kebede, 2005). Supporting this view, UNESCO (2006) reports that 58.5% of the population aged 15 and older is illiterate, placing Ethiopia among the lowest in literacy rates across Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, the UNESCO (2019) report revealed that Sub-Saharan Africa has one of the lowest adult literacy rates in the world, with a 61% literacy rate.

The concept of adult education is widely considered as broad and involves several sectors. However, it was only in 2005 that the Ministry of Education called for active involvement, ownership and commitment of communities, NGOs and civil societies. In Education Sector Development Program (ESDP III), in addition to the regions which play active role in organizing the program and preparing materials in the mother tongue, NGOs which work on adult literacy have also been welcomed for the better expansion, local responsiveness and relevance of the program (MoE, 2005).

The National Adult Education Strategy (MoE, 2008) further emphasized the importance of collaboration and coordination across different sectors involved in education and related fields to strengthen the program. Similarly, in ESDP IV, the Ministry of Education reiterated its commitment to strengthening partnerships with the government, private sector, and NGOs for better provision of Integrated Functional Adult Literacy (IFAL) (MoE, 2010b). In response to

this, the Ministry of Education, together with five other ministries, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to make the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) program more integrated (MoE, 2010:38).

The Master Plan for Adult Education also highlighted the multidisciplinary nature of adult education, which requires the involvement of various sectors. It stated that functional adult education builds on indigenous knowledge and seeks to link literacy skills to livelihoods and skills training in areas such as agriculture (including off-farm activities), health, civic education, and cultural education. This approach necessitates collaboration among governmental and non-governmental service providers across different settings, ensuring that literacy skills are meaningful and applicable to learners' lives (MoE, 2011b).

According to Genet (2014), the Ministry of Education, along with other government ministries, recognized the active role of institutions such as universities, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) centers, and NGOs, to meaningful delivery of IFAL. However, previous trends show that most health extension workers and development agents do not perceive IFAL as their responsibility, as the roles of the signing ministries are not adequately cascaded to the grassroots level for integrated program implementation.

In addition to the challenges already mentioned, several studies on stakeholder participation in adult education programs have highlighted significant obstacles to their successful implementation. For instance, Habtamu *et al* (2021) identified three major challenges hindering stakeholder involvement in the Integrated Functional Adult Education Program (IFAEP). These challenges include limited collaboration among stakeholders in developing a comprehensive plan for the program and inadequate cooperation in providing the necessary resources for its execution. Similarly, Anjulo *et al.* (2017) pointed out that poor coordination between board members and technical committees severely affects the effectiveness of adult

education initiatives. Abate and Adamu (2021) echoed these concerns, noting that the implementation of IFAL programs has faced significant barriers due to insufficient cooperation among key stakeholders, particularly in areas such as coordination, communication, and networking.

As clearly highlighted in various policy documents and research findings, one of the major challenges in the adult education sector is the low level of stakeholder participation in program implementation. This issue forms the core rationale upon which the current study is based.

Rationale

As mentioned earlier, numerous investigations at national and international levels have explored the role of stakeholders in adult education programs. For example, a study by Samuel *et al* (2022) titled “Stakeholders’ Participation in Adult Education Programme Development in Ethiopia.” Their findings indicated that stakeholders generally have a favorable perception of collaboration and recognize the program’s contributions to sectoral and national development. Despite this, the study also highlighted that stakeholders are only minimally involved in crucial aspects of program execution, such as management, awareness campaigns, community engagement, budgeting, training, and monitoring and evaluation.

In addition, in 2021 study conducted by Getnet and Yirga, titled “Factors Affecting Inter sectoral Collaboration in the Provision of Adult Education in Ethiopia,” the researchers identified several key challenges to effective collaboration between sectors. These included weak political will, unclear responsibilities, poor communication strategies, and a shortage of financial and human resources.

Lastly, study by Abdullah (2024) titled “Active Citizenship and Community Engagement in Adult Education” emphasized the value of forming strong partnerships with local community groups, NGOs, and civil society organizations. These alliances enable adult

education programs to better meet local needs by supporting joint projects, sharing resources, and creating networking opportunities. These collaborations also provide learners with opportunities to apply their education directly in community service and civic involvement.

All the studies mentioned above were not focus on stakeholders’ participation on policy and strategy related issues more specifically their participation in the development and execution of policy in which the researcher consider as one of the major challenge for the existence of high illiteracy rate and poor management of the program. Consequently, these conditions motivated researcher to investigate the extent of stakeholders engagement in the development and execution of adult education strategy materials in the country. Hence, the study designed to seek answer for the following basic questions.

1. How do adult education stakeholders participate in the development and execution of adult education policy and strategy documents?
2. To what extent are stakeholders committed to the execution of adult education policy and strategy documents?
3. Are stakeholders given a supportive environment to take part in adult education policy documents formulation and execution?

Methodology

The principal aim of the study was to critically examine the extent and nature of stakeholders’ engagement in development and execution of adult education policy and strategy documents in Ethiopia. To achieve this, the researcher adopted a qualitative research design which enabled an in-depth exploration of the perspectives and interpretation of key informants regarding the development and execution of adult education policy and strategy documents in Ethiopia. In this research, the researcher applied a process that involved emergent questions or procedures, where data is typically collected in the participants’ setting, and data analysis inductively builds from specific to general, and

the researcher provided interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014). To do so, the researcher closely interacted with adult education officials and experts at various positions to explore their interpretation of stakeholders involvement in formulation and implementation of adult education policy documents in the country. Qualitative research is emergent by definition since “what will be learned at a site is always dependent on the interaction between investigator and context which cannot be fully predictable. In this sense, it is believed that qualitative design encourages openness and learning, proponents believe that emergent research designs are more likely to produce interesting data that are generative of insight (Wiedner and Ansari, 2018).

Accordingly, primary data was collected from sub cities/zones and district adult education officials and experts, adult education centre coordinators and facilitators from Addis Ababa City Administration and Oromia regional state through structured interview. Secondary data was secured from adult education strategy and policy documents found at sub city, district and centre level in Addis Ababa City Administration and from region, zone, district and centre level at Oromia Region. Some of these documents were education and training policy, national adult education strategy, Minimum Learning Competencies (MLC) in adult education, adult education Program Implementation Guideline, adult education Curriculum Framework, Master Plan for Adult Education in Ethiopia, adult education path way, adult education Memorandum of Understanding Manual, adult education Benchmarks, adult education Supervision Manual, Teaching Learning Materials Development Manual, education annual abstracts, adult education sector reports, ESDP documents and GTP documents were analyzed. Moreover, to triangulate the accuracy of the information and to substantiate the data literatures pertinent to the study were reviewed.

To secure the necessary data for the study, two zones (West Shoa and South West Shoa) from Oromia and three sub cities (Lideta, Yeka and Bole) from Addis Ababa, a total of 5 zones from the two regions, three districts

from each of the five zones (15 districts) and one adult learning centre from each district (15 centers) were selected purposively based on their performance on the implementation of adult education programs. In addition to this, the federal ministry of education was also selected by using the same sampling technique. From these two regions, samples were drawn from various position of the education system according to their involvement in the implementation of adult education program in their respective region, zone, district and center. Accordingly, 6 adult education officials from federal and regional levels, 20 experts from the region, zone and district levels, and 20 adult education facilitators at center level were drawn by applying purposive sampling for all cases.

Data Gathering Instruments

In order to secure relevant and necessary data for the study, two potential data gathering tools were used: interview and document analysis. Interview was applied for all respondents at all levels federal, region, zonal, sub city, district and centre adult education officials, experts and supervisors and adult education centre coordinators and facilitators. The interview provides flexibility to the interviewers to secure views, perception, understandings, experiences of the interviewees in the areas of adult education policy formulation and implementation. In order to substantiate the information gathered through interview, document analysis was also used as data gathering tool. By focusing on the content, context, and meaning within documents, researcher can better understand complex social phenomena.

Population and Sampling

Oromia Regional State and Addis Ababa City Administration were purposively considered for the study. Oromia, the largest region in the country (CSA, 2011), was chosen to represent other regions, while Addis Ababa was selected to reflect the situation of adult education programs in urban areas. From

these two regions, 2 zones in Oromia and 3 sub-cities in Addis Ababa were included. Using purposive sampling technique 20 adult learning centers and 15 districts were deliberately selected for the study. The study involved a total of 46 participants, including 20 facilitators, 20 experts and 6 officials.

Results and Discussions

Types of stakeholders to be participated:

The National adult education strategy emphasised the active involvement and coordination among those sectors working to strengthen the adult education programs in Ethiopia (MoE, 2008). This strategy emphasizes that to guarantee quality in curriculum development, various stakeholders must be involved. The adult education implementation guideline further outlines the various stakeholders who should be involved in the curriculum development of adult education programs. These stakeholders include personnel from education, agriculture, labour and social affairs, NGOs, local administrative officials, and community leaders. This idea is directly aligned with the findings of Samuel (2022) and Deriba. *et al* (2022) who emphasize that Ministries of Education, along with regional and local education offices and relevant government departments, play a critical role in policy formulation and implementation.

Furthermore, the strategy identifies the stakeholders responsible for monitoring and provide support supervision in adult education programs. These stakeholders encompasses facilitators, supervisors, community representatives, political leaders, NGOs, civil society organizations, program leaders, coordinators, development workers and adult learners themselves.

Adult education programs are community-centered initiatives that requires careful planning, implementation and evaluation with active involvement from the community. The primary aim of the programs is to enhance the wellbeing and quality of life within the community. In summary, the involvement of the key stakeholders as outlined in the national

adult education strategy, especially, the local community is significantly limited in nearly all aspects of the implementing adult education programs. Restricting the involvement of the local community, undermines the overall effectiveness of the programs.

In line with the ideas set out in the adult education national strategy and implementation guideline, the master plan for the adult education program also recognizes the leading role of the Ministry of Education, and recognizes that adult education is not the responsibility of any a single group. Government ministries and institutions, universities, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), NGOs and the private sector all have a significant role to play (MoE, 2008).

Concerning stakeholders' engagement in the implementation of adult education program, respondents across various levels in both regions consistently indicated that the involvement of other sectors to the implementation of adult education remains minimal. In supporting this idea, a zonal experts of the Oromia Regional State noted that,

“Adult education was intended to be executed by the joint efforts of different sectors. Some of these are: education, agricultural and rural development, health, gender and other development related sectors; however, these sectors do not consider adult education program as part of their duty and responsibility. They have left the program solely to the education sector. Thus, in practice, the programme is run by education sector at all levels of the structure.”

Dimensions of stakeholders' involvement:

In response to the enquiries concerning various 'aspects of stakeholders' engagement, the respondents comprising officials and experts consistently acknowledged that multiple entities are actively engaged in the execution of adult education programs. Gboku and Lekoko (2007) delineate stakeholders participation in to several key modalities, including representational participation,

information sharing, consultation, joint decision-making, acting together and building independent community initiatives.

The Adult education implementation guideline emphasizes the necessity for the Ministry of Education, relevant ministries, and other government institutions prioritize the enhancement of collaboration and networking with NGOs, and sector specific associations and development partners in the area. This is because they have expertise in their different areas of specialisation (MoE, 2011). The guideline further discusses some of the areas of collaboration for these organisations and associations: utilisation of existing structures, research and documentation exchange, provision of technical support in specialised areas of training, resource mobilisation, training materials development and production, lobbying and advocacy, curriculum development and monitoring and evaluation among others (MoE, 2011).

Despite the involvement of numerous stakeholders in the implementation of adult education programs across the country, the contribution have not led to significant improvement to the nation's low literacy rates. This is due to lack of organized and coordinated participation, as observed both from the preceding the discussion and the researcher's personal experience.

Regarding community as key as stakeholders, the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2008) emphasizes that stakeholders' participation should prioritize placing the community at the core of the entire process. Similarly, the Oromia Education Bureau (OEB, 2008) underscores the critical role of the community plays in ensuring the success of the adult education programs.

The document identifies the following key activities as requiring the highest level of community participation:

"selecting and preparing education program centers, building facilitators' accommodation and reading rooms up on their own choices, facilitating all the necessary conditions,

selecting curriculum content based on their own needs and interests, preparing an educational plan, thoroughly participating in the program, monitoring and evaluating the process, participating in learning and those who are educated in teaching; providing especial assistance for women and girls to learn, participating in the recruitment and evaluation of facilitators, providing the necessary facilities and assistance for coordinators, teachers and supervisors, mobilized to monitor adult non-formal education program and taking part in contributions or support activities necessary to strengthen adult non-formal programs, and following up and evaluating adult non-formal programs."

Areas of participation should be in resource allocation, regulatory frameworks, curriculum development and monitoring and evaluation.

Resource mobilization: The information gathered through interviews with adult education officials and implementers showed that the responsibility of resource mobilization should not rest exclusively with the government. It should be a shared responsibility among the MoE (ministry of education), REBs (regional education bureaus), local communities, workers, non-governmental organisation, private organisations, associations and individuals. The respondents also forwarded that stakeholders should have to actively participate in the area of resource mobilisation for the adult education program. Some of the ways that need to be applied by program stakeholders were:

"preparing a lottery for fund raising, project proposal writing, taxation (establishing a licence for adult education), regular budget provision by central, regional and district governments; community and learners' contributions and grants and donations from NGOs and private organisations."

Implementation of policy documents: adult education is widely recognized as multifaceted issue that necessitates the involvement of multiple sectors. Nevertheless, it was not until 2005 that the Ethiopian Ministry of Education

formally advocated the active engagement, ownership and commitment of local communities, NGOs, and civil society actors in adult education agenda. In ESDP-III, in addition to the regions which play an active role in organizing the program and preparing materials in the mother tongue, NGOs which work on adult education have also been welcomed for the expansion, better local responsiveness and relevance of the program (Genet, 2014).

The National adult education strategy (MoE, 2008) also re-emphasized the active involvement and coordination among those sectors working on education and others for strengthening the program. Similarly, in Education Sector Development Program (ESDP IV), the Ministry of Education again showed interest in strengthening its partnership with government, the private sector and NGOs for better provision of adult education. Prompted by this, as indicated above, the Ministry of Education together with five other ministries signed Memorandum of understanding (MoU) to make adult education program more integrated (MoE, 2010). In the same way, in the master plan for adult education, it was stated that the multidisciplinary nature of adult education necessitated the inclusion of various sectors in its provision (MoE, 2010). It reads:

“Functional adult education builds on indigenous knowledge and seeks to link writing, reading and numeracy skills to livelihoods and skills training in areas such as agriculture (including off-farm activities), health, civic, cultural education, etc. Such an approach requires delivery by various governmental and non-governmental service providers in multiple settings and also ensures that literacy skills development is meaningful to the learners”.

The Ministry of Education, in addition to other government ministries, recognized the active role institutions, universities, TVETs, NGOs and the private sector play in the effective provision of the adult education program. However, the practice and experience of Ethiopian shows that most health extension workers and development agents do not regard

adult education as their responsibility as the signing ministries' roles are not cascaded to the grass roots level for the integrated implementation of the program.

More specifically, according to Knowles (1980), as agents of change, adult educators' responsibilities extend far beyond the routine scheduling of activities.

“Their responsibilities entail, rather, the involvement of clients in deep analysis of higher aspirations and the changes required to achieve them, the diagnosis of obstacles that hinder the achievement of these changes and the planning of an effective strategy for accomplishing the desired results. Their parts in this process is that of helper, guide, encourager, consultant, not that of transmitter, disciplinarian, judge, and authority.”

Similarly, the interviewees (facilitators) were asked to evaluate the commitment of stakeholders towards adult education program implementation. Majority of the respondents argued that there is very low commitment among the stakeholders towards adult education program implementation. Concerning this issue, the response of one facilitator from Addis Ababa presented as follows:

“... In truly speaking, I am working in adult education sector until I can secure another job. Because at this position the monthly salary paid for me is about 1200 Ethiopian Birr (equivalent to 40 USD). With this amount of money, it is difficult to lead an independent life. As a result, I am forced to live with my family to get their assistance. In addition to this, there is no chance to continue and upgrade my education in the same field. The only chance that I have is to shift my career to formal education and join teacher training colleges to teach children. Because of these reasons, I am not committed to work in this sector.”

In support of this idea, the study conducted by Deriba, *et al* (2022) revealed that lack of training and insufficient payment are rated as high challenges to the implementation of an adult education program.

The existence of conducive environment for stakeholders' Participation:

The discussion made with interviewees at all levels of this study revealed that there is no well-defined structure to lead adult education program in the country. Concerning this problem, the respondents argued that the planned institutional system, including the national adult education board and technical committee were not organized well- which resulted in continued fragmentation and poor implementation status of adult education program. This situation may negatively affect the implementation of adult education program in the country. In this regard, one of the officials at Ministry of Education said that:

"Currently the implementation status of the program is not planned well; there is loose coordination among implementers and stakeholders; low commitment from implementers, stakeholders and political leaders' side to run the program."

Consequently, boards and technical committees at all levels have not functioned effectively, primarily due to absence of dedicated professionals to lead and implement the program. As a result, many adult learning centers have been deprived of the necessary technical support.

Regarding the existence of conducive condition for the stakeholders to participate in adult education program, the officials at federal level appreciated the presence of national adult education strategy and more than 10 working policy documents can be considered as a conducive environment for the stakeholders to participate in the program. However, they commented that the existing structure of the adult education sector is not functioning properly, because the program is run by a committee (board) at all levels of the government political structure where there is no accountability for the failure or success of the program. In practice, as stated by one of the respondents from Oromia, read as:

"The coordination among sector ministries in the horizontal relationship is weak and the

vertical relationship is limited only within the education sector."

The absence of a well-established and systematic coordination framework has resulted in the fragmentation of stakeholders' efforts and resources, thereby undermining the effective implementation of adult education program. This also brings about duplication of efforts and wastage of scarce resources in the implementation process. For instance, according a higher official from Ministry of education stated that

"...the adult education board established at federal level had not met for the last two years". Some of the contributing factors, according to the same interviewee, were *"lack of commitment, absence of clear structure that enabled the stakeholders to participate in adult education program, the absence of clear guidelines and lack of accountability mechanisms for the stakeholders on how to participate in the program."*

From the discussion the researcher concludes that the mere existence of guidelines, manuals, rules and regulations alone is insufficient to achieve the intended outcome of adult education programs. In addition to these system documents, equally important is the presence of well-established organizational structure, responsive and need based approach and active participation and commitment of stakeholders are mandatory. In addition, the involvement of local communities, civil society, and learners in policy design and implementation has paramount importance. Further the existence of feedback mechanisms and responsiveness to needs of the learners is equally important.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The finding of the study reveal that various categories of stakeholders are involved in the implementation of adult education program in the country. Despite considerable efforts by both government and NGOs, illiteracy rates remain high and overall implementation of the program is sub-optimal. This situation implies the absence of well-established coordination mechanism to align stakeholders' effort and

resources towards the effective implementation of adult education program. This brings about a duplication of efforts and wastage of resources.

It is therefore recommended that adult learning centers and district education offices, in collaboration with other key stakeholders like agriculture, and health offices should mobilize the community and promote adult education programs. Additionally, communication channels (medias) and community-based structures including public meetings, conferences, forums community-based social support (*idirs*), community-based financial support (*ikubs*), as well as religious institution like churches and mosques, should be leveraged to enhance outreach efforts and effectively disseminate relevant information to all stakeholders.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflict of interest associated with the publication of this study.

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