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## The Practices of Integrated Functional Adult Literacy Program in Ethiopia: The Case of Oromia

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### **Abstract:**

*Integrated Functional Adult Literacy (IFAL) program is being implemented at national level in Ethiopia for it has been regarded as an integral part of development endeavor of the country since 2008. IFAL program is new in its kind in that government tried to bring different stakeholders like education, health, agricultural sectors and many others who are engaged in building the capacity of adults. A study was carried out to look at the existing practices in four zones of Oromia Regional State so as to find out lesson that can be learned and the challenges the program encountered. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods and conducted based on the information obtained from 180 respondents. The objective is to provide an in-depth exploration and description of IFAL practice evident in Oromia region (strengths and weaknesses) so as to show the direction on how to satisfy the learning needs of adults. The study confirmed that sectors of agriculture, health, education and volunteers were the main actors in the implementation of IFAL program which would have been considered as the strength. But their contribution was hampered by major factors such as lack of reward package, poor rapport between different sectors and problem related with issue of unity of command. Participation in the IFAL program was not considered as additional task that deserve some kind of financial and other forms of reward. The rapport between stakeholders who are engaged in IFAL program was not up to the requirement. The study also revealed that participants of the IFAL implicitly were expected to report to two bosses: for their line managers and coordinator of the IFAL program.*

**Keywords:** Adult education, facilitators, integrated functional literacy and stakeholders

### **1. Introduction**

Education in general and adult education in particular is considered as the key to enter development. This is because; education produces people who contribute to the development of the nation (Rogers and Street, 2012). Adult education includes the entire body of learning process whereby people regarded as adults develop their capability. Adult education is broad concept that incorporates different forms. Integrated Functional Adult Literacy (IFAL) is one of them.

Integrated functional adult literacy is an approach used to help adults acquire reading, writing and basic arithmetic skills and enhance their livelihoods in their locality which intern could contribute for the development of the country. Integrated Functional Adult Literacy program is developed through a bottom-up taking into account principle of locality, local design, participation and the outcomes which are discussed as follows (McCaffery, Merrifield, and Millican, 2007):

- a. Local context. The definition of functionality depends on what kind of reading and writing skills are commonly needed in the learners' community. Therefore, each community needs their own definition of functional literacy.
- b. Local design. Each learning group makes its own learning plan on the learners' needs and interests'. The tutors receive training on how to assess the learners' literacy skills, knowledge, needs, and interests; how to design their own learning activities and curriculum; how to make their own learning materials; and how to network with local organization in order to find learning materials and resources.
- c. Participatory process. The learners are involved in all aspects of learning activities. They develop their functional capabilities by making decisions and planning their own learning.
- d. Action outcomes. Results are measured in terms of learners' ability to use their reading, writing and math skills for practical purpose in daily life, for learning by doing, is the focus of every reading, writing and math activity from the very beginning of the program.

The goal of IFAL program is to develop the ability of learners in making use of literacy skills to solve problems and meet learning needs in daily life. The program is expected to be learner-centered rather than book/content centered and teacher centered. This means that learning activities focuses on helping learners to achieve goals and skills that are relevant to their personal needs and interests.

MOE (2010) indicates that in order to solve the problem of relevance in the provision of adult basic education ESDP document emphasizes that skill based, work oriented and community based adult education needs to be provided at national level. IFAL, indeed, is regarded as an integral part of implementation of different development policies, strategies and packages such as agriculture and rural development, industrialization, health, and packages related to youth and women. As a result, the focus of adult education is to help adults to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills among themselves and to facilitate the provision of functional literacy. Moreover, it enables the adult learners to read and write in order to acquire knowledge and skills in agriculture, health, civics, cultural education, etc.

The training and development of the were da-level support system is the most critical factor for long-term success of the program. Successful implementation of IFAL program requires competent facilitators who can identify and tell learners need and interest. To do so facilitators should get proper training. Facilitators who get proper training will be able to identify community needs and potential, learners learning needs, train tutors, develop materials, design curriculum, organize groups and manage the program. On top of that facilitators have to be able to adapt the training materials prepared at regional level to satisfy the learning needs of participants of IFAL program

Thus, the researchers have selected West Shoa, West Arsi, East Hararge and Jimma Zones as the study area. The main reason to conduct this study in West Shoa, West Arsi, East Hararge and Jimma Zones are to investigate the nature and the types of literacy program being provided and to identify the major challenges the program is living with.

The general objective of this study is to investigate the nature of IFAL program being carried out, lesson that can be learned and analyze the challenges in West Shoa, West Arsi, East Hararge and Jimma Zones have encountered.

Based on the objectives stated above, this study has tried to answer to answer the following basic research questions:

1. What is the extent of involvement of stakeholders?
2. What is the nature of the reward scheme?
3. How are facilitators capacitated in order to serve the program effectively?
4. What are the successes and challenges of IFAL program in the region?

This study tried to identify and examine the implementation of IFAL program in terms of competency of facilitators, supervision and support provided to the program and the participation of stakeholders in implementation.

Therefore, this could have the following significances:

1. It could serve as reference for education planners, decision makers and implementers in the area of IFAL program.
2. It forwarded tentative recommendations that can serve as benchmark for improvement of the IFAL program administration and execution.
3. It can serve as a spring board for those who are interested to extend this study for further investigation.

## 2. Research Design and Methodology

### 2.1. Research Design

The study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The objective was to provide an in-depth exploration and description of IFAL practice evident in Oromia region (strengths and weaknesses) so as to show the direction on how to satisfy the learning needs of adults. Exploratory and descriptive designs are seen to be appropriate for the study because they help to explore and investigate the effectiveness of the program from different angles. According to Best & Kahn (1999), descriptive survey method is more effective to assess the performance in their natural setting. This method is used to describe the important points about opinion, attitudes and suggestions of IFAL beneficiaries, facilitators and officials.

Of the nineteen Zones of Oromia regional state the researchers' selected four zones such West Shoa, West Arsi, East Hararge and Jimma Zones using purposive sampling technique. Regarding the selection of respondents 4 zone IFAL experts are selected using available sampling strategy as interviewees. 16 Wereda Education Functional Adult Literacy experts, 16 Weredas Education Office supervisors, 16 school principals and 10 cluster coordinators are selected using stratified sampling techniques. 7 facilitators from each Woreda are also selected using stratified and simple random sampling with the help of Woreda IFAL experts (53 teachers, 16 DA and 16 Health Extension Workers and 27 volunteers were involved). 6 adult learners from one center are taken part in focus group discussion. Generally, a total of 180 respondents are participated in the study.

### 2.2. Instruments of Data Collection

The researchers used questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion and observation for it helped to combat the limitation of each method otherwise we might face. For example, in focus group discussion the participants speak in a specific context, within a specific culture, and so sometimes it might be difficult for the researchers to clearly identify an individual message (Gibbs, 1997, p4). Interview on the other hand has a problem of overlooking at events. That is why the researchers prefer to use different kinds of data collection instruments.

Questionnaire was one of the instruments of data collection used to collect data from Wereda Education Integrated Functional Adult

Literacy experts, Wereda Education Office supervisors, school principals, cluster coordinators and facilitators. To enhance better communication and understanding with participants of the research after the questionnaire is prepared in English language, it is translated to Afan Oromo.

Interview was used to collect data from the Zonal Education Office IFAL coordinators. Semi-structured interview is used because the study is designed to explore what is being done in the region and to investigate the view and attitude of the respondents about IFAL and how they perceive their work. As semi-structured interview has established framework the analysis is greatly simplified. This is particularly important for limited time study (Bell, 1993, p138).

In fact, interview is often used to establish the variety of opinion concerning a particular topic. It has been used to establish relevant dimensions of attitudes. Interview is often used to form tentative hypotheses about the motivation of underlying behavior and attitudes (Shaughessy et al, 2000, p160).

Focus group discussion is used to assess how beneficiaries and community members view IFAL and to see if they recognize its contribution for better livelihood. Group discussions, as Gibbs (1997, p2) says, have special value for those who want to assess how several people work out a common view, or the range of views, about some topic. It can help to explore the view and satisfaction of the group, to identify their priorities and helps to evaluate the effectiveness of the program (Pickering & Clement, 2001, p266-269).

In order to secure the concrete evidence on how the program is going on, the researchers observed some of IFAL classes of sample Woredas. IFAL classes were observed adult literacy class while the teaching learning process was taking place to examine the effectiveness of the overall program. Brown (<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/tutorial/Brown/laurpatp.htm>) says there are three kinds of observational variables; descriptive, inferential and evaluative. The researchers heavily depend on the inferential observation.

### 2.3. Data Collection Procedures and Analysis

Official contact is made with the OEB, respective Zone Education Offices and Woreda Education Bureau to get permission and support for research work. IFAL coordinators and facilitators are communicated about the objective of the study. The data is collected after consent of participants of the research is secured.

In analyzing data gathered, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. The data collected by various tools is analyzed and interpreted. The data collected through questionnaire (quantitative data) is computed using percentile whereas the data collected through interview, focus group discussion, and observation analyzed qualitatively by descriptive statements. Then based on the data analysis interpretations is made to reach at certain findings. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are drawn.

### 2.4. Presentation, Discussion and Analysis of the Finding

In this chapter the findings of the study were presented and discussed. Presentation and discussion of the findings were made based on the information obtained from 180 participants in which cases 170 of them participated in filling in questionnaire, six of them did take part in focus group discussion, four of them as an interviewees and observation. The findings were presented and discussed under the following tables and headings:

	Very good		Satisfactory		Below satisfactory	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Convenience of FAL class</b>	30	18%	75	44%	65	38%
Rapport between different sectors	16	9.4%	49	28.8%	105	61.8%

*Table 1: Issues Related to Learning Environment*

Based on the information obtained from coordinators of the program at Zone level it has been learnt that IFAL classes were conducted in school, under shade, in farmers training centers and other convenient places which of course makes IFAL program more accessible so that anyone who is interested can take part in the training. But this doesn't mean that learning environment is free of problem. As has been reported in table 1; 38% of the respondents confirmed that the condition of IFAL classes were below satisfactory while others believed that the classes were convenient. During the observation session, however, it has been seen that the teaching learning processes carried out in the school system was not in good condition. That was mainly because of seat found in the most of the schools were not meant for adults, but for school children.

Another issue that is directly or indirectly related to the learning environment is the rapport exhibited between different sectors. About 61.8% of the respondents believe that the rapport between different sectors was below satisfactory. Among other things, however, the rapport between sectors determines the success of the IFAL program. In order to make IFAL effective, government has design strategy so as to pull the resources available. Indeed, major stakeholders like education, health and agriculture sectors needs to come together and work for the success of the program. But, has been discussed by the interviewees though attempts were made by local administrators to create good rapports between all stakeholders for the success of IFAL, the desired result was not achieved yet. One of the main reasons was that all sectors were busy with the duties and responsibilities primarily entrusted to them by their respective organization. On top of that, IFAL was additional task and their participation was viewed as additional burden and no arrangement was in place to ensure their participation.

Major criteria of Selection of Facilitators	No.	%
Their profession/educational background	146	85.9
Appropriateness of the candidate to serve the purpose	146	85.9
Knowhow of language and culture of the community	170	100
Willingness to take part in IFAL program	33	19.4
Being model in the community	47	27.6

Table 2: Issues related to facilitators

Table 2 was dealt with issues related to facilitators. 85.9 % of the respondents reacted that facilitators were assigned to facilitate IFAL classes in accordance with their educational background and if they would serve the purpose. When researchers carried out observation they have seen that extension workers facilitated contents related to farm practices, health extension workers handled health related issues and teachers on the other hand tried to help adults understand on how to read and write. Indeed, educational background was one of the criteria for selection of facilitators in the IFAL program. In addition, ability of the target language was another important selection criterion to be eligible for participation in the IFAL program.

The other important issues the study tried to look at was to find out if facilitators who took part in IFAL program were assigned as per their willingness and if they were role model in the community. Only 19.4 % of the respondents said that the willingness of the respondents was taken into consideration and 27.6 % of the participants assumed being a role model was one of the criteria for selection of participation.

The finding asserted that educational background, appropriateness of the candidate to serve the purpose, understanding culture and language of were major criteria for selection of facilitators. Though, willingness and being role model in the community were equally important if they are not greater they were not given due attention.

Do facilitators get any kind of payment/financial reward?	Yes		No	
	No.	%	No.	%
	15	8.9	155	91.1

Table 3: Reward scheme

As table 3 indicated 91.1% of the respondents have said that there was no financial reward for facilitators though 8.9% of the respondents replied positively. During the interview session, researchers raised the issue to the officials as why that has been the case. As one of the respondents affirmed; “facilitators who participate in IFAL classes run by government did not get any kind of financial reward. Only those who were working in IFAL centers supported by NGOs got some kind of financial rewards in the form of pocket money.” Thus, regional government didn’t take participation of IFAL class as something additional responsibility which deserves some kind of reward or compensation.

Do facilitators get training?	Yes		No	
	No.	%	No.	%
	93	54.7	87	45.3
Duration of the training	Three days training			

Table 4: Training provided for facilitators

As table 4 depicted, 45 % of the respondents have replied that facilitators didn’t get any kind of training while 54.7% of the respondents have said that training was provided for facilitators. Those who affirmed provision of training for facilitators have said that the training was provided for three days. As the issue has been raised for discussion during the interview session it has been learnt that the training was provided once at regional level only in 2011 and has been cascaded in most of the Woredas.

Relevance of the training	Good		Satisfactory		Not satisfactory	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
In term of equipping with facilitation skill	-	-	15	16.1	78	83.9
Its contribution in familiarizing facilitators with the course guidebook	-	-	24	25.8	69	74.2
Introducing strategy on how to localize course guidebook to incorporate the need and interest of participants	-	-	-	-	93	100
Understanding psychology of adult learners	-	-	12	12.9	81	87.1
Classroom management	-	-	-	-	93	100
In creating rapport between facilitators who came from different sectors	-	-	-	-	93	100

Table 5: Nature of the training

Table 5 was designed to assess relevance of the training provided for facilitators who replied the above table positively. Only 16.1 % of the respondents have said that the training provided was satisfactory in equipping learners with facilitation skills; though, 83.9% of the respondents didn't thought so. As far as contribution of the training in familiarizing facilitators with the course guidebook is concerned; 25.8 % of the respondents assured that the training was helpful to familiarize themselves with the course guidebook prepared at the region. But majority (74.2 %) of the respondents said that the training was not satisfactory in familiarizing facilitators with the course guidebook.

Participants of the research have been asked if the training provided could have introduced them with the strategy on how to localize course guidebook so as to incorporate the need and interest of participants. All of the respondents anonymously have said that they were not introduced the strategy on how to incorporate the need and interest of the adult learners. As the interviewees also have confirmed because of the constraint of the budget the training was not designed to address such kinds of issues. One of the respondents has said "when the course guidebook was prepared it has been tried to localize the materials as much as possible. As the matter of fact, Oromia region was clustered into four Zones and the classification takes into account if target groups are rural and urban community; farmers or pastoralists; highlanders or lowlanders and the like". Even though the attempt was good and can help in satisfying the need and interest of the adults who are living in different parts of the region, it doesn't mean that all adults who are living in one area have the similar learning needs. Unlike children who want education to prepare themselves for better tomorrow, adults like to learn what is relevant for them so as to improve their livelihood. As adults are growing older and older their difference in their livelihood will also increase and they want to be treated individually. Thus, facilitators are expected to identify the need and interest of their learners and work to treat them individually.

Among other things in order to ensure success of the IFAL program, understanding psychology of adult learners is paramount. 87.1 % of the respondents, however, have asserted that the training provided at district level was not satisfactory in helping facilitators to understand psychology of adult learning. Similarly, those who participated in the interview affirmed that the three days training workshop wouldn't be considered as sufficient in acquainting facilitators with necessary knowledge and skills to enhance learning efforts of adult learners.

Issues related to the course guidebook	OEB		NGOs		At the center	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Who prepares the course guidebook?	170	100	-		-	
Relevance of the course guidebook	Highly relevant		Relevant		Not relevant	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	85	50	85	50	-	

Table 6: Issues related to the course guidebook

Participants of the research in the interview have discussed some of the major successes that can be attributed to the provision of IFAL with all its limitations from the organizational point of view in that coordination of CRC and Woreda Education Offices have been increased which of course ultimately might contribute for the attainment of the desired objectives of the program. In addition to this bringing different sector together is also viewed as the strength of the program because they said "IFAL is found to be different from any other form of the preceding literacy activities in that it focuses on the livelihood of the beneficiaries". This of course has been discussed by FGD participants directly or indirectly.

When FGD participants discussed the benefit they got from their participation in IFAL program they said that their interest towards schooling has been increased to a great extent and they became more supportive to their children education. Saving culture of participants has been increased, their productivity was also increased and their participation in social affairs was improved. Problem solving strategy has also been improved as the respondents said. Those reported improvements were of course the major areas of change excepted from adult learning at all level although it is difficult to conclude if such improvements were made because of participation of learners in IFAL program.

### 3. Conclusion and recommendations

#### 3.1. Conclusion

Learning environment is one of the determining factors for the success of IFAL program. Based on the discussion it has been found out that resources like FTC, schools, shades, community centers and the like were used to run the program. Creation of convenient learning environment, however, goes beyond physical resources in that it is more of human and financial resources. So long as human resource is concerned facilitators of the program were mainly from education, agriculture, health sectors and volunteers. Hence, most of them were development agents who are working to enhance the rural community's livelihood; it is possible that they would have immense contribution for the success IFAL program. But their contribution is condition by number of factors. Among other things the availability of reward package, the rapport they have and unity of direction.

The study, however, confirmed that the program has had no reward scheme. Participation in the IFAL program was not considered as additional task that deserve some kind of financial reward. In addition, it has also been learned that the rapport between IFAL facilitators was not satisfactory as the program demand.

The study confirmed the training provided lasts for three days and was very much limited in scope. Because of these reason, facilitators of IFAL program witnessed that they have difficulty in incorporating the need and interest of learners with the course guidebook and understanding phycology of adult learning.

Though, IFAL program was found to be more need based and learner focused, it still was living with a number of limitations. Coordination of the program by itself was one of the major problems because it violates the principle of 'unity of direction'. Participants of the IFAL implicitly were expected to report to two different bosses: for their line managers and for the coordinator of the program IFAL.

### 3.2. Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the researchers have made the following tentative recommendations.

1. Collaboration of different stakeholders is very important to succeed with the initiation of IFAL program. But it has to be carefully investigated to identify who would contribute what so that proper assignment can be done.
2. In order to motivate individuals who, take parts in the IFAL program they should be rewarded either financially or through exemption from some of their duties and responsibilities so that facilitators will be motivated and work to their level best.
3. It is paramount important to provide training for facilitators which help them to have better understanding of adult psychology and make them to be capable facilitators who can identify and satisfy learning need of participants.

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