How do learners view adult education? Women learners’ perception on the Ethiopia's adult education programme

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Abstract

The perception of adult learners and societies towards educational programmes including adult education affects their effectiveness. This study aims to explore the perception of Ethiopian women adult learners towards the Integrated Functional Adult Education programme using qualitative case study as methodology and social constructive ideology as paradigm to figure out the women learners’ perception towards adult education program.

Data was collected using interviews and focus group discussions with women learners employing purposive sampling techniques. The study found that initially women learners were suspicious to attend the programme but became enthusiastic to attend. Women’s fear of the programme’s relevance is replaced by gratitude as attendance continues. The study also showed the programme answers the women’s longing for formal education.

Introduction

A society has its own culture guiding perspectives towards education. The society’s culture is the accumulation of the knowledge, values and attitudes of its members. Communities have their own unique perceptions for the relevance of education (Yuliani and Hartanto, 2017). In pro-industrial societies like Europe, education may be regarded as a lifelong process whereas in primitive societies, the relevance of education may not be understood and their learning process ends in their early adulthood (Jarvis, 2009).

In educational programmes, the learner’s perception influences its effectiveness, their background and family characteristics have a significant effect on their achievement. The families’ way of life, socioeconomic status, educational level, religion and the view they look at the world, all contribute to the perception they have towards their education (Shore et al., 2013; Arar and Rigbi, 2009). Educational programmes’ services’ quality and learners’ satisfaction becomes another determinant of the perception they have towards the programme (Petruzzellis and Romanazzi, 2010) while adult learners are sceptical of the educational programmes initiated by the government, non-governmental organizations and volunteers (Knowles, 1970).

Historically, literacy education in Ethiopia began formerly in the church and later in the mosque (Negash, 2006), literacy practices in churches and mosques were considered the traditional form of education and dominated by male learners. The intentions of this form of education were to expand religions ideologies (Shenkut, 2006), women are not allowed to take part in literacy delivered in the religious institutions, particularly in the Orthodox religion, the dominant religion in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is a nation with a rigid religious society, an Oriental Orthodox and Muslim dominated country, any kinds of education other than those with a religious purpose, were discouraged until recent times with religious leaders condemning learning in schools or adult learning centres as a sin. Furthermore, Ethiopia is not a colonized nation and the integration of the society’s culture with the western culture has been untouched. A society with religion that discourages modern education and having a culture preserved from western influence may have a unique perception for an adult education programme that aiming to better a learners’ livelihood.

The perception of participating learners and society towards education covers a myriad of contributions in achieving the intended goals of the programme. Numerous empirical studies have investigated the learner and the perception of a wide society towards the educational programmes including adult education programmes (e.g., Macfarlane, 2015; Gibb, 1987; Sewpaul and Jones, 2004, Ogay and Edelmann, 2016) finding the relationship between the peoples in environment and the classroom participants perceptions and the effectiveness of the programme have direct relationships. Adult learners’ understanding and perception towards educational programmes as a means to create their consciousness and to achieve a social justice determines their attendance. (Anderson et al., 2019). Park and Choi (2009) stated that adult learners
attending an adult education programme in online form are likely to develop negative perceptions to the programme by scrutinizing its relevance. Adult learners are eager and motivated to acquire the educational objectives relevant in solving their day-to-day problems (Smith and Gallagher, 2002; Knowles, 1980), unless the relevance of the programme to their livelihoods affects their interest to attend. A lack of clear marketing and promotion on the programme’s relevance in changing and transforming the learners’ society creates skeptical adults. However, studies have been investigating the perceptions of adult learners towards adult education in developed societies and other parts of the world and found no evidence concerning the perceptions of adult learners from religiously dominated and never colonized cultural areas. The Integrated Functional Adult Education [IFAE] programme is also context specific and exclusively provided in Ethiopia with its own forms. Adult learners’ perception towards this programme is still uncovered in the realm of literature and therefore this study may lay a foundation for further research in this area in addition to the contributing new stepping-stones of knowledge.

Several local studies concerning the issues related to adult education, facilitators and learners participating in the programme include the current practises and problems in eastern Ethiopia’s integrated functional adult literacy programme (Awgichew and Seyoum, 2017), profiling adult literacy facilitators in development contexts of Ethiopia (Warkineh et al., 2018), and ragological strategies to maintain high-quality adult education, in Ethiopia (Seyoum and Bash, 2017), gender roles’ effects on women participation in functional adult literacy (Kabeta and Gebremeskel, 2013), challenges of intersectoral collaboration in providing adults education in Ethiopia (Abate and Adamu, 2021) and the obstacles of women’s empowerment in adult education programme (Mengistie, 2020). Their investigations found, and they reported on the different perspectives in different areas of adult education. However, the perceptions of adult learners towards the Ethiopian IFAE programme have been untouched giving this study a unique glimpse about the learners’ perception of the programme.

In Ethiopia, organized adult education programmes to enable development have been implemented for adult segments of the population from the imperial period (Wagaw, 1979) including the present, modern era. In the imperial period, the sole participants of the adult education programme were students from families of the clergy. Large segments of the population were sceptical about attending the literacy program so less resource was allocated (Shenkut, 2006; Wagaw, 1979). The evaluation of the programme in that period found the programme ineffective in achieving the intended aims due to its sole focus on literacy - reading, writing and arithmetic (Woldemeskaele, 2007; Wagaw, 1979). Understandably, the contents of the program did not meet the interests of learners and a developmental approach was initiated in government offices indicating a top-down approach.

During the Dergue regime, a military government in Ethiopia, the adult education programme was extensive with more than 80% of the population enrolled in the mass literacy campaign (Bhola, 1987; Shenkut, 2006). International organizations including United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) praised the regime for its tremendous achievements reducing illiteracy (Negash, 1996). Today the literacy rate has reached more than 83% (Shenkut, 2006) however, due to the lack of use in their daily lives most of the participants relapsed to illiteracy. Although the literacy campaign covers large segments of adult population, it is not free of criticism of its aim to inculcate the socialist ideology, similarly literacy during the Dergue was also considered to have failed the real needs of adult learners. Literacy in the Dergue is a programme with a big investment and increase in literacy but unable to achieve sustainable national development.

In the 30 years of Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) period, the adult education programme has been implemented in different levels of effort and forms. When the current government took power, adult education was sidelined to the Education Training Policy (ETP), with the term literacy operationally defined to include only reading, writing and numeracy contents (Wagaw, 1978; Negash, 2005). In 2008, the education of adults was revived following the pressures from international organizations like The United Nations and The World Bank in order to meet The Education For All and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). A National Adult Education Strategy was prepared to implement the IFAE programme throughout the country including far more than reading, writing and computing. The program was eventually renamed the IFAE (MoE, 2008), with the goal of improving women’s illiteracy and poor living conditions. According to the Ministry of Education (2015, p.86), the program is a two-year curriculum that combines mother-tongue reading, writing, and arithmetic skills development with practical knowledge and abilities in family health, hygiene, and sanitation for 15–60 year-olds. IFAE is built on indigenous knowledge and uses inputs from different development workers (agriculture, health, etc.). The initiative links fundamental numeracy skills to livelihoods in agriculture, healthcare, civic and socio-cultural education, and other domains, and it solicits public and private sector service providers.

Adult education has various concepts based on the region or the country, currently in Ethiopia it understood as an educational programme aimed to increase the productivity of adult populations by giving educational opportunities other than the formal one. It is considered as a solution to alleviate the prevalence of poverty by reducing the illiteracy rate particularly for women and indigenous rural communities. Finally, the IFAE aims to foster a democratic and good governance culture, as well as social reform and sustainable economic development (MoE, 2008).

2. Methodology

The social constructive paradigm is used to guide this research. According to the social constructivism paradigm, reality is multifaceted, shaped by individual interactions with social settings and viewpoints on a given topic (Hatch, 2002; Taylor et al., 2016; Woods, 2006). The researcher argues that reality is multifaceted and formed through contact with participants, in this study. Ontology is best gained by social constructions such as practices, documents, languages, and consciousness from the participants’ point of view (Hatch, 2002). In this study, the researcher assumes that participants’ social interactions in daily activities can shape their knowledge. It is also thought that the world is strongly constrained by specific time, practice, and context. This paradigm proposes that both the researched and the researcher would gain deeper insights into their lived experiences through intense contact and discourse (Woods, 2006). This necessitates intimate interaction between the researcher and the participants in order to support their reality or knowledge production and expression of the lived experiences under investigation (Creswell, 2007; Taylor et al., 2016; Woods, 2006).

The study looks on how women learners perceive about the IFAE program. The social constructivism argues researchers have to assert the variety of perspectives instead of classifying interpretations into a few groups (Taylor et al., 2016). The research relies on single participants’ perspectives (Starman, 2013) and understandings of cultural experiences gained by evaluating single viewpoints to attain the goal (Woods, 2006). The social constructivism paradigm, which frequently employs the qualitative methods, was applied in this study. Because qualitative research and interpretations are a frequent style of inquiry in domains of social and behavioural sciences, the techniques in this study are based on qualitative and interpretations approach (Creswell, 2007).

According to Yin (2003), in order to attain the specified goals, researchers use at least one design, either covertly or overtly. According to Creswell (2007), a qualitative case study design is utilized to better understand human behaviour and perspectives. A case study design, as many scholars have stated, explores a specific occurrence in a given context, such as the program, the organization, a homogeneous community, an occurrence, the method, and a human, an object, an agency, or any other element can be considered as a case. (e.g., Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2003; Dawson, 2002; Hatch, 2002). A case, according to Stake (1995) (mentioned by Yazan 2015), is a specified, multidimensional, and
operating object within the interconnected system possessing a limits and it has functioning aspects as well as a goal. As a result, the IFAE program was the focus of this research, which had women learners in Bahir Dar City.

The interviewees were 20 women who had completed the IFAE program and had a solid record of accomplishment of class engagement. The first participant was chosen purposefully utilizing the one who plays the facilitation role in the programme as gatekeepers, whereas through a snowballing technique the other 19 were chosen. To overcome anxieties that arose throughout the interview process, the researcher built trustworthy relationships with the participants. In this study, semi-structured interview guidelines were utilized to collect data in a qualitative case study approach where a researcher can learn what is on someone else's mind (Merriam, 2009). A semi-structured interview guide aids the researcher in obtaining in-depth data and investigating the opinions of women learners. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, with interview guides serving as indicators of the issue rather than interview process limitations. The interviews lasted an average of 40 to 60 min and were tape recorded based on the participants' consent.

In this study, analyzing qualitative data involves six distinct yet intertwined procedures. Creswell's six processes were utilized to analyze the data. The organizing and preparation of data for analysis is the initial step (Creswell, 2012). The ability to organize potentially vast volumes of data is critical in qualitative research. The data was arranged using a matrix, and it was manually transcribed from Amharic to English. The second stage entails reading the data that has been transcribed (Creswell, 2012). In this step, the researcher understands the overall concept of transcriptions to explore and code by reading and re-reading the transcribed notes of the data. The third step is to conduct a thorough investigation utilizing the coding technique to develop descriptions and themes (Creswell, 2012). Here, the researcher segments, labels, and connects the transcribed data to depict the phenomenon's complexity. The fourth stage is the coding process, which is used to create themes (Creswell, 2012). The researcher manually developed themes or broad groupings of concepts based on a thorough evaluation of the data. The fifth phase involves developing narratives utilizing what the researcher has discovered in response to the research questions in order to portray and convey themes (Creswell, 2012). In this step, the researcher weaves and connects the emerging themes in order to depict and report on the responses of the participants. The findings were presented as story conversations and narratives. The sixth stage entails analyzing the significance of the findings (Creswell, 2012). The researcher promoted personal viewpoints, made comparisons between the findings and the literature, and recommended limitations and future researches at this time. Renowned writers (e.g., Merriam, 2009), suggested tactics such as member checking by sending back a copy of tentative interpretations to the participants, triangulation, auditing, and consistent peer assessment about the methodology process and interpretation outputs, were used to ensure the study's dependability and accuracy. Participants were given their own transcriptions and requested to prove the content's validity, and employs expert assessment on the research outputs to ensure the work's reliability and trustworthiness.

2.1. Ethical considerations

This study was authorized by the University of Gondar's Institutional Review Board in Gondar, Ethiopia. To enter the field, the researcher had to submit an official letter to the administrative office of Belay Zeleke Sub-City, written by the Institutional Review Board. The facilitators were used as a key informant by the researcher in the field to gain access to the participants. An information letter followed by a consent form affirmed the participants' willingness to participate in the study. In a face-to-face talk after they accepted and signed the consent form, the participants were told the purpose of the study, how the data will be utilized, and the possible social consequences the study will have on their life. Participants were given the option to refuse or discontinue their participation at any time during the study. Their privacy and confidentiality were safeguarded in the study's report, and pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity.

3. Results

3.1. Women participants' perception towards the IFAE programme

To present the participants’ perception of the programme four themes were developed, presented and analysed: themes including: boredom overthrown by enthusiasm, women’s fear replaced by gratitude, IFAE satisfying the women’s longing for education and the IFAE becomes honour and beauty. By agreeing these themes, an attempt was made to explore the participants’ perception towards the program through drawing meaning from the participants’ sayings.

3.2. Boredom overthrown by enthusiasm

The IFAE programme has been provided nationwide and indispensable in order to ensure the country's sustainable development. Women are one of the target groups of the programme. The result of the study shows a number of participants often joined the program because of the influences from governmental bodies, in other words, women’s participation had been seeming compulsory, pressured, without participants enough awareness about the nature of the program. As a result, participants of the study indicated that they were not interested in the program at the beginning their attendance.

Women’s participation can be seen as compulsory, pressured, lacking awareness of the true nature of the programme; this is shown by their lack of interest at the start of the programme.

For example, in interview, Woudie [Married, 45 years old, graduated woman] said:

When I have begun to attend the program, I didn’t have knowhow about its relevance. I assumed, as they [the government bodies; IFAE facilitators and experts] enforced me to attend the program for their sole interest. I was so bored to go to the program. But eventually, I understood the benefits and I found the program fascinating.

At the beginning, I was not interested, because I wasn’t aware of its relevance. We were saying; let us go to sit like a stone…[የልማapat እኔ ሁኔታ እንከ ሁኔታ እንከለ እንከለ]… But after days, weeks and months, we could see changes in our day-to-day lives as a result of the program. We started to develop abilities of reading, writing, communicating, etc., which in turn made us to be so enthusiastic to attend. In interview, Tigist [Married, 36 years old, graduated woman]

Most of us wrongly perceived the command by government officials, facilitators, etc towards the program. Now, I am so irritated about my foolish assumption. It was for me… for us. When I see slight changes in my life, I could be interested. When I went there I know what I could get...it’s to have a better life. If I get this chance decades before, I would have been a woman with better life in Bahir Dar. In interview, Selam [woman, 40 years old, divorced a mother of three]

In the beginning, they were skeptical to attend the programme, as there was doubt on its purpose. Participants highlighted their interests to attend the programme once they started to acquire important skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant in their daily lives.

For instance, Woudie said, “when I started to attend the program, I had a suspicion that it may be aimed to change my religion”. Initially, the learners regard the IFAE programme as a mere compulsory programme to change their identities, cultures or religion reducing the learners’ zest to attend the learning centre. They had admitted the significances of the program and regretted about their superficiality about its purpose. They later understood the significance of the programme and regretted their superficial understanding of its purpose.
3.3. In the IFAE Women’s fear replaced by gratitude

Women’s participation in any educational programme, may depend on the level of support from the husbands, other woman in the community, family members and societies. For most people in developing countries, education is conceived as important only for children. Conventionally, formal education has been reserved for men, so women’s attendance to IFAE programmes is hardly acceptable by society. Societies mostly believe women’s participation in formal education is not productive compared with that of men even in an IFAE programme. Discouraging circumstances evoke the women’s fear from participating in the programme, from their personal interviews, women faced resistance from society to attend for example, Woudie explains:

The community members’ reaction to our participation derives me nervous. Our society’s member influenced my husband and he raised compliances about my attendance. They said, ‘why you allow her to go there [IFAE program]?’ Since I had desire for education, it wasn’t easy for him to stop my participation. Through time, he started to see changes in our economic, social and family life, which later convinced him to let me go.

The women graduates noted their participation in the program initially raised some anxiety, explaining that members of the community perceived education at their age [the age often out of formal education] as irrelevant. In interview, Zewudie [50 years old, married woman] explains:

When I went to the programme, the reaction of the society was so bad. Almost all are pessimistic the relevance of the programme. For example, one woman said me ‘it is time for church, not for education’, which is so frustrating. Later on, I started to realize that this kind of assumption was wrong. I believed that these happened because most of the society members are not educated as well as less awareness about the relevance of the programme.

The participants identified society’s negative reactions as a barrier to adult education, particularly for women learners, which stems mostly from the belief that once people reach adulthood, they are too old and incapable of learning. As a result, some participants have attended the program by pretending as they are going somewhere else. Tigist is one example, she is aware of the reactions of society; she conceals her attendance and has pretexts for those who asked. Tigist said:

When I started attending the programme, except my family, no one knows where I was going. I am careful enough to hide my exercise books. When they [other individuals in the village] ask me, where are you going? I tell them other destinations or reasons. From my experience, if I was told them the truth, they would not say a good thing; they said something that affects my desire to attend the programme.

Women’s participation in such a programme is a new event for most of the members of the study. The community’s involvement and consciousness towards the programmes’ benefits are exceptional. In spite of this, in the Sub City, most of the participants mentioned the community’s attitude towards the adult learners’ involvement is discouraging.

The participants in the programme stated that the suspicion of society towards the programme reaches to wasting one’s life and putting the learners’ marriage in danger. In this regard, Selam said:

... the societies’ view is difficult; I was so depressed to attend the programme. They said if you go to this educational programme at this age, you are possibly buried women. Some members even say it is a walk for seeking something... for a slandered purpose. They assume that the women who live only in the house are chaste. የህ የምሽት የቀረበበት የእስከ ለማስታወቅ ለማስታወቅ i.e. walk in this evening should be in suspicion. From this repeated saying, I was so annoyed as well as feared. Immediately, in some months’ difference, I could read, calculate, easily communicate, etc. Consequently, I ignored those bad words, and now, I’m so grateful.

The participants’ described society’s unfriendly reaction robs women learners’ of their effort to be involved in the programme. However, the learners acknowledged the facilitators and some governmental official’s enthusiasm in their participation and involvement. The participants mentioned that the society believe their participation in the programme is inconsequential even for women themselves. Lemlem [45 years old, married women] talks:

... some of the members of the society speak to us, ‘why you went there, to get degree?’ and they said, ‘Now what is better is to stay at home because this education is not important to you.’ They think that the purpose of education is only to enter into college or university and to get public jobs. My intention wasn’t to join university; rather I intended to know to solve my day-to-day challenges. The society’s mindset is that education should lead to secure, governmental or public employments… however, we, all the participants know the programmes benefit in our everyday lives.

The majority of the participants noted, at the beginning, that society believed only formal education benefits the participants, however, the IFAE program, particularly for women groups’, increases survival and sustainable development. The IFAE improves participants’ way of life by engaging in socio-cultural and traditional economies and urban-agricultural activities. The programme invaluable importance created a sense of gratitude with the women. For instance, in interview, Tizita [42 years old, married with three daughters], depicted:

People weren’t interested about our participation in the programme. They think participation in the programme is not to get something important but rather is a pretext to leave the home. This belief comes from their lack of thought about the programme. They didn’t know how IFAE programme is relevant for individuals like us... for example, now we, only women who attended and graduated from the programme, are working agricultural activities through forming associations. Unlike most community members’ negative attitude and experience to IFAE, we benefited in our daily lives as well as in our agricultural engagements. As soon as we learned something new from the facilitators and each other, we immediately apply it in our routine activities. Therefore, today, we are so happy because we just get something from the programme to solve problems.

Women participants pointed out the importance of society’s belief to empower adult sections of the population particularly women through IFAE. One of the participants, Tamire [40 years old, divorced with three daughters] consolidated the above idea. That is:

I think society’s perception towards our participation has been scary. When I go to the learning class, I use another road, in which, I come across individuals who are new to my face. Because my neighbours in this village are neither, attend the programme nor interested on my participation. If they see me, when I went to or back from the classroom with my exercise books or other learning aids, they always laughed at me. Many of the participants withdrawn from the attending the programme because of other individuals influences.

Women indicated through tolerating those challenges from large sections of society they able to achieve a lot and be grateful, contrary to their initial fears. The results show society’s attitude can affect any projects implemented in and around the context and from their related experiences, it is possible to understand that effective implementation of the IFAE program, society’s attitude is important.
3.4. The IFAE satisfies longings to Women’s education

The provision of the IFAE often aimed at the adult sections of the population including the poor women, those out of the formal education system and those unable to attend or afford formal education fees. Many of the participants of this study implied their participation in formal schooling has hindered for different reasons. By attending this programme, almost all participants mentioned their satisfaction with the desires of attending education. Zewudie remembered and described her zest to formal education as follows:

“When my age has reached for formal education, I was so interested to go to school. Some of my friends from the neighbours were gone to education, I remember when I was crying to go there, but my father wasn’t well to send me. He was a priest. He believes education other than the church is a sin. He said I don’t want to send my daughter to change our religion. My families, typically, he [her father] assumed that education [formal] is to change religion [Christian] into Islam. When I asked him to allow me to go there, he speaks out, I don’t want to live alone. Because most of the educated individuals at that time assumed as they went abroad. Now, I am a little bit satisfied my previous yearnings to attend education.

In the Dergue regime, there was literacy programme through campaign. Most of the women’s in my village went to attend the programme nearby my house. At that time, the government officials have obliged us to go to the programme. However, my husband begs the officials not to send me and he bought alcohol [invitation to drink] for them. Even though I lost the formal education, there were opportunities in the form of literacy but I wasn’t fortunate to get that chance. Often we [she and her husband] engage in conflicts when I asked him to allow me to go with other women for education. If I was used that opportunity, I would be literate women. Today thanks to the government and the facilitator, my keen to education has somehow fulfilled, I could read, calculate, sometimes write and sign my signature. Woudie

…of course, the access to education was narrow; but there were women who attend formal education. I was one of the some few women who got the chance to education but after grade three, I had interrupted because of my family problem. I don’t have information about marriage, but they already decided to marry me for an individual I didn’t know before. After marriage, I couldn’t explain feelings that I felt, let alone asking to allow me to go to school. It is possible to say I was a prisoner \(\{\text{reading, writing, calculating}\}\). In my early age being literate and employed in office or school as a teacher was my hobby. My family shadowed that vision; especially my father did a lot. However, today many years from now, I could get this chance, education, from IFAE. Tamire

All the participants were interested to attend education, particularly formal ones in their early age, the IFAE is considered the optional opportunity for women who lose this opportunity. The study participants of stressed and appreciated the presence of such programmes to improve their lives. In the study setting, women described the programme’s significance to fulfil their longings for education and to reduce the illiteracy rate.

3.5. The IFAE results in honour and beauty to women

The IFAE is of huge importance for the participants. Education in general and the IFAE programme in particular, improve the status of individuals, groups and communities in the competent world. The learners in the programme discussed IFAE programme participation as the means to upgrade the status individuals have in society. Like any otherworld, society’s appreciation of the differences between literates and illiterates is highly visible. Most explained that those who are literate have more opportunities in life noting that IFAE programme participation improves women learners’ status of any group of the population and they perform better in their endeavours. Zewudie explain:

Before I enrolled IFAE, I was seen as an ordinary individual who can’t know and speak for me, my children, forecast the future, etc. Before, individuals have undermined me, but today they have changed their attitudes about my understandings on issues in our milieu. Our society has the first positive impression about literate individuals. They gave me honours about my attendance to IFAE, while I could execute activities, which requires some sort of reading, writing, calculating, etc. Most of the time, when I use a pen in writing my signature rather than finger point, the individuals provided unexpected appreciation and honour to me.

Although the society’s reaction to our participation was poignent, some really admire the performances we show in our daily activities. In routine activities, my computing abilities of basic mathematical skills gave the special graces for me from other members of the society. For example, when I was attending meetings from the sub city there were per diem for participants, then I signed my signature, and they admire me. Tamire

Although I had received some suggestions from the schoolteacher about my two boys’ performance, for me it was difficult to understand their academic progress. When the school requests me to come to know the children’s academic performance, I was so regretted to go there because I didn’t understand any texts and numbers. After I got the participation from the programme, I could closely supervise as well as support their improvements. The schoolteachers have provided admirations to my continuous support of my children’s education. My participation in IFAE is the source to my respect and honour in any dimensions of life. IFAE is my honour, respect, and beauty, which provided me a special placement in the society. Selam

The IFAE programme means the special attitudes and confidence to the participants from the members of society. Most participants thought involvement in the programme enables transformations of their status from the ordinary illiterate person to literate one, women attending the program confirmed honours and respect starting from a single-family member to the large society.

4. Discussion

This study found that women learners perceive the IFAE program and its effect differently; many participants conceived their participation as something unimportant that women were so suspicious to attend the program they assumed it was enforced but had no significance on their lives. Some societies were unsupportive in their responses to the program in the study setting. The discouraging essence of society on women’s participation was rooted in the lack of awareness about the program’s benefit. This happened because the programme was launched without sufficient information about its relevance for the participants. The development of the programme from the view of the government endangered the women participants’ suspicion on its significance. Literature shows any educational programme aimed to empower women should involve the women in the development process of the programme (Habtu, 1996; Stromquist and Sanyal, 2013; Negash, 2005). According to Stromquist and Sanyal (2013), opening the opportunities in the programme development process to women increases the women’s hope to benefit from its implementation. In principle, women’s participation in educational programmes like IFAE has to engage the concerned bodies in awareness creation activities. Though the practice is different in the functional adult literacy implementation guidelines (MoE, 2011) as well as in national strategies of adult education (MoE, 2008), the importance of voluntary participation of adult learners in the programme was clearly stated. The Functional Adult Education Implementation Guideline (MoE,
The IFAE programme was intended to provide important skills, attitudes and knowledge to women’s empowerment, in particular. As NAES (2008) and Functional Adult Literacy Implementation Guideline [FALIG] (2011) depicted, the program’s aims were significant for adults (MoE, 2008). In addition, the study participants have conceptualized the programme as the main tool to achieve their personal longings to formal education. In developing countries, women are segregated from accessing formal education; specifically Stromquist and Sanyal (2013) among the third world countries, women’s illiteracy rate is huge in the sub-Saharan countries. For centuries, in Ethiopia, women were at the back from accessing any form of education. In formal education, even today, women’s low participation persists. In the study most participants did not participate in formal education in their early years, therefore, the IFAE programme is used as the means to satisfy their long time wishes for education.

This study found the IFAE programme responded to their ambition to attend formal education, women see the IFAE programme as the way to satisfy their long-held interests to attend formal education. Most of the researchers asserted the crucial significance of the IFAE programmes in particular and other non-formal education in general, for the development of developing countries. Congruent with this study, Negash (1996) boldly emphasized the immediate importance of non-formal educations to the urban poor, including women. Like formal education, the IFAE programme has critical pay-offs for women’s empowerment. Although women’s ambition through attending formal education was to work out of the informal economy and socio-cultural contexts, the IFAE programme helped them to know and apply literacy in their daily lives. Although societies in the study setting are highly sensitive to the benefits of formal education, the study by Abebe (2008), entitled “Trapped between disparate worlds? The livelihoods, socialization and school contexts of rural children in Ethiopia”, described the learners of formal education as not interested to attend because they could not see the immediate relevance of participation in their daily chores. Abebe (2008) concluded that formal schooling unlike the adult education programme challenges the traditional way of life and hampers the indigenous knowledge development, the IFAE programme in the study setting, is not only the response for women’s cumulative zeal to formal education but also a means to transform the indigenous knowledge for generations.

Education is the weapon to transform one’s status in the social structure; the study found that women’s participation in the programme helped them to move within that social structure. Women participants’ see the programme to give them confidence, honour and beauty within society. It is obvious that educated individuals usually outperform to those who are uneducated in activities. In this study, the participants of the IFAE programme view the programme as the means to transform their status within their society. Most studies also found that education, particularly adult education, changed women’s status in many aspects.

According to Rogers et al. (2007) adult education programme changes the individuals’ social status. In any group or society, the difference between being literate and illiterate in the lens of the large societies is highly visible. Literally, an individual with educational experiences has the greater capability to change their life however, it does not mean that illiterate peoples are unable to survive. Although illiterates have different ways to deal with activities, which require literate competencies, most members of the populations may perceive them with scorn. Women as a group are often perceived with scorn.

Women’s gender inequality plus the illiteracy character increases their segregation. The study found, women find honour and respect after enrolling in IFAE. In addition to the ability to engage in literacy tasks, improvements in social and economic arenas also improved the women’s status entitlement. The study from New Zealand, Bangladesh and Egypt by Rogers et al. (2007), concurred that literacy for adults improves the livelihoods of participants, as in this study, women’s participation in the IFAE programme changed their income status often shown in the form of improved livelihoods. Generally, in Ethiopia, particularly in the study setting, social status is highly valued and most improved through education, in this study, women participants in the IFAE programme transformed from illiterate to literate status and creating positive perceptions.

5. Conclusion

This study found that although the program enthusiast the women learners later, they had been suspicious about the relevance of the IFAE programme at the start. Through time, women’s fears and suspicions of attending the programme had been replaced by the feeling of gratitude. Most of the women also understood the IFAE programme because of the longings of their earlier interests of formal education. In the Sub-City, women participants perceived the programme as the means to change their status within the context of the study.
6. Policy and practice implications

The IFAE programme is an incontestable alternative for poor urban women through fulfilling pre-conditions; this ameliorates the process of empowerment. In today’s world, particularly for developing countries like Ethiopia, women’s empowerment is necessary for achieving and sustaining development. The IFAE programme for women in Ethiopia develops and preserves indigenous knowledge, demises illiteracy and poverty, and contributes to the sustainable development of the country. In this study, one finding is despite the women’s participation in the programme being hindered by the absence of encouraging perceptions by much of their societies within the context of programme provision. To positively address women’s participation and eventually empowerment, the IFAE programme should provide extensively through involving all sections of the population in planning and development, and implementation levels. The top-down nature of the programme has to be changed to the bottom-up approach to increase ownership of the programme by those groups at grass-root level.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Tilahun Adamu Mengistie: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

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Data availability statement

Data will be made available on request.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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