The provision of adult education in Ethiopia: ‘policy initiatives and practice’ in focus from qualitative findings – A meta synthesis study

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ABSTRACT
This study was conducted to build evidence-based research about the provision of Ethiopian adult education. Therefore, the main purpose of this meta-synthesis study was to upsurge understanding from empirical facts and give evidence-based research regarding the provision of adult education in Ethiopia from the standpoint of policy and practice a wide-ranging spotlight. In doing so, sample qualitative studies were searched and selected from databases using search terms. To find all the relevant primary studies on adult education to this investigation, both electronic and manual search strategies were utilised using the PRISMA (2009) guideline. According to this meta-synthesis result, Ethiopia has had three distinct political systems of government since the 1941, when modern education system has been outshined, and each of which was differentiated by its approach to education. The Imperial system, which began immediately after World War II and lasted until 1974, was the first form of governance. The second, which lasted from 1974 to 1991, the socialist form of governance, was characterized by the single-party state and a centralized government. The third, which lasted from 1991 to 2016, the democratic form of governance, was characterized by multiparty politics and a decentralized government. Ethiopia’s educational history is necessary to comprehend the context of modern education in the nation (Bishaw and Lasser, 2012). Due to the presence of an old civilization with its alphabet, according to several works of literature, education in Ethiopia is not a recent development (Sandhaas, 2009; Tefera, 2005; Negash, 2006). The Ethiopian educational system was initially more affected by traditional values and strengthened by religious instruction, particularly that related to the Christian religion (Sandhaas, 2009; Margareta and Sjostrom, 1983; Awgechew, 2016). Emperor Menelik II (1889–1913), known as the father of modernisation in Ethiopian history, brought modern education to the country in 1908 (Pankhurst, 1968 cited in Bishaw and Lasser, 2012; Mammo, 2006; Margareta and Sjostrom, 1983). Since 1941 the country’s education system was outshined.

1. Introduction
The most powerful tool to combat poverty, discrimination, and all other types of basic human rights exclusion is education, be it formal or informal (Avdagi, 2017; Boyadjiieva and Ilieva-Trichkova, 2017; Kebede and Muhamedhusen, 2016; Awgechew, 2016; Yilfashewa and Garkebo, 2017). Education has a significant impact and reflects the political, social, economic, and cultural aspects of society (Wirtu, 2019; Schemmann et al., 2020). Therefore, every country that wants to experience economic prosperity and treat its population fairly must create an effective educational system and policy (Awgechew, 2016). Most nations have created and implemented educational policies as the best and most effective way to achieve rapid modernization. Therefore, the educational strategy was influenced by the way modernisation was viewed (Kebede, 2020).

It is the fact that the political commitment and national orientation of the government to education can be reflected in a nation’s education policy (Sandhaas, 2009). Therefore, understanding Ethiopia’s educational history is necessary to comprehend the context of modern education in the nation (Bishaw and Lasser, 2012). Due to the presence of an old civilization with its alphabet, according to several works of literature, education in Ethiopia is not a recent development (Sandhaas, 2009; Tefera, 2005; Negash, 2006). The Ethiopian educational system was initially more affected by traditional values and strengthened by religious instruction, particularly that related to the Christian religion (Mammo, 2006; Margareta and Sjostrom, 1983; Awgechew, 2016). Emperor Menelik II (1889–1913), known as the father of modernisation in Ethiopian history, brought modern education to the country in 1908 (Pankhurst, 1968 cited in Bishaw and Lasser, 2012; Mammo, 2006; Margareta and Sjostrom, 1983). Since 1941 the country’s education system was outshined.

Ethiopia has had three political systems of government since the 1941, when modern Ethiopian education system has been outshined, and each of which was differentiated by its approach to education. The Imperial system, which began immediately after World War II and lasted until 1974, was the first form of governance. The second, which lasted...
until 1991, was the military/socialist order. And, in addition, the third and present federal form of government took office in 1991 and started operating in full in 1994 (Negash, 2006). Every political system has its own set of ideological precepts that it uses to explain and influence the educational landscape, particularly the adult education (hereafter, AE) sub-sector. Therefore, the scope of this meta-synthesis is not large enough to present and discuss the entire educational system, but it focuses on building the provision of AE across the specified forms of governance from the perspective of preliminary research findings.

2. Study objectives and basic research questions

The reviewers thought that since development of AE policy initiatives has become mainly the government’s role, and also can be practiced by other concerned, it is crucial to gather evidence from empirical research to demonstrate exceptional achievement and learn from its drawbacks. Until now, academics, research organizations, and universities have published a large body of literature describing the provision and practice of AE in Ethiopia in a particular administrative period. However, there aren’t many studies that focus on the integration of AE literature within the setting of Ethiopia’s multiple government systems. Despite this, reliable accounts of prior research are a prerequisite for systematic knowledge construction (Cooper, 1998). Therefore, the absence of a meta-synthesis study on this issue, the reviewers were able to locate and compile actual data on the characteristics of Ethiopian AE “policy initiatives and its practice” from existing qualitative study findings.

Due to space limitations, the focus of this research was limited to an exploration of AE policy and practice as the primary topics of investigation. Keeping these in mind, the goal of this meta-synthesis study is to increase knowledge from already known facts and give policymakers and other interested parties a broad emphasis on evidence-based research to demonstrate exceptional achievement and learn from its drawbacks. The reviewers thought that since development of AE policy initiatives has become mainly the government’s role, and also can be practiced by other concerned, it is crucial to gather evidence from empirical research to demonstrate exceptional achievement and learn from its drawbacks. Until now, academics, research organizations, and universities have published a large body of literature describing the provision and practice of AE in Ethiopia in a particular administrative period. However, there aren’t many studies that focus on the integration of AE literature within the setting of Ethiopia’s multiple government systems. Despite this, reliable accounts of prior research are a prerequisite for systematic knowledge construction (Cooper, 1998). Therefore, the absence of a meta-synthesis study on this issue, the reviewers were able to locate and compile actual data on the characteristics of Ethiopian AE “policy initiatives and its practice” from existing qualitative study findings.

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3. Theoretical framework

There is a wide variety of AE theories accessible in the literature as a result of the substantial theoretical literature that has grown over time in the field of AE (Wirtu, 2019). Thus, Paulo Freire’s (1921–1997), Julius Nyerere’s (1922–1999), and Jack Mezirow’s (1923–2014) critical theory of adult education were applied to this study because the scope of this analysis confirmed their insight to be sound. The idea of critical AE theory and practice has been hotly debated, in part because the word “critical” is so accessible to so many different interpretations (Brookfield, 2017). According to popular wisdom, Freire and Nyerere fervently believed that AE should be applied to all of humankind and that doing so will enable adult learners to engage in discourse, empower themselves, and engage in critical reflection on their own lives (Assefa, 2021a; Wirtu, 2019; Findsen, 2007). Additionally, Jack Mezirow’s exploration of the ideas of critical reflection, transformative learning, and communicative action has contributed significantly to his position (Findsen, 2007). According to Mezirow, the overarching goal of AE is to help adult learners develop their critical thinking and awareness skills so they can realize their agency.

A critical analysis of a system, institution, or collection of activities and an equitable method of world organization are at the core of the critical AE theory (Brookfield, 2017). According to Wirtu (2019), the Ethiopian AE system can be used as a tool to clarify misunderstandings rooted in political, historical, sociocultural, and economic interactions when approached from learner-oriented policy and practice backgrounds. This is significant from a theoretical perspective for this study. Many different views on AE around the world are found in the literature. For instance, Gal et al. (2020) stated that AE is a catch-all phrase incorporating a variety of environments in which adult learners may engage in learning. Desjardins (2017) identified three distinct institutional characteristics in his research that may contribute to the widespread and high prevalence of organized AE. Studies in the field also frequently emphasize AE as any learning possibilities taken up by people who are not enrolled in their usual educational cycle (Assefa, 2021a, 2021b; Desjardins and Ioannidou, 2020). Given that AE has been linked to social justice and constructive social change, this highlights the significance of greatly increasing various learning opportunities throughout life (Akinjoh, 2017; Boyadgieva and Ilieva-Trichkova, 2017; Desjardins and Ioannidou, 2020).

A long-standing taxonomy of AE also proposes that adult learning can take three different forms: formal, non-formal, and informal (Kenea, 2014; Desjardins and Ioannidou, 2020; Gal et al., 2020; Gelana, 2014; Abiy et al., 2014; Sandhaas, 2009). Although definitions may differ across contexts (Gal et al., 2020; MoE, 2008a, 2008b; Sandhaas, 2009), the forms of AE which have been practiced in Ethiopia can be seen as these forms of learning (Assefa, 2021a). These are formal learning, defined as learning that is planned out from the perspective of the student, takes place in a structured setting, is provided by an institution, and results in a credential; non-formal learning is integrated into scheduled activities that have a significant learning component that is deliberate from the perspective of the learners; and informal learning happens naturally, unintentionally, or as part of daily activities. Indeed, through the three aforementioned types of AE provisions, Ethiopia had a wealth of experience in the supply of various forms of AE (Wirtu, 2019). Evidence that is well supported and government directives demonstrate that the content of AE includes reading, numeracy, and the development of essential life skills that help students solve problems and transform their lives (Kenea, 2014; Gelana, 2014; MoE, 2008b; Abiy et al., 2014; Sandhaas, 2009).

4. Synthesis methodology

4.1. Data collection and literature search strategies

Several scholars have examined how a research synthesis goes about locating papers pertinent to a topic, one of the issues brought up by thinking about data sources (Finfgeld, 2003). Therefore, to find all relevant studies on AE in this investigation, both electronic and manual search methodologies were used (Sandelowski and Barroso, 2007). As recommended by Finlayson and Dixon (2008), the first search and evaluation of the AE literature were conducted to determine whether there is an adequate supply of qualitative research reports on a given topic. Additionally, a scoping review of the AE literature was carried out utilizing search terms in prospective database sources such as ERIC, Google Scholar, and Google. AE terms and phrases such as adult education, adult education policy and strategies, adult education implementation, adult literacy, functional adult literacy, and integrated functional adult literacy in Ethiopia were used in the search terms when creating them. All of these search phrases were taken into account as a significant component of the study’s search strategy and data gathering procedure (Finfgeld-Connett, 2018; Noah, 2017) to highlight the themes. Additionally, using what Cooper (1998) referred to as the “ancestry approach,” a manual search of pertinent publications and key authors’ reference lists was conducted (e.g., Mammo, 2006), as access to a vast array of electronic references is required in addition to access to a comprehensive collection of cross-disciplinary articles from databases (Finlayson and Dixon, 2008).

Since the scope of the inquiry is sufficiently broad to encompass the phenomenon of AE policy and practice (Abrate, 2022; Finfgeld, 2003), the literature sources used for this synthesis data collection were divided into...
three groups. These are publications from peer-reviewed journals (Gizaw et al., 2019; Kenea, 2014; Gelana, 2014; Margareta and Sjostrom, 1983; Abiy et al., 2014; Zelalem et al., 2018; Tilahun, 1991); to ensure that multiple stakeholders perspective is heard from (Cooper, 1998; Noah, 2017), professional conference papers presented in different AE conferences (e.g. Bhola, 1987; Wirtu, 2005; Zeleke, 2005); and working papers conducted by decent AE organizations (e.g. Mammo, 2006) were considered. To sum up, Figure 1 displays the flow of literature search available for rigorous synthesis. In doing so, the PRISMA (2009) guide for preferred reporting of literature search for systematic review and meta-analysis was adopted (see Figure 1).

4.2. Quality appraisal, inclusion, and exclusion criteria

There is disagreement regarding evaluating research quality and merging studies that employed various methodological approaches in meta-synthesis analyses in a sizable body of literature (Erwin et al., 2011; Walsh and Downe, 2005). But as experts in the subject have noted, creating criteria is crucial to addressing the issue of publication bias present in particular academic domains (Finlayson and Dixon, 2008; Noah, 2017; Sandelowski and Barroso, 2007). To gather individual primary studies that are consistent with the study’s goals and questions, precise inclusion and exclusion criteria have been devised. To identify whether the articles were appropriate for this study, five criteria were formed. These are (a) the research method for the study must be qualitative, because the reviewers were encouraged to address deeper understanding of Ethiopian AE experiences, phenomenon and context across governments education systems which cannot be put into numbers to understand; (b) the study’s publication status must be reported at AE conferences or published by any peer-reviewed journals; (c) the study must concentrate on Ethiopian AE, adult literacy, IFAL, and IFAE policy and practice; (d) the paper must be written in either English or Amharic languages; and (e) the research has to be done after 1941, the year when modern Ethiopia education became a real in the country.

Thus, on September 30, 2021, the search process was over. Despite the enormous quantity, sources turned up a group of 54 published publications that are most likely to be included in this study (see Figure 1). It became evident that there is a fair amount of qualitative research that specifically addressed the AE system in Ethiopia. As a result, only the title, abstract, and full text of the articles that were determined to be relevant to this study were read (Noah, 2017). The 54 records remained after duplication was eliminated. The titles and abstracts of each report were quickly reviewed to further weed out publications that weren’t studied in qualitative research. The 31 articles were then removed (6 at title and 25 at abstract). The remaining 23 screened reports were analysed using the predetermined inclusion criteria and eligibility was evaluated (see Table 2). After review, 12 articles were disqualified and discarded.

Last but not least, evaluating relevant primary studies and determining how to include them in the framework of the synthesis is a crucial endeavour, despite the availability of a great body of literature on electronic databases and other potential sources. If appraisal criteria are taken into account during the investigation, the format must be decided (Finlayson and Dixon, 2008). Therefore, in this stage, the quality appraisal criteria from Atkins et al. (2008), Finfgeld-Connett (2018), and PRESMA (2009) were modified to assess the quality and potential inclusion of primary studies in this study. According to many academics, even though it is impossible to predict how many articles will be required to complete a meta-synthesis study at the outset (Cooper, 1998; Finfgeld-Connett, 2018; Finfgeld, 2003), the final 11 articles that are perpendicular to this synthesis objective and research questions were included (see Table 1).

As shown in the below Table 2, the following 13 inclusion criteria were developed and employed to determine the eligibility of primary studies to be included.

4.3. Coding schemes and process

The reviewers used codes that appeared throughout the articles (Cooper, 1998; Finfgeld-Connett, 2018; Finfgeld, 2003) that were chosen to schematize explanations and conclusions. As a result, by merging the numerous study reports that make up this synthesis, coding themes, ideas, and patterns were created (Noah, 2017). Similar to this, tables were used to analyse the methodological quality, conclusions (Sandelowski and Barroso, 2007) as well as study features including objective/purpose, fundamental questions, technique, sample, and conclusion/implication of primary papers (see Table 1).

4.4. Trustworthiness

Validity in the context of meta-synthesis research is improved through triangulation, similar to any systematic investigation. As a result, this study used an erudite judgment, which is the convergence of three types of triangulations, such as (a) researcher, (b) theoretical frameworks, and (c) methodological concerns, as indicated by experts in the field (e.g., Finfgeld-Connett, 2018; Finfgeld, 2003). To ensure credibility and dependability, adequate attention was given to the transparency and clarity of the study process during data collection and analysis (Erwin et al., 2011). Additionally, expertly searching published research reports in databases was performed using justifiable criteria to close any gaps in the validity of primary studies (Atkins et al., 2008; Noah, 2017).

4.5. Data extraction, analysis and synthesis methods

Characteristics of a primary research report (see Table 1) and qualitative findings were two forms of data that were retrieved and organized from study reports, following recommendations made by practitioners (e.g., Finfgeld-Connett, 2018; Noah, 2017; Walsh and Downe, 2005). It has been established from multiple angles that there are numerous sorts of analyses employed in meta-synthesis to evaluate results (Atkins et al., 2008; Cooper, 1998; Erwin et al., 2011; Finfgeld, 2003; Noah, 2017; Walsh and Downe, 2005).

Therefore, this study used a synthesis method known as “thematic synthesis,” as proposed by Nowell et al. (2017) and Thomas and Harden (2008). It was chosen because thematic synthesis significantly improves free coding of the original data, groups related free codes into descriptive themes, and produces analytical themes from the findings of the chosen article (Finfgeld, 2003; Thomas and Harden, 2008). To compare and integrate the findings and descriptions of selected articles into new concepts, stages of coding, organizing, and developing descriptive themes were made (Walsh and Downe, 2005).

5. Results

The reviewers thought that a more thorough and theoretical study was necessary to understand how empirical investigations on the strategy, policy and practice of AE in Ethiopia were progressing. As a result, this meta-synthesis does not compare the best outcomes; rather, it organizes the body of available knowledge so that AE practitioners, institutions, and academics may quickly access the current Ethiopian AE policy environment and practice.

5.1. Major AE policy development: perspectives in conceptions, policies, and strategies

Previous studies focused less on policy concerns and more on the description of AE practice, which contributed to the problem with AE provision in Ethiopia. The country’s legal-based AE initiatives present

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1020E%202009.pdf retrieved 25 September 2020.
various images over various governmental eras. Therefore, this study focused on the policy environment and its application throughout the government’s educational system while presenting the overall growth of AE. After evaluating the source studies, three fundamental themes emerged. These are (a) the orbital basis or the inclusion of AE into the Ethiopian modern education system was made between 1941–1974; (b) the establishment of nationwide mass campaign against illiteracy and ignorance put into practice during the post–1974 period; and (c) the development of ample amount of education policies but symbolic effort observed in the AE provision since 1991 to now. Details are displayed below.

5.1.1. The inclusion of adult education into modern education system

In Ethiopia, the years under his late majesty Emperor Haile Selassie, between 1941 and 1970, are typically considered the introduction of AE into the Ethiopian modern education system (Negash, 2006). As previously documented, a wide range of writers agreed that the emperor was motivated to establish a contemporary educational system to advance Ethiopian civilisation and strengthen national unity (Bishaw and Lasser, 2012; Margareta and Sjostrom, 1983; Sandhaas, 2009; Negash, 2006). Additionally, other study findings assured modern education was to be restored and enlarged following the 1944 Memorandum on Education Policy’s guiding principle of “mass education at all costs, regardless of age and sex” (Sandhaas, 2009; Zelleke, 2005). Even if commitment changed throughout time, Zelleke (2005) depicted that there has been a desire to provide the AE program legal support ever since the emperor outshined modern education to the nation following the introduction modern education system by his majesty Emperor Menelik II in 1908.

On the other hand, after decades of investigation conducted by scholars in the AE field, the reviewers were unable to determine from those what AE policies and strategies were endorsed to support the program. Although most of the first research focused on discussing the application of AE under the Durge and present regimes, many studies revealed that AE entered the context of Ethiopia’s modern nation building with the emergence of three significant legal creativities of AE during the Emperor’s period. For instance, Yefidel Serawit (also known as the Army of the Alphabets) was founded in 1954, Berhanneh Zare New Institute (also known as Your Bright is Today) was founded in 1948, and The Work-Oriented Adult Literacy Program [hereinafter, WOALP] was established in 1968 and operated until 1973 (Wirtu, 2005; Sandhaas, 2009; Zelleke, 2005) (Kenea, 2014; Mammo, 2006; Margareta and Sjostrom, 1983; Zelleke, 2005).

The Berhanneh Zare New Institute was established in Addis Abeba (the capital city) to support adult evening education. The phrase “education

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**Figure 1.** Search strategy flow diagram.
### Table 1. Included study characteristics.

| Study | Purpose | Sample sources | Methods | Conclusion |
|-------|---------|----------------|---------|------------|
| (Kenea, 2014) | Look into change and continuity in the policy and practices of adult basic literacy initiatives in Ethiopia and deduce lessons that can be drawn from the experiences for the future. | Adult education strategies (4) & adult literacy participants (N = 48) | Document analysis and In-depth Interview | The adult basic literacy initiatives were founded on erroneous conception of literacy - the deficit model of literacy- which assumes an absolute state of literacy/illiteracy. The literacy initiatives also lacked continued commitment from the governing bodies and were largely in response to external drives rather than local needs. Ideological motives rather than actual needs of the beneficiaries have guided the initiatives. |
| (Gizaw et al., 2019) | Explore the IFAE issue and throws light on the distinctive roles of the adult literacy facilitator, | Stakeholders in adult education (N = 94) | Interview | Exploratory/Thematic Analysis | Due to the presence of poor AE implementation strategies and guidelines, the facilitation task found at a risk. |
| (Bhola, 1987) | The emphasis of the adult education program is literacy and the dialectic role between development and literacy. | NLC-related documents. (N = 4) | Document analysis, FGD, and interview | Narrative research/Thematic analysis | most significant remarks emerging from the policy review can be made: * No conditions too adverse for a literacy campaign * Campaign fatigue: one could see among the organizers of the campaign in Ethiopia a phenomenon that can be best ascribed as the “campaign fatigue” or the “campaign burnout.” * The need for a renewal of commitments and renovation of energies is obvious * The need for professionalization of the enterprise |
| (Wirtu, 2005) | To depict the provisions and participants of AE n in Ethiopia, show problems that have hindered its development and advocate ways of overcoming the hindering factors. | Government policy, and performance reports | Document Analysis | Exploratory Study | the provision of AE in Ethiopian and participation of adult learners was not at a satisfactory level due to factors such as lack of resources, poor coordination, inadequate of AE organization and structure. |
| (Gelana, 2014) | Overview Ethiopian progress towards the goal of taking adult literacy in four indicators: budget allocation, facilitator training and recruitment, stakeholders' collaboration, and adult literacy rate. | ESDPs (N = 2, including ESDP III and ESDP IV) | Document Analysis | Case study/Thematic analysis | Collaboration among stakeholders in implementing Functional Adult Literacy was found at a substantiated level, despite the signing of MoU among ministries and willingness and encouragement made by the Ministry of Education to work collaboratively with stakeholders. The role of implementing FAL has almost been left to the Ministry of Education and its regional, zonal and wereda offices. As to the literacy rate, although the progresses in enrolment in FAL are encouraging, Ethiopia inevitably seems far from achieving the adult literacy rate by 2015 as intended. |
| (Mammo, 2006) | Exploring the efforts to provide adult literacy and basic education to the adult population in two distinct periods – Literacy before 1990 and after 1990 in Ethiopia. | Literacy efforts (N = 2, before 1990 and after) | Document Analysis | Narrative/Thematic analysis | Despite AE govt emphasis in different education development sector programs, the result was often far from proposed on the documents. In general, the prospect of reaching all children with basic education by 2015 seems close to reality although the achievement of Dakar commitment on adult literacy seems unclear a bit dubious. |
| (Margareta and Sjostrom, 1983) | Give an account description of the 'Yemisrach Dimits' Literacy Campaign in Ethiopia, and present a plan for an evaluation of the campaign. | Adult literacy campaign of 1979 | Field visit | Exploratory Study/Narrative Analysis | YDLC was mostly practiced at the rural areas of Ethiopia and outreach to only 15–25 years old participants. The campaign was administered centrally and supported budget by Lutheran World Federation since the start. It was linked up with agricultural, food and health, social and security were the main focus of education of the program. Difficulty to attract adults and problem of not using mother tongue language in the literacy were the major challenges for the initiatives. |
| (Abiy et al., 2014) | To develop a Lifelong Learning system in Ethiopia. | educational policies & AE stakeholders, (N = 16) | FGD, Interview, and document analysis | Case study/Thematic analysis | It emerged that some of the existing policy provisions and contexts reflecting the highly formalized and structured educational opportunities available to Ethiopian youth and adults require reconceptualization. Despite the enormous progress made in increasing children’s access to primary school, more than two million children remain out of school and adult literacy rates are still far from reaching the targets set both by the United Nations Millennium Development |

(continued on next page)
helps people come out of darkness into light” is stressed in the name of the institute, which embodies the essence of the enlightenment era (Wirtu, 2019). Additionally, Tilahun (1991) declared the institute’s opening due to the Imperial bodyguard’s plea to the emperor for a way to enhance their education. As a result of this incident, AE was institutionalized for the first time in Ethiopian contemporary education history (Bishaw and Lasser, 2012; Abiy et al., 2014; Sandhaas, 2009). Although the institute offered evening seminars (Sandhaas, 2009) and literary services (Tilahun, 1991), other AE models, like the Yemisrach Dimts Literacy Campaign (hereafter, YDLC), were unveiled by Margareta and Sjostrom (1983). The Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus sponsored the YDLC’s implementation. Sjostrom (1983). The Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus sponsored the YDLC’s implementation.

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literature on AE policy from this period uncovered some gaps and weaknesses. For instance, Kenea (2014) reported there were no recognized policy frameworks for AE provision.

On the other hand, Mammo (2006), Margareta, Sjostrom (1983), and Zelleke (2005) found that two AE policy initiatives against illiteracy and ignorance were recognized. First, after coming to power, the Derg proclaimed Zemecha, which stands for “growth through campaign and cooperation” was first put into effect in January 1975. Then, two AE program initiatives were started, including the knowledge and employment campaign in 1974 and the Ethiopian national literacy campaign (also known as the NLC) from 1979 to 1989 (Abiy et al., 2014). The campaigns placed a strong emphasis on literacy as one of their main goals for nationwide implementation. According to empirical findings, however, no one created the guidelines, orders, rules, etc. to implement and keep track of the campaign in their study report. It has been only disclosed by Bhola (1987) that the existence of a separate AE department with a well-articulated planning and implementation structure has been developed at the MoE’s centre for the NLC.

According to the results, it is probable that several slogan-based techniques were used to mobilize the entire society toward adult literacy in particular, with snappy slogans being cited as one of the most successful strategies (Kenea, 2014; Mammo, 2006; Margareta and Sjostrom, 1983). For instance, I promise to abolish illiteracy either by teaching or learning; to be free from illiteracy is like to be reborn; let the learned teachers and the uneducated study either by teaching or learning; to be free from illiteracy is like to be reborn; let the learned teachers and the uneducated study.

In conclusion, the majority of people with little literacy have been reverted to illiteracy (Mammo, 2006).

While the current government took power, the first development in the education sectors was the development of the new ETP, which recognizes non-formal education in addition to the general education and training sectors (MoE, 1994). The ETP has been implemented through the rolling of five consecutive ESDDs since 1997/98. Researchers have, however, discussed how the implementation of the ETP in later ESDDs, such as ESDD I (1997/8–2001/2) and ESDD II (2001/2–2004/5), has not paid enough attention to AE (Kenea, 2014; Mammo, 2006).

5.2. Major challenges, and opportunities

According to the main study findings summarized across government systems (e.g., Kenea, 2014; Bhola, 1987; Sandhaas, 2009), AE in pre-revolutionary Ethiopia had been restricted to the acquisition of basic reading and writing abilities. During the socialist era, literacy participation became required from all citizens (Kenea, 2014). It provided a learning opportunity and increased the expectations of millions of people. In 1989, a national literacy rate of 83.2% was determined (Mammo, 2006). The marketing was extremely successful with this. Four of the major languages offered adult literacy (Margareta and Sjostrom, 1983). Another notable accomplishment of the NLC was the creation of literacy and post-literate texts in 15 languages (Kenea, 2014; Bhola, 1987; Wiru, 2019; Sandhaas, 2009).

Surprisingly, the AE campaign’s efforts and successes during the socialist era were recognized with some international honours, including the International Reading Associations Literacy Prize in 1980, the UNESCO (Krupskaya) Literacy Prize Honourable Mention in 1982, and the NODA Literacy Prize from UNESCO in 1986. The campaign also won the Iraq Literacy Prize, an award from International Gold Mercury, and a Medal and Certificate from the Academy of Simba (Italy) (Bhola, 1987; Mammo, 2006; Tefera, 2005). However, many issues meant that the campaign was not entirely successful. The progress of the literacy campaign was significantly hampered by the two catastrophic events that occurred in the 1980s—namely, the escalating civil war and the disastrous drought and famine of 1985—and as a result, the realization of the dream was further away than initially anticipated (Kenea, 2014; Bhola, 1987).

Following 1991, attendance in literacy classes is now optional (MoE, 2008a). However, the situation is not suitable for this, as stated by Kenea (2014), because the idea of adult learners participating of their own free will without any additional involvement to create favourable conditions for them may only signify the government’s lax attitude regarding AE. High dropout rates and poor student performance in IFAE were the results of this viewpoint (Abiy et al., 2014). Although there are IFAE policies and programs such as ETP, NAES, and rolling of the ESDDs that are conducive to the supply of AE (MoE, 1994, 2008a), they have not been executed properly to produce the desired outcome.

From the results of previous studies, it is clear that there have been numerous obstacles to the practice of AE. For example, the work of Gizaw et al. (2019) and Kenea (2014) demonstrated that all levels were limited by a lack of institutional framework, human, material, and financial resources, as well as a lack of political commitment and a defined policy. It was also difficult to provide learners with a high-quality education due to a shortage of resources, such as skilled teachers (Gizaw et al., 2019; Gelana, 2014; Zelalem et al., 2018), teaching materials (Margareta and Sjostrom, 1983), and other resources like classroom supplies. Most importantly, not only the imperial era but also the Dergu regime in some cases was failed to providing AE services using the first language of learners (Kenea, 2014).

Despite the focus of this review, one was to answer a few questions on AE practices, particularly AE management in the three governmental systems; however, it was unable to locate research about how AE had been handled throughout the Imperial Empire. A study by Kenea (2014) uncovers that the AE management system was quite centralized during the Derg era. The Peasant Associations (hereinafter, PAP) in rural regions and the Urban Dwellers’ Associations (hereafter, UDAs) in urban areas
were given general decentralization tasks (Bhola, 1987; Margareta and Sjostrom, 1983). The AE Board and the AE Technical Committee currently oversee the AE program at all administrative levels. The national AE board is presided over by the deputy prime minister and is made up of ministers from the pertinent sectors of education, health, agriculture, labour, and social affairs. The MoE serves as the chairperson of the AE Technical Committee, which is made up of representative specialists from all sector offices (Gizaw et al., 2019; Gelana, 2014; MoE, 2008). Although earlier studies cast doubt on the relationship between AE practice and efforts, it is clear that the availability of AE management structures at various levels, actors’ involvement in the program, and the existence of numerous policies and strategies have all provided excellent opportunities for AE implementation.

6. Discussion

Customization, targeting, and outreach-related policies are signs of active policymaking that aims to increase the amount of structured adult learning (Desjardins and Ioannidou, 2020). Researchers, for example, Abiy et al. (2014) have found that education in Ethiopia plays a vital role in fostering cultural cohesiveness, addressing inequality across gender, regions, and urban and rural communities, and bringing about change in ethical and cultural norms through AE. In their article titled The Political Economy of Adult Learning Systems, Desjardins and Ioannidou (2020) highlighted four institutional traits that are closer to AE provision. These include public support for education, open and adaptable formal educational systems, and proactive policies and programs. Considering these studies and others in the field, the enrolment rate in AE is relatively low as a result of governments’ ideological interference with the program, except for primary school, where the nation is making progress (Gelana, 2014; Negash, 2006; Mamo, 2006; Sandhaas, 2009; Awgechew, 2016).

Political developments in the AE field may hurt how AE policies, strategies, training programs, and systems are integrated into a country’s educational framework. This prompt interested practitioners, academics, and decision-makers to take into account the segregation of any political stance when formulating AE policy and legal directives. It requires well-justified legal grounds, such as policies, strategies, and related working directions for AE providers’ well-thought-out action, to accomplish the intended plan of AE. However, the AE policy initiatives development in Ethiopia is unknown to some beneficiaries of AE programs that what legal context they received from those initiatives. Some people even engage in it without giving any thought to the legal context specially, as in the cases of the Imperial and Derg regimes. Due to this, established AE initiatives such as the Berhanethe Zare New Institute which was an AE pioneer and the 1944 Memorandum of Educational Policy during the Imperial era were deemed to have made only marginal contributions to the area. Additionally, the 1974 proclamation of development via cooperation, knowledge, and work campaign during the Dergu regime was contribute a lot to liberate large number of illiterates despite it was criticized as lack of supportive policy and legal documents (Kenea, 2014). A body of literature on AE policy and strategy identifies numerous legal measures that have been started since 1991 by the current government. Examples include, the 1994 launch of the ETP, and the 2008 launch of the NAES. In addition, scholars in the field of AE such as Abate (2022), Assefa (2021a, 2021b) and Gelana (2014) portrayed that the ETP has been in place since 1994 through rolling of educational sector development program initiatives including ESDP I from 1997/8–2001/2, ESDP II from 2002/3-2004/5, ESDP III from 2005/6–2010/11, NAES in 2008, ESDP IV in 2010/11–2014/15, ESDP V in 2015/16–2020/21. Currently, the government is implementing the Ethiopian Education Road Map (2020–2030) targeted to solve all the educational difficulties encounters during the implementation of ESDP I–V.

The ESDP I was drafted primarily with a focus on improving the quality of education and expanding access to education. To meet the needs of the nation and the economy, the plan places more emphasis on increasing equitable access to primary and vocational education, restructuring the educational system, altering the curricula to make learning more relevant to communities, and enhancing the system’s overall educational quality (Assefa, 2021b; MoE, 1998). However, it is clear from the first research by Kenea (2014), Gelana (2014), and Sandhaas (2009) that the draft did not acknowledge AE and did not make significant contributions to the supply of AE. Adult education or adult literacy were not listed in the plan as topics or subtopics, but functional literacy was listed under remote learning (Gelana, 2014). Furthermore, it was not obvious what was meant by functional literacy or adult non-formal education in Gelana’s discussion or in the ESDP I budget breakdown, which mixed adult education/literacy with it.

The ESDP II was written with the issue of equity in mind. The type of adult and nonformal education that would be stressed as a crucial component of the strategies for accomplishing the goals of universal primary education and education for all was mentioned in ESDP II (MoE, 2002). Programs for adult and non-formal education are seen as tools for enhancing the life and work skills of the general adult population as part of the approach for reducing poverty (Abate, 2022; Kenea, 2014; Gelana, 2014; MoE, 2002). Although significant emphasis was placed on reading, numeracy, and the environment to help students develop their problem-solving skills and alter their way of life, the practice remained symbolic because of the government’s lack of commitment.

When ESDP III came to draft in 2005, its main focus was on enhancing general education and teacher development (MoE, 2005). Contrary to previous ESDP I and ESDP II, ESDP III and later on rolling ESDPs gave AE some respect and developed the concepts of programs for Functional Adult Literacy, Integrated Functional Adult Literacy and Integrated Functional Adult Education (hereafter referred to as FAL, IFAL, and IFAE, respectively). The new National Adult Education Strategy [hereafter, NAES] drafted in 2008 is a recent change to Ethiopia’s AE policy in the rolling of ESDP III (Assefa, 2021a; Kenea, 2014; Gelana, 2014; Abiy et al., 2014; Sandhaas, 2009). Additionally, to improve the distribution of AE to the general public, MoE has been working with foreign partners like dvv international. Over the past five years, there have been some encouraging advances in the implementation of NAES through the FAL and IFAL programs, which were subsequently renamed IFAE in 2015 (Gizaw et al., 2019). IFAE is a two-year program that links learners to training in livelihoods and life skills in industries including agriculture, health, civics, and cultural education in an effort to make writing, reading, and math skills relevant to learners’ daily lives (Gelana, 2014; Abiy et al., 2014; Sandhaas, 2009). In relation to this, the AE sectors were introduced to significant initiatives under ESDP III.

In order to ensure that all children, youth, and adults, with a focus on females, acquire the competencies, skills, values, and attitudes enabling them to participate fully in the social, economic, and political development of Ethiopia, ESDP IV was endorsed in 2010. Its goal is to improve access to quality secondary education services as the foundation and bridge to the demand of the economy for middle-levy workers (MoE, 2010). ESDP IV also anticipates a significant program in AE, with the aim of allowing all adult illiterates to enrol in a two-year Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) course.

A Master Plan for Adult Education has also been created for the ESDP IV era to direct activities in this subsector during ESDP IV implementation. The deputy prime minister organized a national task force made up of governmental and non-governmental organizations, and it helped create a number of fundamental documents, including the FAL Curriculum Framework, the FAL Implementation Guideline, the FAL Facilitators Training Manual, and the FAL Benchmarks. Although female enrolment in IFAL programs has remained quite low, a small percentage of adult learners have begun to complete them. The reviewers of this synthesis were unable to determine from main research how many adult participants really enrolled in or successfully finished the FAL program. However, according to MoE (2015), only around one third of the 36.4 million adults who were supposed to enrol in the two-year IFAE programs from 2010 to 2014 have completed year two of the program. The National
Adult Education Board was one of the expected institutional systems that was not completely built, and the lack of need-responsive learning materials, inadequate stakeholder coordination, and financial constraints were noted as the limiting issues of the provision (Gizaw, 2019; Gelana, 2014; Mammo, 2006; MoE, 2015; Abiy et al., 2014).

ESDP V was launched in 2015 primarily targeted to improve the attainment and learning outcomes for all students. By providing adult and non-formal education related to lifelong learning opportunities that satisfy the varied learning requirements of everyone and contribute to personal, societal, and economic growth, AE was seen as one of the main pillars in the creation of a learning society (MoE, 2015). Enhancing post-literacy activities in AE programs and increasing community involvement to develop community learning centres was a worthy goal in ESDP V. However, the lack of a post-literacy approach and a curriculum structure caused an illiteracy relapse, making the proposal unsuccessful. One of this plan's greatest successes is the introduction of Yebrihan Misana (literal meaning: evaluation of the light). Any adult who stopped their previous education has the option of continuing their study or earning a certification if they pass the MoE exam.

In general, the MoE study (2018) found that there was a lack of integration between functional adult literacy and skills in agriculture, health and livelihood; a lack of clarity in AE structure; a weak coordination system at all levels; a lack of proper documentation of the program's data; a program that concentrated solely on literacy and numeracy while paying little attention to other functional skills (business, health, and agriculture); and a lack of localization of the program.

The government is currently introducing the new Ethiopian Education Road Map (2020–2030) in light of all the difficulties encountered during the implementation of ESDP I–V. It is expected to be implemented until 2030. The new education road map considers the provision of AE very well. It boldly suggests the following eight ways to improve adult and nonformal education (ANFE). These are (a) empower ANFE to develop its own independent education policy framework; (b) restructure ANFE so that it has an independent organizational structure with clear accountability and budget at all levels, that is, from Federal to Woreda; (c) promote strong collaboration and coordination between sector ministries to effectively implement the full program; (d) strengthen existing alternative basic education centres and rural schools to effectively implement the program ANFE, and the link between the two (ABE training centre and primary schools); (e) adapt and tailor the program to the practical needs and situation of adults; (f) strengthen ANFE continuity and transition from level two to formal education; (g) utilize existing Farmers Training Centre and Community Learning Centre for adult and non-formal education; and (h) introduce payment schemes for facilitators of ANFE instead of considering them as volunteers, if ANFE must be fully operationalized and functional (MoE, 2018).

The trajectory and ambitious revolution time of AE provision will be reached soon if all the aforementioned directions will be implemented without any reservation. The outcome will be evaluated in light of the following new education roadmap. According to the reviewers’ knowledge concerned at this moment, the new education road map has not yet been fully implemented nationwide. The draft is close to being finished.

IFAE aims to connect fundamental literacy and numeracy abilities, such as writing, reading, and math, to livelihoods and skill development in agriculture, health, civic education, and cultural education, among others (Abate, 2022; Assefa, 2021a, 202b; MoE, 2015). However, it was undeniable that the Ethiopian IFAE failed because there was no real policy alternative, government, or NGOs. This is due to the claim that the primary goal of a national education system is the installation of social, cultural, and political ideals intended to promote citizen unity of vision (Negash, 2006). According to scholars, every plan to create an educational strategy should first and foremost consider the needs and problems of the population. Second, it should seek to further the development of the concerned nation (Tefera, 2005).

According to academics such as Desjardins and Iannidou (2020), adult outreach and targeting policies are key strategies for combating inequality and disadvantage. Unfortunately, in Ethiopia, AE programs are politicized rather than based on the needs of students, especially when the government is the one who started them. It might explain why the implementation of the AE policy and strategy has had such poor results (Kenea, 2014). The AE system must be included in the larger economic, social, and cultural system, far from the political perspective (Schemmann et al., 2020). As a result, it can improve the distribution of social justice and educational opportunities for individuals who previously lacked them. Therefore, separating political ideology when creating learner-oriented AE policies and strategies is essential to ensuring that learners' educational requirements are met.

Except for a few NGOs such as DVV International, Basic Education Network Ethiopia (BEN-E), Adult and Non-Formal Education Association in Ethiopia (ANFEAE), and Pact Ethiopia, which play a very small part, practically all AE in Ethiopia has been supplied by the government (Gizaw et al., 2019; Abiy et al., 2014). According to the findings of this study, there is a widespread propensity for the government to not prioritize AE and to push it in the direction of non-governmental organizations (Kenea, 2014). Due to a lack of institutional support, human, material, and financial resources, as well as a lack of political commitment and clear strategy, this contradictory scenario has posed a severe challenge to the practice of AE. Without a genuine commitment to implementation, laws and official methods may not be able to advance literacy initiatives. However, to be sustainable, even when the central committee may wane, the push from the center must be backed by a strong initiative at the local level. It is quite incredible that Ethiopia under Derg was able to have the kind of success it had in its fight for literacy despite the famine and civil conflict that raged in the nation and drained ever-increasing amounts of resources.

It is commonly acknowledged that AE facilitators are essential for the successful implementation of adult literacy learning programs, with an emphasis on AE human resources (Gizaw et al., 2019). Adult literacy instructors must be skilled and educated, as adults have different needs than students at lower educational levels (Gelana, 2014). However, it is clear from Gizaw et al. and Gelana's research report that, when compared to the formal education system, the concern paid to the quality of IFAE facilitators appears to be little. This is a starting point for the government to think about the AE issue because it is so broad. Therefore, to reduce the challenges already present, it is important for stakeholders to work in coordination and with a high level of participation (Abate, 2022; Assefa, 2021a; Desjardins and Iannidou, 2020; Gelana, 2014; Sandhaas, 2009; Negash, 2006). As a result, the AE policies provided excellent security.

7. Conclusion

Based on the state of the art in the study of Ethiopian AE policy initiatives and practice under the governmental systems viewpoint, the following conclusion was drawn. A non-interventionist approach was taken to AE practice under the imperial administration when examining the connections between AE policy and Ethiopia's political systems. During the era of the emperor, there was no policy framework in place, despite the idea that the AE foundation would be introduced into the current educational system. AE has been launched as a widespread campaign against illiteracy and ignorance under the Derg regime. AE implementation has been relatively successful during this era and increased literacy, despite criticism that it is a form of political propaganda. The government did not create any formal policy framework. Literates quickly reverted to illiteracy as a result.

After the current administration took power in 1991, many directives and methods were devised to introduce AE programs such as FAL, IFAL, and IFAE. The results, however, remain merely symbolic. Up until 2005, the practice of AE was characterized by carelessness in both the provision of the services and the quality of those services. However, since ESDP III, greater focus has been placed on it, and since ESDP IV, the Ethiopian government has made IFAE one of its key sectors. During the revolution, it was also approached with a powerful, ground-breaking passion, but in
the early years of the post 1991 period, it was virtually completely ignored. In general, it was observed that governments have continued to pay little attention to AE for ideological reasons.

8. Implication and further study

It is possible to share the human, financial, and material resources required for AE as if there were a significant stakeholders/implementers commitment. As far as morale is concerned, sharing responsibilities boosts it and can help members feel valued and appreciated for their contributions to AE. In this view, one of the most crucial mindsets shifts that the government must promote is acceptance of the need to develop and implement approachable AE policies that were created in collaboration with all stakeholders. Therefore, the government should consider the growing number of nongovernmental organizations and community-based groups would likewise expand their services and efforts regarding the provision of AE. Because of this, forming partnerships with interested parties serves as a means of designing the benchmarks and evaluating the effectiveness of AE policy formulation and general practices.

As to the purpose of this study, its focus was mainly centred on building evidences about the AE policy initiatives and an overview the program practices. Honestly speaking, this study in not full of facts about the entire Ethiopian AE system rather bounded to see the policy and practice arena. Therefore, this study suggests scholars and research institutions to conduct further study on how to introduce solid structure of AE and strong coordination system at all levels; develop strategies and implementation guidelines to curb the problem increase adult educational inefficiency; design and apply transparent, accountable, decentralized and data-based financing system in the AE sub sector; empower AE to develop its own independent education policy framework through detaching its organization from the general education system; and related issues.

Declaration

Author contribution statement

Yalalem Assefa; Bekalu Tadesse Moges: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Shouket Ahmad Tlwani: Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data.

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Additional information

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