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## **Youth and adult literacy in Zambia, alternative strategies for financing, policy formulation, curriculum design and monitoring**

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative exploratory article attempted to engage with the subject of youth and adult literacy in Zambia. The inspiration was based on the author's experience in the field including supervision and marking of post-graduate work on youth and adult literacy. Most of the reports on youth and adult literacy tend to focus on the problems and not the solutions. Underscoring the importance of literacy to both an individual, the community and society as a whole, this article presents possible interventions in youth and adult literacy learning programmes in Zambia. The interventions are in form of alternative strategies for financing, policy formulation, curriculum design, and monitoring of literacy programmes. The interventions on financing include the introduction of government grants to literacy providers and the development of sustainable self-financing based literacy programmes. Policy formulation to include research-based data, a decentralized and participatory process. Stakeholder engagement is crucial for enhancing political will in the formulation of adult literacy policy in this regard. Similarly, curriculum design would require a decentralized participatory process and give attention to the growing diversity of adult learners in terms of needs and also both the local and global context of adult learning. Where digital skills, collaborative learning, active engagement and knowledge construction, problem-based learning, and critical thinking are emphasized. The monitoring of literacy programmes includes the reorganization of literacy programmes to allow for effective monitoring mechanisms.

**Keywords:** *Adult literacy, adult literacy policy, curriculum design, financing, literacy assessment*

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### **Introduction**

Youth and adult literacy (YAL) has been an area of concern by several governments in developing countries since the 1950s. However, from 1960 to 1990 there was a decreasing interest and support for literacy work owing to the lack of success of the previous efforts put in by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Sichula, 2018a). The renewed global vision and support towards youth and adult literacy came to light around the years 1990 to late 2000. Different adult literacy programmes (ALPs) emerged at global, regional and national levels in many countries. But the focus and support for YAL programmes in many countries have shifted towards literacy for children. It is believed that there are more long term benefits realized

from investing in mainstream education compared to specifically investing in YAL programmes alone (Sichula, 2020). It is further, claimed that in many developing countries, these programmes do not seem to achieve the goals hoped for and objectives. As a result, they have received less attention (Blunch, 2017, p. 1).

In some countries, YAL programmes have been completely abandoned. In the case of Zambia, the programmes run as non-formal functional literacy programmes but still lack the necessary support and commitment by most stakeholders including the government (Sichula, 2020). For example, Sichula (2018b) reports that YAL programmes in Zambia suffer negation in many aspects including lack of policy, inadequate funding, lack of teaching and learning material, the use of untrained literacy facilitators and lack of coordination among many challenges. The irony of this negation is that YAL is an important parameter for the measurement of the national Human Development Index (Ministry of National Development and Planning, 2017). This neglect has the potential to widen the socioeconomic gaps in society. The central argument in this article is that while other studies have established the benefits of investing in mainstream education rather than YAL, there is also research evidence that shows that ALPs affect other important socio-economic outcomes such as health, household income, and labour market participation by enhancing participants' health knowledge and income-generating activities (Blunch, 2017, p. 1). Therefore, this article addresses the need for Zambia to renew its interest and support for YAL and offers alternative strategies for financing, policy formulation, curriculum design, and monitoring of literacy programmes.

### **The concept of literacy**

The concept of literacy lends itself to different definitions and meanings. Generally, broad orientations of literacy have influenced what is known about literacy-the cognitive and sociocultural perspectives. The cognitive perspective has influenced the idea of seeing literacy as the ability to read and write. Street (2006) observes that the cognitivist view of literacy holds the notion that the acquisition of literacy is a universal process in which the attainment of reading and writing skills follows a specific developmental milestone for everyone. It ignores the different contexts in which people are found and the purposes of reading and writing in those contexts. On the other hand, the sociocultural perspective sees literacy development as embedded in the cultural, social, and historical contexts in which the people live (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000). From the sociocultural view, we see that there is no standard definition of literacy because there are different purposes for which people use literacy. However, for this article, cognizance is made to the effect that both perspectives have made a tremendous contribution to the body of knowledge on literacy and how it is acquired (Sichula, 2018b). Therefore, overstressing one perspective over the other will be ignoring the important contribution of the other perspective.

This work does not claim or assume that the cognitive and sociocultural views of literacy are independent of each other, they are all bound by the sociocultural context. Therefore, a combination of both views is very important in literacy education and provision. This work goes with a contemporary view of literacy, that there is not one literacy but multiple situated and social practices of how people use reading and writing in their daily lives" (Sichula & Genis, 2019, Rogers & Street, 2012). We see literacy as a tool for everyday communication among the people in their contexts and domains of life (Benavot, 2015). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, varied communication practices involve but not limited to the use of digital tools through which we convey messages among ourselves for different purposes. Therefore, in the context of youth and adult literacy

learning the way we define literacy influences the goals and objectives of the literacy programme and the methods used to implement, monitor and evaluate the literacy programmes (Oputu & Oghenekohwo, 2017; Sichula, 2016).

In today's fast-changing world, literacy education is essential for equipping populations with knowledge and skills for adapting and responding appropriately to changes emanating from global technology. This is important especially for developing countries because literacy enhances the people's potential and capacity to increase their capabilities to adapt and take control of forces around them (Freire, 2014). When the purpose of literacy is human transformation (Freire, 1993), it plays a significant role in empowering and transforming the lives of the individuals by making them challenge the status quo and rethink their status in societies they live in by further challenging the power relations (Freire, 1985). This is important for the development of a liberated human capital for a just and literate society. Several literacy programmes in Africa are tailored towards eliminating the various forms of discrimination such as gender gaps which have been going on for a long time- a major hindrance to human progress (Dutt, 2017). It is also key towards sustainable socio-economic, environmental and political development of any nation (UNESCO, 2015). In this regard the focus is never on what literacy can do to the people but what the people can do with literacy. It is believed that literacy has power and those who have it have used it to oppress others (Freire, 1973). Therefore, changing this narrative is only possible when the emphasis and investment in literacy education are on how people can use literacy to transform their lives rather than teaching them reading and writing for its own sake.

### **Literacy and development**

A lot has been said and written on how literacy is linked to human development. For example, it is believed that when people have literacy [skills of reading and writing] other variables related to the general well-being of the people also improve (Sichula, Luchembe, & Chakanika, 2016a; Sprow Forte, 2012). Such as improved health, income, employment opportunities, food production, and poverty situation tend to minimize among the literate than those labelled illiterate (Street, 2006; UNESCO, 1999; Wagner, 1995). Furthermore, it is argued that a higher level of literacy among the population will lead to socioeconomic gains such as improved health, better schooling leading to higher national literacy levels, and this will, in turn, lead directly or indirectly to greater economic benefits all round (Rogers, 1997; Wagner, 1995). This claim is valid in context because it is also known that it is not the mere acquisition of literacy skills that automatically lead to improvement in the lives of the people, but the uses of literacy in their everyday lives (Rogers & Street, 2012; Street, 2006). Fundamentally, many literacy programmes have incorporated vocational skills to allow obtain maximum benefits.

Furthermore, literacy skills are associated with the development and empowerment of the people (Roberts, 2000). It is said to enable the attainment of a wide range of other sustainable skills, abilities, and behaviours essential for the betterment of society (Barton & Papen, 2005). These include personal and communal responsibility for the sustainable use of natural resources for sustainable development (Sichula, 2016; Sichula et. al., 2016a). Bertschy, Kinzty, & Lehman (2013) points out that literacy facilitates citizen's value re-orientation and attitudinal change for the acquisition of vocational and functional skills including knowledge that is beneficial to the individual and collective drive for a better society. In the context of a developing country like Zambia, this suggests a type of literacy programme capable of meeting the needs of the population

for a meaningful life (Clark, 1993; Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, 2003). Fundamentally, for the youths and adults, the social benefits of literacy are more enhanced when programs are integrated and linked to the broader movement for social change (Chang, 2013). Literacy programmes that are part of a broader human initiative for change, participatory, and culturally-sensitive are more empowering.

### **Theoretical perspectives**

This work adopts the human capital theory to inform and shape the arguments and analysis of the support for investing in youth and adult literacy learning. This is because investing in YAL programmes is essentially investing in human capital development (Aitchinson & Alidou, 2009). The relationship between education and economic growth is a well-known fact in both education research and practice (Owusu-Agyeman, 2019). Although this relationship is often spoken in terms of formal education, the human capital theory goes beyond investment in formal education. It recognizes all forms of education including non-formal and informal learning (Balatti, Black, & Falk, 2006). Essentially because knowledge acquisition and skills development does not only happen in a formal learning setting. Adult learners participate in other educational activities outside the formal education setting where they acquire a variety of skills and knowledge to improve their practice and livelihoods (Bullock, 2014; Sichula, Luchembe, & Chakanika, 2016b).

In keeping with the human capital theory, public expenditure on education is justifiable and widely informs education financing both in developed and developing nations (Sichula, 2020). The justification is mainly premised upon the economic returns of investment in education. The theory rests on the assumption that investment in education (formal, non-formal and informal modes) is highly instrumental and necessary to improve productivity among the population of any nation (Marginson, 2019). This also provides more learning opportunities for the population and prepares people for active participation in the ever-changing global economy especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It offers learning opportunities, especially to out-of-school youth and adults. This has the potential to increase the skill stock of the out-of-school youth and adults for social and economic productivity (Almendarez, 2013; Sichula, 2016; 2020).

It is also implied that the essence of investing in human capital is to provide the new generation with appropriate knowledge from both current and previous generations and teach them how the existing knowledge should be used to develop new products, processes, and methods through creative approaches (Almendarez, 2013). Therefore, an investment in adult literacy learning is seen as important because literacy is linked to all aspects of human life and crucially important for the well-being of the people (Barton & Papen, 2005; UNESCO, 2015). Alongside financing, policy plays an important role because it is highly instrumental in guiding all aspects of adult literacy provision including financing. Policy on education is what government chooses as guidance for education-related action (Sapru, 1994). Education policy is one of the priorities for governments across the world particularly on the impact on education outcomes and implications for the economic prosperity of nations. Most education policies in Africa are formulated by government Ministries of Education or Departments of Education (Owen, 2014).

The approach is generally centralised and sometimes the input is rarely research-based. It is more about the power exercised by the powerful in society to determine policy decisions and bring about change (Sapru, 1994). However, in an ideal situation education policy formulation is said to be informed by the need to solve a particular problem and the entire process should be informed by empirical research-based data. The process is said to be objective, rational and

systematic involving all parties to the education agenda (McDonnell, 2012; Howlett, & Mukherjee, 2017). Fundamentally, the entire process is interwoven within the aspirations and goals of a nation. This is to say education policies are merely rules and laws that govern the operations of an education system in a country. The policies are also crucial for monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of education programmes and their impact on society. These theoretical perspectives were crucial for analyzing the investment and monitoring of adult literacy programmes in Zambia.

## **Methodology**

The article followed a detailed literature review process to gain insight on the financing, policy formulation, and monitoring and evaluation strategies of adult literacy learning. It involved searching for relevant and scholarly material through the use of keywords derived from the purpose of the study namely *financing adult literacy*, *adult literacy policy formulation*, and *adult literacy monitoring and evaluation*. An online search was conducted through EBSCOhost and limited the search to the period 2010-2020 and databases to ERIC, Academic Search Premier, eBook Collection, and Education Research Complete. The sample came to 62 articles and 57 book chapters. We also reviewed Zambia's General Education reports including Youth and Adult Literacy and UNESCO's report on the state of adult education and development of adult education in Sub-Saharan Africa. All the documents were analyzed qualitatively through a document analysis approach. Informed by the human capital theory on public expenditure on education and human capital in particular, and the importance of policy in financing education as well as monitoring and evaluating its outcomes, the criteria for review was set on the following: establishing and analyzing what the articles say about financing adult literacy; the specific economic environments that support the kind and types of financing for youth and adult literacy; whether or not the financing strategies can be applied to any context-developed and developing nations; and the sustainability of the financing strategies.

Similarly, the policy formulation strategies that are used in developing policies for adult literacy learning; the effectiveness of the strategies and finally established how the literacy programmes are monitored and evaluated and what lessons can be drawn from these evaluations. Through thematic analysis, themes from the articles and book chapters were generated to identify and describe both implicit and explicit views of the textual data. The actual process and procedure of analysis consisted of reading and re-reading the articles and book chapters to generate the sense based on the questions indicated above, this was followed by highlighting, labelling and segmenting sections, portions, and paragraphs of the text that were interesting to the questions. The findings are presented under the following themes: provision of youth and adult literacy (YAL); financing; policy formulation and monitoring and evaluation of the literacy programmes.

## **Provision of Youth and Adult Literacy**

The review of the literature revealed that Zambia like many other countries in Africa faces many challenges in the provision of YAL. Firstly, the country adopted a comprehensive definition of youth and adult literacy from CONFINTEA V (The Fifth International Conference on Adult Education of 1997); from which adult literacy is broadly conceived as the basic knowledge and skills needed by all in a rapidly changing world, and is a fundamental human right. Drawing from a socially, economically and politically transformed society literacy is a necessary skill in itself and one of the foundations of other life skills (UNESCO, 1997). In this recognition, the country

has for some time been making efforts and maintain the commitment towards improving adult literacy provision to address the adult literacy gaps among the citizens (Sichula, 2018b). This has been through the implementation of educational programmes that address the needs of the different groups in society (Sichula, 2016). With less than a decade remaining to the end date of the vision 2030, Zambia is striving hard to attain high levels of adult literacy among many goals of the 2030 Vision. The provision of youth and adult literacy in Zambia involves many players both government and non-government actors. Under the government provision, two major ministries are responsible for adult literacy provision and these are the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) and the Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare (MCDSW).

The Ministry of General Education Provides YAL mainly through the Department known as the Directorate of Open and Distance Learning (DODE) in a unit called Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Youth and adult literacy is provided as both formal and non-formal education (Sichula & Genis, 2019). The Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare is mainly responsible for providing non-formal adult literacy programmes which take a functional literacy approach in providing skills training, micro-finance and agricultural literacy. The provision is further separated based on urban and rural areas. In the urban setting, the provision focuses on schooling and skills for vocational purposes, trading and entrepreneurship, while in the rural areas the concentration is agricultural-based literacy. This is because, in Zambia, rural populations largely depend on agriculture as their main source of livelihood (MCDSW, 20003; Sichula, 2020). Non-formal adult learning activities involve meaningful lifelong learning activities that are organized and are carried out outside the formal learning institutions. The activities are designed to meet the learning goals of adults in various contexts (Sichula, 2018).

They are often context-based in the sense that learning activities that are offered in one area may never be offered in another. Further, the review established that most of the facilitators involved in non-formal literacy provision are volunteers who are equipped with only basic skills and knowledge in teaching literacy to their participants. Non-formal adult literacy provision involves programmes such as agriculture-based skills development, hygiene and sanitation education, basic reading and writing, and community empowerment programmes that are centred on micro-financing and credit programmes. The main participants are women who are regarded and classified as vulnerable but viable. They are trained in skills such as tailoring, tie-dye including weaving (Mkandawire & Tambulukani, 2017). It is also anticipated that non-formal literacy education could develop appropriate attitudinal change among citizens for them to take deliberate actions in altering the current discontent situations in the country. Though not emphasized in the programmes, it is hoped that the participants may somehow develop problem-solving and decision-making skills that bear positive results on the economy, environment, and social well-being. Unfortunately, most of the non-formal adult literacy programmes that have been carried out in the country have failed to produce these gains (Banda, 2019).

The Ministry of General Education involves teaching and learning subjects such as Sciences, Mathematics, English and other formal based subjects. Formal adult literacy learning activities, on the other hand, are more structured, equally deliberate educational experiences that occur in an educational institution such as a school (Sichula, 2018). They are characterized by structured learning objectives, generalized curriculum, fixed time frames and certification (Rogers, 2005). Formal adult literacy learning is usually institutional-based, structured and the learners are given certification at the end. Most formal based literacy programmes do not go on for less than 6 months and the programmes are not context-based. The facilitator's informal literacy learning in Zambia are usually experts who are well trained-typically as school teachers (Ministry of

Education Science Vocational Training and Early Education, 2012). Formal provision of adult literacy involves the participants being awarded credit qualifications such as grade 7, 8, 9 and 12 school certificates.

Government efforts are supplemented by non-state actors such as international and local non-government organizations, Community-Based Organizations, and Faith-Based Organizations (Ministry of Education, 2015). The literacy programmes that they provide can either involve functional literacy or basic literacy depending on their overall goals and mission. For both government and non-government providers, the purpose of providing literacy is to bring about poverty alleviation among the people mainly through functional based literacy activities (Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, 2003) and provide continuing education opportunities for those who did not manage to attend formal schooling due to various reasons (Ministry of Education, 2015). Despite many years of such interventions, youth and adult literacy programmes have continued to fail to meet their targets. The challenges have highlighted in terms of underfunding, absence of policy, poor curriculum design and implementation and lack of monitoring of literacy programmes. These are discussed in detail in the following section.

## **Financing**

The financing of youth and adult literacy in Zambia has continued to be a challenge. For example, in the 2020 national budget, the education sector was allocated ZMK11.2 million (US\$533,333.3) compared to ZMK13.9 million (US\$661,904.8) in 2019. Youth and adult literacy allocation was reduced by 30% in 2020 and yet this is a major sector for addressing youth and adults who fall out of the school system and capacitate them to effectively contribute to national development. Inadequate funding of literacy implies the overall success of youth and adult literacy programmes in the country (UNESCO, 2016). Further, Sichula (2020) points out that; “Literacy programmes are funded as part of the entire budgetary allocation for each of the two ministries (MoE and MCDSW) and often receive a meagre allocation of resources. This has negatively affected research on adult literacy in the nation, the training of literacy instructors and the production of teaching and learning materials to be specific”. Without adequate funding of literacy programs, the goal of eradicating illiteracy in the country becomes hard to achieve.

## **Alternative funding interventions**

### *a. Government grants*

The main responsibility to finance education in any country is largely that of the state. Therefore, considering that education is a human right, it should be made accessible to every citizen regardless of age and gender. For Zambia, one of the financing options for YAL would be to consider extending the grants to government institutions, and departments that involved in the provision of youth and adult literacy programmes. This will be a remarkable step in realizing the need to address the literacy disparities in Zambian society especially among the youths who are the key resource in driving the country’s national development agenda. The global benchmark for a minimum cost of a meaningful literacy programme per person is estimated at US\$50 and if this adopted in this alternative it would provide an important boost to literacy programmes. Giving adult literacy institutions grants may also help in catering for neglected areas such as providing incentives for the facilitators who in most cases are underpaid or teach on a volunteer basis.

*b. Developing sustainable self-financing based literacy programmes*

This is concerned with refocusing the literacy programmes from mere teaching of reading and writing to incorporating skills and competencies for income generation which can be channelled towards financing literacy programmes. Institutions and government departments involved in the provision of YAL may have to look at initiating and innovating funding sources for literacy programmes. Income ventures may include agricultural activities with the involvement of literacy participants to raise finances for literacy programmes. Engagement in several available income-generating activities to support their literacy activities. The advantage of this approach is that the literacy participants are both learning and providing their labour for income-generating activities. This approach is embedded in the philosophy of education-with-production – a fundamental element of indigenous adult education. In this context, the aim of adult education is the dual function of promoting individual and societal growth (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2012). Functional literacy in the manner it has been provided has not produced the intended gains because the implementation and practice have not been deliberate and has lacked consistency. In this approach, there is a deliberate intention to link theory to practical application to give learners an all-round development and gains from a literacy programme, this will also enable closing the existing gaps between the idea of simply learning to read and write for its own sake and the practical application of writing and reading to their everyday lives (Papen, 2005; Prinsloo, 2013).

So if the youth and adult literacy programmes are designed and implemented in a manner that makes the programmes relevant by solving the problems of different communities, they are likely to attract sponsors [who may include the learners themselves to pay for the service] to sustain the programmes. Currently, the notion of education-with-production is missing in the literacy programmes in Zambia, hence, the additional challenge of financing literacy programmes. Examples may include literacy education with food production for community food security, and literacy with vocational skills (Anonuevo & Bernhardt, 2011). Most literacy programmes in Zambia have failed to be sustained because they have for a long time depended on external funding. While this is crucial, it is generally agreed that local initiatives and support for literacy have far-reaching sustainable benefits and potential than externally stimulated and supported programmes. The idea is that something that is initiated locally receives the needed support and is guaranteed in terms of the sense of ownership by the local people themselves (Campbell & Burnaby, 2001). Thus, the option of self-financing at a community level if properly explored by involving and incorporating the voice of the community may produce positive financing solutions for literacy programmes in the poor communities of the country. In other words, a community-driven funding initiative and system for youth and adult literacy can only be developed and done by the community themselves through their assets (Kerka, 2003), and if the initiative is not forthcoming from within the community, initial help from external development agencies can come in to stimulate the interest (Rubin et al., 2012; Tisdell, 2013). In support of this, UNESCO (1999) reports on the reaffirmation of delegates of the CONFINTEA V that only human-centred development and a participatory society based on the full respect of human rights will lead to sustainable and equitable development.

## **Policy formulation**

By 2008 countries such as Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique, Madagascar and Zimbabwe had either specific ratified national adult literacy policies or had lifelong learning education policies in which adult education is recognized as a human right, while Zambia lacked an articulated policy on youth and adult literacy (Ministry of Education, 2008; UNESCO, 2009). In Zambia, there has never been an independent national policy on youth and literacy learning. Adult literacy is aligned to other national policies such as Community Development, National Cultural Policy, Educating our Future National Youth Policy, National Agriculture Policy, National Gender Policy, National Employment and Labour Market Policy, Science and Technology Policy (Ministry of Education, 2008). This scattered policy representation creates an impression that adult learning is an insignificant element of the education sector and development of Zambia. This picture resonates with a weak and poor mechanism for cooperation and coordination among these ministries. Despite Zambia having been part of the CONFINTEA V and adopting the definition of adult literacy, there is no information on the progress made on the resolutions on policy and legislations of adult literacy education Post-CONFINTEA V. As it stands the policy on adult literacy education in Zambia has been in draft form since 2004 and there is no public information as to what has been the hold-up and the progress made so far (Sichula, 2018b). The failure to ratify the adult literacy policy reflects a potent problem— an indication of the marginalization of youth and adult literacy education. The lack of comprehensive policy and legislation on adult literacy education has a direct negative impact on funding, organization, implementation and success of adult literacy programmes.

However, through the National Implementation Framework III (NIF III), for the period 2010-2015 (Ministry of Education, 2010), nine objectives were set of which the seventh one was to increase adult literacy levels by expanding educational facilities and vocational training and raising awareness of the literacy programmes. Now it is important to indicate here that this and several adult literacy interventions have often been directed at distant issues rather than the core elements which are policy and funding. The policy will direct funding and other developments needed in the adult literacy education sub-sector in the country.

Some of the probable policymaking interventions may include reliable data on the immediate and long terms needs for adult literacy education in Zambia. The need for research and valid reliable data in policymaking cannot be overemphasized, although this aspect remains ignored in most policy-making processes (Bogenschneider, Corbett, & Parrott, 2019). An exact search on google scholar for “youth and adult literacy education in Zambia” revealed a total of 7,720 results. Out of this, only 15 studies were specific on adult literacy education studies conducted between the period 2015-2021. Most of these studies were done by few academics from the University of Zambia and postgraduate students.

The consideration of adult literacy needs may also require a consultative, participatory process in which the needs could be considered in the context of the vision of lifelong learning and knowledge society-this process is part of the agenda-setting for policy formulation (Yackee, 2015). Decentralization is part of the solution for policy function, planning and standards-setting (UNESCO, 2009). But this is only attainable with genuine political will because it requires the financing of literacy programmes and activities at the local government level – a situation that is practically unattainable as local government departments are often confronted with funding challenges for their programmes (Chishimba, Kazonga, & Nsenduluka, 2020). The policy may also require to be linked to the short term and long term national development agendas, especially on human development. Literacy has been linked to poverty alleviation, improved health, and

income among others in most poor communities (Aitchison, 2005), implying that the policy cannot leave out gender, the use of inter-sectoral approaches and all forms of learning: formal, non-formal and informal learning.

### **Curriculum design**

In the ever-changing global context of adult learning, the curriculum for youth and adult literacy education cannot remain the same. Its transformation is likely to be informed and shaped by the diversity of the adult learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, their literacy needs and largely their communities (Argüelles, 2016), including the national adopted definition of adult literacy education (UNESCO, 2013a). Considering the political, economic and social transformation of the world today, literacy needs to cater to myriad aspects of human life and the continuously changing global space (Hanemann, 2015; UNESCO, 2009). In the process, the curriculum is directed at responding to these changes in the light of the needs of the participants and the larger community. Central to literacy in this context is the increased demand for digital literacy skills for human communication, socialization, e-commerce and generally human survival. Information society that is characterized by an information-literate population (Argüelles, 2016). This objective places an additional demand on youth and adult literacy curricula in different contexts to reflect its content in view of the global context of adult literacy. Active engagement and knowledge construction, more self-directed learning, discovery learning, critical thinking, and collaborating learning are crucial skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Innovation, creativity, and responsiveness in the curriculum design of literacy programmes are therefore inevitable to develop a learner and context responsive curriculum (Rodriguez, 2015). This is to say that the curricula for literacy programmes could aim at socially, economically and digitally required attitudes of the people in the modern world. These are essential for facilitating development in the participants of self-reliance, self-discipline and leadership qualities at individual and community levels.

Unemployment has been one of the major problems faced by many poor communities in developing countries where most literacy programmes are implemented (Blunch, 2017). For example, in Zambia youth unemployment has been a perpetual problem faced by the country. Currently, the unemployment rate is estimated at 43.7 per cent of the total national population of 17,381, 169 (Central Statistical Office & Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2019). Apart from other government interventions which included promotion of agriculture and skills development through skills training centres, adult literacy programmes can make a substantial contribution through vocational oriented adult literacy learning. This approach may incorporate both skills for paid employment and self-employment. Fundamentally, vocational skills for self-employment would be of more value and beneficial to the learners and graduates than skills for paid employment because the socio-economic space is quite small to accommodate most of the graduates. The advantage of skills for self-employment is that they lead to innovation and creativity and ultimately employment creation (Mayombe & Lombard, 2015). Therefore, curriculum design for youth and adult literacy programmes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would require relevance to issues of job creation and marketable literacy skills for individual and community development benefits.

## **Monitoring of literacy programmes**

The absence and sometimes poor monitoring of literacy learning programmes have been one of the reasons for the failure of many literacy programmes in poor communities. In this regard monitoring refers to checking on the implementation of the literacy programme, how it is running, the literacy activities involved and ensure that everything is happening as intended. It involves a systematic process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting information about the programme (UNESCO, 2013b). Although Zambia has monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for formal education, there are is a clear system for monitoring and evaluating YAL programmes. This is a reason why most statistics given on the country's youth and adult literacy rates are based on not so comprehensive assessments. They often include self-assessment, completion of some level of schooling, and local language spoken (Zambia Statistics Agency, Ministry of Health , & ICF, 2019). Available reports on youth and adult literacy programmes are mainly by National Assembly Committees on Education specifically by a sub-committee on youth and adult literacy in Zambia (National Assembly of Zambia, 2009, 2014). These reports are not robust as they concentrate on specific policy issues and they are often not reported regularly as they are largely dependent on government priorities on education in a given national budget and development plan. Of which adult literacy continues to hold marginal attention.

The intervention for literacy monitoring would include several options. The first step is the reorganization and management of youth and adult literacy learning programmes, which has been lacking (Sichula, 2020). There is still no proper coordination of YAL literacy learning programmes despite being structured within specific government Ministries of General Education and Community Development (Sichula, 2018b). If the issue of coordination is comprehensively dealt with, quarterly performance reports on adult literacy programmes would facilitate the monitoring process. These reports could be submitted by literacy organizers and providers at each centre to the coordinating office of the literacy programmes taking place in various communities.

Additionally, the University of Zambia, through the Department of Adult Education could be incorporated to assist in monitoring adult literacy programmes in the country. The importance of monitoring literacy programmes is not only limited to ensuring achieving the targets of the literacy programmes but also providing valid information that could inform policy and future literacy programme design and implementation. Around 2009 there was an Education and Skills Sector Advisory Group which was a consultative forum that advised and monitored the implementation of education sector programmes in the Fifth National Development Plan. However, there is neither clear information on the success of this group nor its current existence. Additionally, the subsequent national development plans (Sixth and Seventh) gave no attention to adult literacy but rather focused on Technical Vocational Education Training (TEVET)-based skills development (Ministry of Finance and National Planning, 2011; Ministry of National Development and Planning, 2017). Therefore, a fully functioning literacy monitoring system is essential to track the national progress and developments in the area of adult literacy.

## **Conclusion**

This article has argued for and articulated the key interventions required for the improvement of youth and adult literacy in Zambia. The interventions are in form of alternative strategies for financing, policy formulation, curriculum design, and monitoring of literacy programmes. The interventions on financing include the introduction of government grants to literacy providers and the development of sustainable self-financing based literacy programmes. In terms of policy

formulation, the articles conclude that there is little to no emphasis on research-based data, a decentralized and participatory process. It should be acknowledged and emphasized that stakeholder engagement is important in the formulation of adult literacy policy. This applies to curriculum design which would require a decentralized participatory process. Given the growing diversity of adult learners in terms of needs influenced by both the local and global context of adult learning, ignoring stakeholder involvement will be a recipe for the failure of youth and adult literacy programmes. It has been established the most literacy programmes lack monitoring and evaluation. This has affected a proper reorganization of literacy programmes for purposes of meeting the literacy needs of the intended beneficiaries. It needs stressing that adult literacy is very important in facilitating human development in several ways. Therefore, the financing of adult literacy programmes would need more attention even in the national budgeting of the education sector. Improved financing of youth and adults will have implications in all aspects of the youth and adult literacy programmes in the country.

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