Research Article

Analysis of the Adult Education Policy Initiatives in Ethiopia: Implications for Policy Reconsideration

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Using a qualitative research approach, this article analyzes the adult education policy initiatives in Ethiopia as of 1994. The data were collected from nine adult education professionals/officers who are working at regional-, zonal-, and district-level education offices through in-depth interviews and official documents. The results indicated that the adult education initiatives of the country lack consistency and clarity and affected the practice of adult education. The National Adult Education Strategy (NAES) and its implementation guideline lack a clear framework for stakeholders to collaborate effectively in the provision of the program. Moreover, different policy issues such as partnership, coordination mechanisms, communication strategy, funding, innovation, and monitoring and evaluation were rarely considered in the implementation of the policy. Therefore, for effective adult education provision, a clear adult education policy and greater synergy between policies and practices must be in place.

1. Introduction

The role of adult education for development has been increasingly recognized globally since the First International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA I) in 1949. To provoke countries towards meeting basic learning skills and needs, the World Conference on "Education for All" and Dakar Framework for Action were held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, and Dakar, Senegal, in 2000, respectively [1, 2]. The Dakar Framework for Action urged member countries to develop national plans by 2002 to achieve EFA goals and targets (concerning adult education/literacy) no later than 2015 [2]. However, many education/literacy initiatives, especially in developing countries, including Ethiopia, were not effective due to varieties of interrelated challenges, including the local socioeconomic reality of the country and learners, adult educators' competencies, adult learners' responsibilities and motivations, engagement of politicians, civil society, and other stakeholders, the quality and relevance of the content of the teaching material and evaluations, resource management, and the level of technical coordination [3–5]. It calls therefore for a concrete adult education policy to be put in place as it plays a significant role in the development of adult education [4, 6, 7]. Policies and legislative measures for adult education need to be comprehensive, inclusive, and integrated within a lifelong and life-wide learning perspective, based on sector-wide and inter-sectoral approaches considering its various forms [6, 8].

Endorsing adult education policy is not an end by itself; continuous follow-up and evaluation should be conducted to make sure that the policy is being implemented as promised and take into account emerging challenges [4, 6]. Here, what policy issues should be taken into account in the time of policy formulation and implementation is an important question. Many successful adult education initiatives in Asia and Pacific countries indicated that partnership/collaboration, coordination mechanism, advocacy/communication strategy, funding, innovation, and monitoring and evaluation are important factors for the success of adult literacy/education, and these factors should be considered when adult education policies are developed [4].

In Ethiopia, even if adult education[1] has been practiced for a long period, in both traditional and modern forms of

learning [9], it lacks consistency in its provision as it has not been framed by an adult education-specific policy [3, 10]. During the imperial period, activities related to both the institutionalization and practice of adult education, more appropriately for adult literacy, were made. Among others, the 1944 mass education policy, the 1955 government notice on fundamental education, and the opening of *Birhanh Zare New* (literally, "your light is today") Institute in Addis Ababa in 1948, the Work Oriented Adult Literacy Program (WOALP) (1967/8–1972/3), which was implemented in agreement with UNESCO and UNDP, were the major policies to promote adult education in the country [9, 10]. During the Derg regime[2], adult education was a national agenda, and millions of illiterate adults were reached by the National Literacy Campaign [9–12]. The country got remarkable achievement in adult literacy through the Campaign and won the 1980 UNESCO's International Reading Association Literacy Prize [12]. After the Derg government was overthrown by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government in 1991, now renamed as Prosperity Party, a new Education and Training Policy (ETP) was endorsed in 1994. However, the policy document did not emphasize adult education/literacy. The country endorsed its National Adult Education Strategy (NAES) and its implementation guideline in 2008 and 2011, respectively. Even after the endorsement of the strategy and the implementation guideline, national adult education reports (e.g., Amhara Regional State Education Bureau [13, 14], annual education statistics abstracts [15], and global reports [16]) show that adult education implementation in the country is not adequate. This could be associated with the low attention still being given to adult literacy/education [3, 17]. Concerning this, Lewis [18] noted that Education for All as an enterprise has in practice paid far less attention to some targets than others. The EFA Global Monitoring Report of 2015 showed that Ethiopia was one among other countries that do not bring significant improvement in literacy in the year 2015 [16].

MoE [19] indicates that the participation of stakeholders in adult education provision is low. The non/low participation of the responsible sectors in turn has contributed to low achievement in adult education development [3, 20]. The low collaboration among stakeholders is in one way or another directly related to the adult education policy frameworks of the country. Some studies have been conducted on the practice of adult education programs in different parts of the country and conclude that the provision of adult education is not satisfactory [17, 21–26]. However, studies related to adult education policy are rare. Fewer studies mention some policy issues though not explicitly discussed [3, 11, 21, 27]. Abate and Adamu [3] indicated that lack of clear strategy and implementation guidelines, lack of accountability procedures, and low political/policy commitment are affecting the adult education programs. Gelana's [21] study focused on the "assessment of Ethiopia's progress towards attaining Integrated Functional Adult Literacy," and it indicates that Ethiopia seems far from achieving the Dakar target of halving adult illiteracy in 2015.

However, the study did not critique the policy itself, but rather acknowledged that adult education policies and strategies are in place and encouraging. Tedila [27] in his study on "an evaluation of the implementation of Ethiopia's National Adult Education Strategy of (2008)" clearly pointed out that the national adult education program was not successfully implemented. Yet his study did not critically evaluate the NAES itself from policy perspectives, rather his study simply evaluated the adult education practices against what has been stated in the strategy. Even his study did not include the FAL implementation guidelines, which were developed in 2011 to help the NAES implement successfully.

Therefore, the purposes of this study were to critically analyze (1) how the adult education policy documents frame priorities, possibilities, and roles and responsibilities for adult education providers; (2) the policy implementation against what has been promised in the policy documents; and (3) on these grounds to provide policy recommendations.

2. Methods

This study followed a qualitative research approach, which supplements document analysis with some empirical data through in-depth interviews. Official policy documents on adult education from 1994 to the present were chosen. This period has been chosen because the current education policy of the country was developed in 1994 and other initiatives have been rolling since then and to include the most recent and relevant policy documents on adult education in the analysis. This consisted of a period that sidelined adult education (1994 to 2005) and a period that started paying a relatively increased attention to adult education from 2005 onwards.

Hence, all of the relevant adult education policy-related government documents, which are the main source of data, in the chosen period, were the subject of the study. The documents are produced by the Ministry of Education, sometimes with the support of DVV International. These documents are the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy of the 1994 [28], Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP I) [29], ESDP II [30], ESDP III [31], ESDP IV [32], ESDP V [19], National Adult Education Strategy (NAES) [33], and Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) Implementation Guideline (MoE, 2011).

General guiding questions such as "what are the merits and demerits of the policy documents," "how the documents frame priorities for adult education providers," and "how the roles and responsibilities of providers are stated in the policy documents (especially in the NAES and its implementation guidelines)" were used to elicit the information from the documents.

In-depth interviews were conducted with nine adult education professionals/officers, who are working at regional-, zonal-, and district-level education offices. The interviewees were purposefully selected by taking into account their knowledge of the policy documents and implementation of the policy. They have rich experiences in managing, supervising, and evaluating adult education programs in different places of the country. Their views

about the policy documents and their feeling about the actual implementation of the policy that has been promised in the documents were critically examined. The guiding questions used for document review were also used to guide the interview. In addition, the participants were asked "whether the issues promised in the policy documents are being implemented properly." The interview data have two purposes: to corroborate evidence from the document reviews and to provide additional data about the implementation of the policy—what follows the policy documents.

The guiding questions used for the documentary analysis and the interview were validated by peers. Colleagues, who work as a lecturer in the Department of Adult Education and Community Development where I work, commented on the instruments. Then, pretest of the tools was conducted with three officers/experts who work in the area of adult education, and minor modification was made before the interview for the main study has been conducted.

The data were analyzed using a reflexive thematic analysis approach in the following steps: familiarizing with the data, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, developing themes, and writing up [34, 35]. The paper (the discussion) is structured into two major sections. Firstly, the merits and demerits of the policy documents are discussed with subsections of (1) the policy environment (more emphasis has been given to political commitment) and (2) the planning of the adult education programs, the adult education strategy, and implementation guidelines. Secondly, how the policy documents give priority to the important policy issues such as partnership/collaboration, coordination mechanisms, communication systems, funding, innovation, and monitoring and evaluation and how these issues are being implemented are discussed. These policy issues are not emerging themes from the analysis, rather taken from the literature and used to structure and frame the data analysis. These factors were identified by Kee and Bajracharya [4] from the careful analysis of many successful adult education initiatives (i.e., Literacy Initiative for Empowerment programs) in the Asian Pacific countries. I believe that these are too important for the Ethiopian context.

Ethical issues were properly managed. Participants were asked to sign written consent even if they prefer to have just oral consent. To keep confidentiality, for direct quotations, participants were addressed using pseudo-names. Accordingly, the names mentioned in the text as "Yetnaye," "*Yigzaw*," "*Wondmnew*," and "*Selamu*" are pseudo-names. All of the documents that are analyzed are not confidential—they are public, available in any educational institution including in my office in print and on the website of the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia in soft copy. As a result, permission to access and review the documents was not requested from somebody else.

3. Results and Discussion

As stated briefly in the introduction section, the focus of this study was the policy development of Ethiopia from the mid-1990s. Nine overlapping themes were constructed from the data. These are (1) the policy environment; (2) the planning of the adult education programs; (3) the adult education strategy and implementation guidelines; (4) partnership/collaboration; (5) coordination mechanisms; (6) communication strategy; (7) funding; (8) innovation; and (9) monitoring and evaluation.

3.1. The Policy Environment: Political Commitment. Globally, it is well recognized that policy affects the education system of countries [36, 37], and thus, the policy initiatives and implementations need a favorable policy environment. UIL (2016, p.9) in its 2015 recommendations on adult education and learning urges countries to nurture a favorable policy environment.

Member states should consider raising awareness, through legislation, institutions, and sustained political commitment, of adult learning and education as an essential component of the right to education and a key pillar in the education system.

However, trends indicated that policy initiatives are usually symbolic and often remain as rhetoric [17, 37]. In Ethiopia, even though different policy initiatives have been endorsed by the government, the policy implementation is being challenged by the lack of a good policy environment. The attention given to adult education by the government is low—most of the initiatives remain rhetoric and lack sustained political commitment. As to Little [36], political will is not a sufficient ingredient of education reform in practice, because education reforms, usually a political enterprise, require due consideration of different political factors and continued commitment [38].

Although the new Education and Training Policy (ETP) was endorsed in 1994 and put a high priority on education for poverty eradication and development, compared with the formal education system, the ETP says very little about adult education (see [28]). It assumes that adult and nonformal education is of less strategic importance for the development of the country than formal education. As neither the term adult education nor its concepts are not mentioned in this policy document, it could be argued that adult education seems to have been considered a "less deserving" political/policy agenda in the country. Scholars (e.g., [10–12, 39]) provided critics of the ETP. Kenea [11] pointed out that ignoring the agrarian adult workforce for a country that follows an agriculture-led industrialization development strategy could be surprising. Negash [39] also convincingly argued that thinking of national development without high attention to the education of adults is merely an ambitious plan. The marginalization of adult education in the ETP of the country is further clearly indicated in the two subsequent ETP implementation programs, ESDP I and ESDP II, discussed in the next section, the planning of the adult education programs.

Effective implementation of the policy initiatives, which are promised by the government, needs the political commitment of the government [38]. The involvement of political authorities is necessary for the development of adult education initiatives [3, 5]. For example, in Asia and the

Pacific countries, particularly in India, Afghanistan, and China, the participation of government officials seemed to have produced a significant impact in building public awareness and rallying partners [4]. The Derg government in Ethiopia was notable for moving the literacy program forward because high-level government officials were involved in the implementation of the program. Although the EPDRF has launched three consecutive adult education programs since ESDP III, its commitment to implementing them is low. The government has shown an intention to leave the literacy teaching to volunteers (MoE, 2011). Lack of a policy and legislative framework, absence of appropriate adult education structures, unskilled human resources, poor understanding of the contribution of adult education to other development programs, and inadequate financial and material resources for the implementation of the program are the major indicators of the low commitment of the government [3]. Thus, it could be concluded that the programs seem to be developed for international consumption [11] because the initiatives are usually symbolic and often remain as rhetoric [17, 37].

3.2. The Planning of the Adult Education Programs. The ESDPs, sometimes called program action plans, which are originating from the ETP, are examples of plans in the education sector. The ESDPs constitute some specific plans/programs of which one is adult literacy/education. In Ethiopia, since the 1994 ETP has been formulated, four ESDPs were implemented and the fifth is being implemented. Alongside the ESDPs, consecutive adult literacy/education plans have been in place. "Plans are one of the major expressions of a policy but are not the policy itself" [10]. It is mainly because they are schemes that intend to translate a given policy into action (ibid).

ESDP I (1997/8–2001/2) in both the document and the implementation period did not give attention to adult literacy/education; it had no elaboration on adult literacy/education. When ESDP I comes to an end, ESDP II (2002/3–2004/5) was commenced and added adult and nonformal education (ANFE) as a subsector. Despite the term "adult" included in the document, practically the emphasis was given to out-of-school children [10, 12]. Consequently, the ANFE was provided as an alternative to formal education for children, not for adults.

A turning point for adult education occurred after almost two decades of neglect, during the ESDP III (2005/6–2010/11). Onwards, the government has been giving increased attention to adult education. It was recognized that adult education ought to be provided with the full commitment of government at all levels in a coordinated manner, as its provision demanded multisectoral activity [33]. For the first time, after the current government took power in 1991, an adult literacy plan was in place and the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) program was commenced in 2005. Since then, the program has been renamed: (1) Integrated Functional Adult Literacy (IFAL) during ESDP IV (2010/11–2014/15) (see [32]) and (2) Integrated

Functional Adult Education (IFAE) during ESDP V (2015/16–2019/20) (see [19]).

Though differently named in the plans, the aim of the adult literacy/education program/s is linking writing, reading, and numeracy skills to livelihoods and skills training in areas such as agriculture, health, civics and ethics, and cultural education to develop problem-solving abilities and change the people's mode of life (MoE, 2005; [19, 32]). However, some argued that the change in the name of adult education programs has affected the conceptualization of the program and its practice [10]. The lack of coherence in adult education programs and policies may bring a range of many competing discourses about adult education programs' role [7]. Therefore, for the sustainability of adult education programs, adult education policy needs to be coherent and coordinated and the programs should be developed based on a long-term strategic vision, yet flexible enough to respond to new challenges [40].

The targets of the programs are identified in the rolling programs. These are all individuals aged 15 years and above, principally those who (1) have never enrolled in schools and those who dropped out of the first cycle primary including youth, women, and men; (2) belong to vulnerable groups of the community (e.g., sex workers, the displaced, persons who live in and on the street, prisoners); (3) live in peripheral and remote rural communities (e.g., pastoralists, semi-pastoralists, fishers); (4) have special learning needs (people with disabilities); and (5) live in urban areas (low-income socioeconomic groups, housewives, laborers, domestic workers).

The Asia and Pacific Regional Preparatory Conference for CONFINTEA VI, which was held in 2008 in Seoul, Korea, emphasized the importance of ensuring the relevance of content and process in all domains such as training, material development, and curriculum, focusing on the context-specific needs of adult learners and promoting critical awareness towards the social empowerment of adults [4]. However, the programs remained unsuccessful due to different problems of which one is a lack of appropriate planning [3, 17]. The major reason for low achievement in adult literacy programs in the country is associated with the lack of decentralized planning. If literacy education is to be transformative, the planning process should be decentralized with power devolved to the lower levels for the program to be responsive to the real needs of local contexts [41]. Often, programs potentially ignore regional and local contexts when planned centrally. Experiences in Botswana indicated that centralized adult learning planning affected the provision of adult education [41]. Planning adult education programs needs careful consideration of whether it incorporates the interests of adult learners [3]. It is important to conduct a need analysis to identify the local learning gaps [5]. Although international commitments urged member countries to develop adult education programs that are aligned with the needs of the participants and make use of their different experiences [1, 2, 42, 43], in Ethiopia, the centralized planning (at national and regional levels) of learning contents and materials ignored the needs

of learners. Kenea [11] argued that "whatever the rationale for a literacy program is, the curriculum (why, what, and how it is provided) is more often influenced by the objectives (or intents) of the providers than by the demands of the learners themselves" (p.377). The participants witnessed that the learning contents are similar for both urban and rural areas; for example, Yetnayet stated:

Facilitators' manuals and textbooks have similar contents, irrespective of whether learners are urban or rural dwellers. For example, agricultural-related contents are important for learners in a rural area, but not for town dweller participants. The urban area learners are interested in content that helps them able to write and calculate more easily than farming since they are engaged in marketing endeavors.

Though different official documents ([32, 33]; MoE, 2011; [19]) of the country have recognized the role of adult literacy programs to empower women, it seems that empowerment is a word more often heard than seen practically. This might be related to the fact that planners and literacy organizers failed to consider the needs of women adult learners. A study in Botswana indicated that literacy programs ignored the needs of women, as the contents are focused on production than reproduction and this affects their participation in the learning programs [41]. What women adult learners expect from literacy programs is widely varied, such as helping their children to read the English language; calculating; and marketing knowledge to engage in different economic activities [3]. Planners should therefore take into account these and other contents while planning programs.

The other challenge in implementing the programs is the lack of national adult literacy baseline figures. In each of the adult literacy programs (FAL, IFAL, and IFAE), there has been a target—the number of adults who could be reached by the programs—yet without clearly elaborating on the national literacy figures (the number of adults will be reached by adult/literacy programs). International trends also affirm that measuring EFA goals remains difficult as a result of the absence of adult literacy figures [18]. National literacy figures are important as they are used as terms of reference for the actors and partners involved [5]. During the FAL implementation period, it was planned to reach 5.2 million adults in the program period, without any baseline literacy figures. Similarly, during the IFAL implementation period, it was planned to reach 36.4 million adults, while there was not a stated number of adults who need improvement in literacy in the country. However, as stated in the ESDP V document, based on the Central Statistical Agency Welfare Monitoring Survey Estimated Report, there were only 20.4 million adults who cannot read and write. Thus, in 2012/13 the ESDP IV target was adjusted to 19.4 million [19].

3.3. The Adult Education Strategy and Implementation Guidelines. The National Adult Education Strategy (NAES) is a noteworthy adult literacy initiative in the country. It was officialized in 2008, two years before the ESDP III ended. Its aim reads: To establish a well-planned, organized, and coordinated adult education system that will provide opportunities to youth and adults to access quality and relevant learning programs to enable them to participate competently in the social, economic, and political development of Ethiopia [33].

The strategy gives a special focus to the delivery of quality, equitable, relevant, and well-resourced adult education programs to enhance the country's sustainable development. It indicates the major challenges of adult education in the country and provided important binding strategic directions in the areas of (1) awareness creation on the significance of adult education; (2) budget allocation and human power; (3) relevant curriculum; (4) capacity building for facilitators, supervisors, and experts; (5) favorable and sustainable learning environment; (6) adult education delivery strategy and techniques; (7) management and organization of adult education; (8) partnership/collaboration; and (9) monitoring and evaluation.

Even though the strategy document mentioned these binding strategic directions, it lacks clear benchmarks to start with, targets to be achieved, specification of a funding scheme, and an accountability system (see also [3, 10, 11]). Consequently, the adult literacy programs have been challenged by the lack of indication of the targets and the number of adults who could be targeted. This in turn affected the implementation and monitoring, and evaluation of programs, as there are no indicators against which programs can be evaluated and monitored.

The other limitation of the strategy is it fails to indicate whether adult education is treated in the document as a sector or a subsector or a program. Hence, different government documents treat it differently and inconsistently, some as a subsector, some as a program, and some as a subprogram. This affects the conceptualization and practices of the rolling programs too.

The other important policy initiative is the endorsement of the FAL implementation guideline in 2011. It aims to develop uniform implementation guidelines, which contribute to the coordination efforts of different bodies (government, nongovernmental organizations, and communities), which have been working in a fragmented way (MoE, 2011). The guideline specifies (1) the target group of the program; (2) adult learners recruitment; (3) facilitators/educators' selection and training; (4) curriculum (content, duration of the program, etc.) development; (5) supervision and monitoring; (6) assessment and certification; (7) organization and management (adult education boards and technique committees with their duties and responsibilities; (8) networking and partnership; and (9) resource mobilization.

However, the guideline lacks clear specifications for the following issues. Firstly, it does not provide a clear structure of how stakeholders at different levels of administration communicate and manage. At the federal level, the program is the shared responsibility of six ministries (Agriculture, Health, Women and Child Affairs, Youth and Sport, and Labor and Social Affairs). However, at regional levels, regions are mandated to select collaborators based on regional

contexts. For example, Police Commission, which is not a collaborator at the federal level, is one of the collaborative sectors at regional, zonal, district, and kebele[3] levels in the Amhara Regional State. So, how can the Regional Police Commission be committed and accountable for the program, as the Federal Police Commission has not shared responsibility in the provision of adult education?

Secondly, it fails to indicate the roles and responsibilities of providers. Although the roles and responsibilities of AEBs and AETCs at federal, regional, zonal, district, and kebeles are elaborated in the document, it does not indicate what each collaborative sector should contribute to the collaboration. How the collaboration would be financed is not elaborated, for example, and as a result, the financial contribution of sectors is insignificant. An interviewee, *Selamu*, said that "the roles and responsibilities of each collaborative sector are not clarified and legitimized." Another study confirms that the lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities among the collaborators affects the collaboration [3]. The guidelines also do not elaborate on the accountability structure. Participants witnessed that the lack of any system of accountability has been challenging the continuity of the programs. For example, *Yigzaw* noted:

Collaborative sector representatives (both at the management level and grassroots implementation) are rarely available in collaborative works. However, it is difficult to make them accountable as there is no officially legislated accountability procedure. I do not know how to make accountable each sector's representative for not participating in the program, and who else can do that.

Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of collaborative sectors with clear and appropriate accountability procedures is therefore important. When each sector knows its roles and responsibilities, it will include the program activities in its sector plans. Concerning this, a participant, *Yetnayet*, added that "the program activities must be included in the quarterly, semiannual and annual plans, contracts of individual implementers." This will enable the evaluation of the implementers based on what they did against the plan. This then enables the implementers to be accountable for the program.

Here above, I have presented and discussed the merits and demerits of the main policy initiatives of the selected period. In the following sections, I have further analyzed some important policy issues in adult literacy/education. The discussion is therefore whether these policy issues have been given enough emphasis in both the policy documents and implementation.

3.4. Partnership/Collaboration.

3.4. *Partnership/Collaboration.* Partnering has increasingly become a new way of governing different policy fields including the education system [44]. It has been widely recognized by the international community that partnership plays a significant role in the provision of adult literacy/education [1, 2, 6, 42, 43]. It is mainly because adult education activities have no theoretical boundaries and cover all aspects of life and all fields of knowledge [42]. It is important

for reaching potential groups of adult learners [45]. Among many others, in CONFINTEA V, it was clearly stated:

The development of adult learning requires a partnership between government departments, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, employers and trade unions, universities and research centers, the media, civil and community-level associations, facilitators of adult learning, and the adult learners themselves ([43], Agenda for the future, para. 3).

As international trends show, adult education has become a policy agenda mainly since the Education for All Conference held in 1990 in Jomtien. The role of partnership in implementing policies is vital [3, 5]. To successfully implement policies, strong collaboration between or among different responsible sectors should be in place and continuously strengthened [40]. In doing so, the political engagement of higher-level government bodies is imperative. Experiences, for instance, in Afghanistan and China, show that the involvement of high-ranking political officials such as presidents, ministers, governors, and secretaries was essential to raise public awareness and effectively mobilize partners [4].

In Ethiopia, the need for collaboration by different stakeholders for sustainable implementation of the adult education program has been acknowledged in 2005 and reaffirmed in the NAES in 2008 (MoE, 2005; [33]). Since then, the provision of adult education made the shared responsibility of six ministries (Education, Agriculture and Rural Development, Health, WOman and Child Affairs, Youth and Sport, and Labor and Social Affairs) and their respective sectors at regional, zonal, district, and kebele levels, but the collaboration of the responsible sectors at all levels is not satisfactory [3, 19–21]. The reasons for the low involvement of sectors are varied but interrelated. Foremost, as briefly discussed above, the plans, the NAES, and the FAL implementation guideline documents fail to provide a clear framework to collaborate successfully. The willingness of collaborators is also vital; if the willingness or motivation of partners is low, they will hardly involve in the collaboration, which affects their commitment to participate actively [46]. Moreover, [3] indicated that low commitment of government bodies at all levels, lack of adequate financial and human resources, lack of feeling of ownership and responsibility by sectors, lack of accountability procedures, and absence of community engagement were the major reasons for low collaboration. In partnership working, who is responsible to do what in the systems and how to hold them accountable are important [17, 47]. Arnstien [48] also argues that informing the stakeholders/collaborators about their rights and responsibilities is an important step towards genuine participation in programs.

It should be therefore understood that the country's overall political environment is the grand factor for the failure of the adult education program in general and the collaboration in particular [3]. Regarding this, a participant, *Yigzaw*, noted that it is difficult to successfully implement adult education in the country with the current level of political commitment of government officials. Another

participant, *Wondmnew*, added "the low involvement of sectors which assumed to take a shared responsibility in the provision of the program is the result of little attention for adult education, nationally." For effective collaboration in the provision of adult education, there should be an increased level of commitment, monitoring and evaluation system, and accountability at different levels of the structure [3, 17].

3.5. Coordination Mechanisms. The role of shared management and administration of public services has been well elaborated on in the literature [48–51]. Adult education is provided by a wide range of government, private, and third sector (nonprofit organizations), and relevant coordination mechanisms are critical for it [5, 16]. Representation by and participation of all stakeholders in program management is indispensable to be effective, transparent, accountable, equitable, and guarantee responsiveness to the needs of all learners [17, 48]. International trends indicate, however, that the effectiveness of adult learning policy and practices as a whole is often undermined by the lack of coordination between these many parties, leading to fragmented provision [40]. The elaboration of a memorandum of understanding is a good way to establish and maintain partnerships, but it needs regular meetings among the different stakeholders to discuss progress and bottlenecks, intending to improve activities [4].

In Ethiopia, as discussed earlier, the responsibility for adult literacy/education provision is divided across several ministries and their respective lower-level offices. However, this shared responsibility often results in a situation where adult education provision and policy implementation are fragmented due to insufficient coordination [14, 33]. Coordination should be decentralized to reach the different realities present at the different administration levels to support existing adult literacy/education initiatives [4, 45]. In this regard, Ethiopia's experience indicated that the provision of adult education has been decentralized among different levels of government entities such as federal, regional, zonal, district, and kebele.

To effectively coordinate the adult education services, adult education boards (AEBs) and adult education technique committees (AETCs) have been established at all levels of administration from federal to kebele with roles and responsibilities (MoE, 2011). These groups are composed of individuals from different collaborative sectors. However, due to different reasons such as low attention for adult education nationally, lack of adequate funding at least for managerial costs, lack of clear specification of the NAES, and the FAL implementation guidelines about what and how each collaborative sector could contribute, absence of accountability procedures, and lack of time to work the collaboration due to home sector mandates, the AEBs and AETCs are no longer functioning [3, 20]. Concerning this, a participant, *Selamu*, witnessed that "the intention to coordinate and manage the program through the AEBs and AETCs was a good start; however the main thing is that there are no sufficient working conditions; low political directive,

and lack of funds." Overall, the result indicates that a lack of appropriate leadership affected the program. Sullivan et al. [51] pointed out that unless leaders have a collaborative mindset and feel responsible and accountable for their underachievement and poor leadership, it is difficult to run collaborative programs.

3.6. Communication Strategy. Effective adult education provision requires a clear communication strategy [5]. It is needed to mobilize actors, partners, learners (adults), and the community [4] using different methods such as television and radio campaigns, and awareness-raising events such as seminars, forums, and workshops [3, 4]. In the NAES document of Ethiopia, it has been indicated that developing awareness among implementing bodies, partners, and the society by applying different awareness creation methods (mass media, printings, conferences, workshops, meetings, etc.) to create a common understanding of the contributions of adult education in accelerating development, creating democratic culture, eradicating poverty, and its importance to improve individual and societal living standards is important [33]. However, as practical experiences and interviewees of this study affirmed, the awareness creation was not implemented as intended. The low awareness of the local community about the nature and importance of the program is more challenging, as, for example, Wondmnew noted: The effort that has been made to aware the local community by using different methods is insignificant. You see! Still, the community associates the program with the program which was provided during the Derg through the National Literacy Campaign. For me, it is the result of the low efforts that have been made by all concerned bodies.

The other important issue to be considered is the communication between and among the collaborators in the provision of the program. Timely and adequate communication among collaborators should be therefore in place [52]. In Ethiopia, however, due to the lack of clear policy directives and accountability systems in this regard, the collaborators are rarely communicated about the adult education program. Regarding this, Selamu witnessed that: Though the adult education boards and technique committees, which constitute representatives from collaborative sectors, have been formed at federal to kebele levels, practically they are not functional. They have been working better around what they were formed, but gradually their participation in discussing the collaboration has been becoming minimized.

The absence of or poor communication and information sharing strategies among collaborators could affect the implementation process [53]. Mattessich and Monsey [52] noted that collaborative engagements, in which the collaborators fail to frequently communicate about, are more likely deemed to be ineffective than those communicated timely. It is mainly because insufficient dialogue among sectors leads to different views on the aims and goals of the collaboration among sectors [53] and ambiguity on different roles and responsibilities in the collaboration process [3].

3.7. Funding. The attendance of adult learners and the overall success of programs usually depend on the funding policy. Hence, funding policy is regarded as the cornerstone of adult education programs [7]. Partners or providers of adult education may not effectively collaborate if funding is inadequate. It needs to have an effective funding mechanism to sustain the programs [4, 5]. The international community has increasingly recognized the role of establishing financing mechanisms. For example, CONFINTEA VI, the Belem Framework for Action, urged countries to be committed to the financing of adult learning and education (ALE) [8].

Notwithstanding the Dakar and Belem Framework for Action have called for significant increases in the financial commitment by national governments and donors, international experiences, including Ethiopia, indicate that adult literacy has remained underfunded [16, 45]. Cases in Ethiopia indicate that adult education is "less deserving" in terms of many aspects, including funding [3, 54]. The government of Ethiopia wants to finance the program through nongovernment sources such as communities, nongovernmental organizations, and other external funding partners ([33]; MoE, 2011; [10]), but without clear funding mechanisms. The policy documents lack clarity on whom and how the collaboration would be financed ([33]; MoE, 2011). As a result, the financial contribution of the government (collaborative public sectors), private sectors, nongovernmental sectors, and the community, in general, is not satisfactory. To be effective in program provisions, there should be also sustainable financing mechanisms within the community [4]. Mattessich and Monsey [52] argued that unless the stakeholders contribute financially, collaborative efforts might not bring the intended outcome.

3.8. Innovation. Innovation, depending on the local reality and needs, is vital for the success of adult literacy/education programs. It plays an important role in making adult education initiatives successful [5]. Therefore, adult literacy/education policy should be designed appropriately to help innovative ideas and practices in place. It is important to have occasions such as meetings, seminars, debates, and workshops where relevant stakeholders exchange ideas and experiences, which are valuable to innovation [4].

Innovation could be made on various aspects such as the type of literacy to be provided, the methods of learning (facilitation), and who could be the educator depending on the local reality and needs. This, however, requires clear policy frameworks, adequate financing, and educated personnel. For example, facilitators/adult educators are needed to be innovative in their teaching/facilitation. However, the facilitators are not competent enough—they are mostly grade 10 or 12 completers. They are expected to receive preservice and in-service training to develop their professional skills (MoE, 2011), which help them to be creative in their job. Facilitators are responsible for identifying, encouraging, and selecting potential participants by going door-to-door and helping adults to learn. This needs knowledge and skill in facilitating the adult learning process, which they significantly lack. Studies have convincingly

argued that the lack of adequate facilitation skill training (both preservice and on the job), low salary, and feelings of insecurity about their job were the main reasons for incompetency and turnover [3, 55]. Therefore, it can be concluded that unmotivated facilitators may not be confident and innovative in their job unless different measures are taken. Gizaw et al. [55] conclude that: . . . no one policy action (increasing the salary, giving them more formal contracts, or providing better training and support) on its own will improve the situation. A holistic approach is needed; adult literacy learning needs to be taken seriously if it is to be done at all—and not done in the margins, on the cheap, as a minor government activity.

Seen generally, the number and competency of adult educators/facilitators were not considered, while the adult education programs are planned. Thus, it would be better to think about the number and quality of facilitators at the time of program planning and implementation. It is also necessary to assign an appropriate adult educator for any selected group of adults. For example, if the majority of adult learners are women, it would be better to have female adult educators. Experiences in Nepal showed that the literacy rate among women rose three times faster than among men as literacy teachers were mostly women [4].

The opening and maintenance of community learning centers are another innovation. The centers should be sustainable and self-sufficient places for lifelong learning opportunities available to the whole community, aiming to promote self-sufficiency, improve the quality of life, and encourage community development. In Ethiopia, during the Derg regime, the community skill training centers/programs (CSTC) played important roles. Country-wide, there were more than 500 CSTCs as a response to the nonformal training gap for and in the rural communities to enable them to participate actively in economic, political, social, and cultural issues [10]. Now, however, these centers are not functional despite the government reporting deceptively for international consumption (e.g., see [14]). In the report, it was indicated that there are 450 CSTCs and 58,614 adults who had been trained in 287 CSTCs, during the ESDP III implementation period. Practically seen, now, most of the centers are closed. Therefore, it is important to establish and maintain locally owned community learning centers that are used for providing adult education programs and enhancing the post-literacy engagement of adults. In doing so, there should be a policy that is supportive of innovation.

3.9. Monitoring and Evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation are key instruments for effectively running adult education programs [3, 56], and it requires the active involvement of a wide range of partners such as families, educators, communities, private sectors, government, and nongovernmental organizations [1, 33]. The third global monitoring report indicates that adult literacy initiatives were lacking monitoring and evaluation systems to assess progress [16]. In the FAL implementation guidelines, it was acknowledged that: Supervision and monitoring should be conducted at learning centers, kebele, wereda, zone, region, and federal in

the areas of the ratio of admission to dropout, facilitators to learners, textbooks to learners, learning centers to learners; appropriateness of the lesson/s content; utilization of financial and other resources; and stakeholder cooperation and collaboration, among others (MoE, 2011, p.26).

However, working environments are rarely allowed to conduct monitoring and evaluation effectively. The lack of financing, lack of trained personnel, and the general low commitment of government bodies at all levels of government administration could be taken as reasons for weak monitoring and evaluation of initiatives. Even if the NAES document underscores the need to have participatory monitoring and evaluation system, the involvement of the collaborative sectors in this regard is low; it seems to be left merely for the education sector. It is mainly because there is no accountability procedure elaborated in the policy documents. An interviewee, *Yigzaw*, witnessed that "attention given to the monitoring and evaluation of the program nationally and by the collaborative sectors is very low. Though it is not consistent, the education sector has been doing this relatively." A recent study in Ethiopia indicates that the monitoring and evaluation of adult education are low. It is limited to only following up on learners' participation in adult education program centers. The facilitation process, the retention of literacy and numeracy skills, and the applications of content and skills for adult learners' daily life, which are considered the outcome of the program, were often ignored [56].

4. Conclusions

In Ethiopia, the provision of adult education is not satisfactory due to different reasons, including the lack of relevant adult education policy and implementation. This study, therefore, analyzed the adult education policy of the country from the mid-1990s. I believe that this analysis would contribute to knowing the adult education policy initiatives and the status of implementation and would enable policymakers and other government authorities to escalate the status of the adult education policy and its implementation. In doing so, I provide some general conclusions drawn from the results of this study.

The findings indicate that, although the role of a supportive policy environment to meet the basic learning needs has been recognized at the Jomtien Conference [1], in Ethiopia, until 2005 adult education was not taken as an important policy issue in the country even at a document level. However, onwards 2005 the government starts to give attention, and an adult education program with its strategy and implementation guidelines was commenced, but these initiatives are not being implemented as intended. This is in one way or another related to the low political commitment of the government at all levels of administration, federal, regional, zonal, district, and kebele.

The rolling programs (FAL, IFAL, and IFAE) have faced challenges in both the planning and implementation phases. The different contexts, realities, cultures, and personal characteristics of the target participants, which are fundamental factors to determine the success of all adult learning

programs, are rarely considered in both program planning and implementation. Thus, to be effective in implementing adult education programs these issues should be given due to attention in the program planning and implementation.

This article also concludes that the NAES and its implementation guideline lack baseline figures of adult literacy rates and relevant funding schemes and generally do not provide a clearer framework for stakeholders/providers to effectively collaborate. Therefore, it would be important to revise the NAES and its implementation guideline to guide the provision of adult education effectively.

The study indicates that partnership, coordination, communication, funding, innovation, and monitoring and evaluation issues have been mentioned in the policy documents in one way or another. However, as discussed in the text, these vital issues have been rarely implemented due to an unsupportive policy environment (the low commitment of government). It needs to have therefore a legislated policy framework, which elaborates the accountability procedure clearly in the process of program implementation.

Finally, this article concludes by urging the national government and policymakers to give higher attention to adult literacy/education. Political advocacy about the role of adult literacy in national development should be conducted by the active involvement of higher political authorities. It is because I believe that several challenges in the field are the result of the low commitment of the national government. Collaborative sectors and different national and international funders may be attracted when adult education gets national attention.

4.1. Declaration. Here, the author declares that the manuscript has not been published previously and is not under simultaneous review elsewhere.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the author upon request.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Acknowledgments

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