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Now I feel as a Full Person: Women's Empowerment through Integrated Functional Adult Education Program in Ethiopia

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Abstract: Notwithstanding their contribution to the development of any society, women are the underclass. Their participation in social, economic, and political spheres could be limited because of illiteracy. To improve their involvement, providing adult education is incontestable. This article examines Ethiopian women's empowerment through Integrated Functional Adult Education, using social, economic, and political dimensions. The paper confirms that providing adult education programs to illiterate women improved their day-to-day lives. The study concluded that Integrated Functional Adult Education improves women's lives in social and economic dimensions. However, the study also found that women's participation and empowerment in political issues remain unimproved.

Keywords: adult education, empowerment, Ethiopia, literacy, women

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Introduction

Aliterate woman has a role to attain social-economic development and achieve Sustainable Development Goals (Pritchett & Sandefur, 2020), but two-thirds of the world's illiterate population are women and suffer the most from gender inequality, particularly in developing countries (Women U. N., 2015; Samarakoon & Parinduri, 2015; Medel-Añonuevo & Bernhardt, 2011). In 2015, all over the world, 775 million people were unable to read and write. Overwhelmingly, 66% were women (UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS], 2017). In addition, UNESCO estimated that in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Arab States, two out of every three women do not have basic literacy skills (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2013). Therefore, limited literacy skills may contribute to women's low participation in education and other sectors in their lives.

Empowerment often relates to the processes of change (Kabeer, 2016). The term is widely used but seldom-defined (Santillán et al., 2004; Soetan, 1999). Empowerment has been claimed as the process of having power in the social structure (Kabeer, 1999). Empowerment is a well-used term with many institutions aiming to achieve national and international goals related to the empowerment of women (United Nations Millennium Project, 2005). Similarly, women's empowerment is at the fore for development sectors, including education. Women's empowerment is also a means, not an end, to improve their participation in economic, social, and political endeavors (Lord & Hutchison, 1993). Because of cultural norms in some countries, women are less likely to be involved in individual, group, household, and societal roles (Aziz et al., 2021; Niyonkuru & Barrett, 2021). For example, in Ethiopia, poverty in women is multi-faceted, linked to a lack of women's economic, social and political

empowerment, including their access to and control over information, services, resources, and commodities (Ministry of Finance, 2019). To increase women's participation in different aspects of their lives and eventually to empower through providing formal education is insufficient. Therefore, providing non-formal education and lifelong learning programs addresses this issue. Gallacher (2015) pointed out that adult education creates and widens the opportunities for disadvantaged groups, including women.

Since 2010, the Ethiopian government has provided an Integrated Functional Adult Education Program to increase the literacy rate. It aims to increase and sustain the contributions of the adult population for national development (Ministry of Education, 2010). According to the Ethiopian Ministry of Education, hereafter MoE (2008), design and implementation of the National Adult Education Strategy has its aim in establishing literacy programs for women, especially for those who have low/no income. The Integrated Functional Adult Education in the form of adult education focuses on adults and its contents come from education, health, agriculture, basic life-skills training, economic, entrepreneurship, civics, and so on. All of the content can be applied in the day-to-day lives of the learners (MoE, 2008; MoE, 2010).

In Africa, particularly in Ethiopia, a functional adult literacy program has invaluable importance for development because of a high rate of illiteracy. According to Kagitcibasi et al. (2005), functional adult literacy is particularly important in developing countries where formal education has not reached a significant proportion of the adult population, particularly in the rural areas. Developing a national development plan without giving due emphasis to functional adult education development and implementation is a wastage of resources (MoE, 2018). Furthermore, sidelining adult segments of the population, especially women without formal

education in development process, is also impoverishment. Therefore, developing and implementing a functional adult literacy program is pivotal to attain the wide intended goals.

Consequently, the Ethiopian government developed a national adult education strategy in 2008 to improve the participation of adult segments of the population in development affairs. Since 2010, the strategy has been executed to decrease illiteracy at a national level in the short term and to combat poverty in the long term. Integrated functional adult literacy in Ethiopia is provided for adults beyond 15 years old, women and men, who dropped out from formal education, those beyond formal education, those who are economically poor to attend formal or any further education, and for those who are marginalized in the social structure (Warkineh et al., 2017). The integrated functional adult education in Ethiopia is provided for 18 months and has three levels, and each level takes up to six months. Based on the national adult education strategy, adult learners who complete 18 months of attendance and are competent enough would be graduated, and those interested and competent enough would join technical, educational, vocational, and other training programs.

Among the program's target groups, women are the most sensitive group of the population. In Ethiopia, in many other countries too, women are neglected groups in society despite their contribution to national development (Thubauville, 2014). In addition, they are treated inhumanely because of the influence of the patriarchal ideology of society. To give an ear to the unheard voices from women, the Ethiopian government devised the national strategy for adult education with the intention to improve

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women's education and life, especially women who are willing to participate but lack the financial resource. Kagitcibasi et al. (2005) explain that literacy is seen as an empowering process, particularly for women who constitute most of the world's illiterates.

Although the program is in its infancy, it will contribute to the improvement of adult learners' lives. Women are one of the major target groups of the program because too many of them missed formal education (Thubauville, 2014, Kabeta & Gebremeskel, 2013). The Ethiopian government's Integrated Functional Adult Education for adults fills this gap enhancing women's participation in economic, political and social aspects (MoE, 2008; Molla & Cuthbert, 2014; Awgichew & Seyoum, 2017). Therefore, the study investigates the contributions of the program for women's empowerment.

This study aims to understand the contributions of the Integrated Functional Adult Education Program to women's empowerment at Bahir Dar City in the case of Kebele-17[1], Ethiopia. Ministry of Education (2008) in Ethiopia considers adult education programs an indispensable weapon of improvement for individuals, groups, and communities in general. Adult education is invaluable to women beyond formal education. Women who have dropped out of formal education are economically poor with no prospects of going into further formal education. Adult education is a mechanism to achieve a country's national priorities and international development goals (Samarakoon & Parinduri, 2015; Jones & Chant, 2009). In developing countries, the provision of adult education is

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[1] Kebele-17 is the least level of the City Administration with no more than 5000 households

necessary. For example, in Ethiopia, 65% of the total population are adults, who have a vital role in the economic developments of the nation, are illiterate[2] (MoE, 2008). Women play a pivotal role in the development of the national economy, particularly in agriculture. In Africa, women produce 80% of locally consumed goods (Sell & Minot, 2018). Despite their contribution to national development, they are less likely to be the decision-makers in social, political, and economic issues. Therefore, developing and implementing an adult education program for women should be prioritized.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of empowerment has a long history in the work of social change (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). An international and national program that aims to achieve social change often includes the concept of empowerment in its objectives. However, women's empowerment started to be mobilized by the feminists in the 1980s and 90s to include issues that women face in the international agendas (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). From the feminist perspective, women's empowerment follows a radical approach to transforming power in favor of women but failed to consider the level that women have in self-understanding, the capacity for self-expression, and their access to and control over resources across contexts. Measuring women's empowerment using the radical feminist approach is criticized for its influence on invaluable social norms for the existence of the society. Therefore, measuring women's empowerment employing a radical approach is least amenable (Kabeer, 1999).

Women's empowerment has been measured through evaluating changes in women's lives depending on their perspectives and priorities (Kabeer, 2016). In this approach, women's priority

has been identified by asking them to provide their own accounts of what constitutes a positive change in their lives. However, it runs into a problem, for example, if both men and women acquire their sense of identity and self-worth, and assess justice of their position in society on the basis of norms and values that embody, produce and legitimate women's inferior status and restricted opportunities (Kabeer, 2016). In contexts where the women are highly influenced by social norms, and self-internalize the norm as a natural for injustice, they may not see the other parts of the practice. This may perpetuate the existing male hegemony and patriarchal ideology.

Jones and Chant (2009) use work and social life in measuring women's empowerment through education. Job opportunities and women's day-to-day social life help highlight the situation women live in, but it does not necessarily show empowerment. In a society where communal life is predominant, women are valued in social life but not necessarily empowered. Job opportunity for women has a significance to improve their lives, but it is insufficient to show their level of empowerment. Often, women may engage in low-paying jobs, but their decision-making power on their income may be overtaken by their husbands, fathers, or brothers (Kagitcibasi et al., 2005). Therefore, accessibility of jobs and social life alone may not refer to women's empowerment.

The job opportunities for women are only for informal sectors without social security; therefore, this situation does not indicate women's empowerment (Kagitcibasi et al., 2005). On the other hand, Samarakoon and Parinduri (2015) depict the ability to make the decision, freedom of mobility, and social works to measure women's empowerment, proving that literate women can have bargaining power but the issue of women making decisions matters to their empowerment (Kabeer, 1999). Mostly decision-making power

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[2] Illiterate here means unable to both read and write with understanding a short simple statement on their everyday life.

depends on access to resources; therefore, without accessing the decisive resources, empowerment cannot be achieved. Nesbitt-Ahmed (2017) pinpoint that women's access to financial resources enables them to discuss with their husbands and families about how it will be spent, but it does not directly bring empowerment. Therefore, these dimensions of measuring empowerment are specific and do not show the real empowerment of women.

Mocan and Cannonier (2012) find the level of women's fertility and the use of contraceptives to measure women's empowerment through education in developing countries like Sierra Leone. However, the study by McCrary and Royer (2011) suggest that literacy does not decrease women's birth rate in the United States. Indeed, in developed countries, education decreases women's tolerance to social practices that endanger their wellbeing. The study by Samarakoon and Parinduri (2015) argue that education reduces the number of live births, increases contraceptive use, and promotes the reproductive health practices of the women. However, they find no evidence that education improves women's decision-making authority, asset ownership, or community participation.

Women's empowerment through education is also evaluated using social role, economic activity, intra-household distribution, and health status (Sell & Minot, 2018). On the one hand, Malhotra et al. (2002) identify the women's ability to participate in social, economic, and political dimensions to measure empowerment. Kabeer (1999) states accessibility to and control over resources determine women's empowerment. Therefore, this study investigates women's empowerment through the Integrated Functional Adult Education Program using the accessibility to and control over resources in economic, social, and political dimensions.

Literature Review

Integrated Functional Adult Education

The term literacy does not have a universal meaning and application across literature and practitioners. In ordinary understanding, literacy is often related to reading, writing, and basic mathematical skills. If an ordinary person is asked what literacy is? Probably the answer may be related to the ability to read and write. According to Kagitcibasi et al. (2005), however, literacy is more than reading and writing, and has been explained in different forms including skills and the applications in daily life. They also point out that functional literacy is not only a skill or knowledge, but acquisition also encompasses more than learning some technical skills. Being functionally literate is more than simply decoding script or producing essays, it is also taking on the identities associated with these practices. Therefore, functional literacy is the process of learning skills, which can be applied in a learner's daily-life activities. Robinson (2004) points out that functional literacy is the ability to engage effectively in all activities, which assumes that literacy is required in culture or society. Therefore, functional literacy is not only confined to formal ways of learning, rather, it is interpreted differently based on the milieu (Candy, 2002; Abadzi, 2010).

Two divergent definitions were forwarded by literature in the use of the term functional literacy (Robinson, 2004). The first definition of literacy is very flexible and ever-changing, depending on dynamics in society. Based on this definition, literacy is not common across or even within society. Such connotation of functional literacy is the most important in an ethnographic study and different kinds of literature. It is explained as a hidden literacy (Rogers, 2005) and is usually investigated through ethnographic research. The second definition of functional literacy is related to

the common understanding that it is the ability to read and write texts in daily life (Abadzi, 2010). Unlike the first definition of functional literacy, the second definition is the most commonly used understanding in literacy programs, often in developing countries. People are functionally literate when they can engage in activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of individuals' community and for enabling individuals to continue to use reading, writing, and calculation for their own and the community's development (Robinson, 2004). Robinson also asserts that functional literacy today, mostly in Africa, tends to mean a training program, not a lifelong function.

In the Ethiopian context, a number of studies (Negassa, 2019; Oljira & Hailu, 2021) have investigated the concept of integrated functional adult education. Usually, the researchers use the concept of functional literacy, integrated functional adult education, or adult literacy interchangeably. Before 2008, the Ethiopian government has been using the concept of functional adult literacy in running adult learning programs. Then the program's nomenclature is changed integrated functional adult education by taking into account the programs integrated nature from different sectors. For example, Oljira and Hailu assert that functional adult literacy program that has been commenced in Ethiopia is known as Integrated Functional Adult Education (IFAE). Therefore, IFAE conceived as a functional literacy program that reaches out to adults and young people aged 15 or older, and it is available to women, the disabled, and minority groups (Hanemann & Krolak, 2017).

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Women's Empowerment through Integrated Functional Adult Literacy

Longwe (1998) asserts that empowerment, more precisely, women's empowerment, involves the process of taking and generating enough political mobilization and organization so that women are in a position to take power. As to Stevenson and Allen (2017), empowerment is an aggregate feeling of competence, strength, and ability to succeed. Indeed, women's empowerment is the process of improvement in participation, which enables women to take part in the economic, political, and social activities. The term '"women empowerment"' is often used in two broad senses (Gul, 2015). In a general sense, the term '"empowering women"' is for women to be self-dependent by providing them access to all the freedoms and opportunities, which they were denied in the past only because of them being women. The narrow understanding of the term "women empowerment" refers to enhancing their position in the power structure of society. Gul also argues that 'women empowerment' essentially means that women have the power and capacity to regulate their day-to-day lives in the social, political, and economic dimensions. Furthermore, women empowerment is the process by which women collectively come to recognize and address the gender issues, which hinders their advancement (Longwe, 1998). Longwe also states if women wait to be given, definitely, they shall wait forever. Moreover, empowerment is power, which enables women to move from the periphery to the center of the stage in all activities.

To move women to the center of power and to influence all activities in their day-to-day life,

providing education in general and adult education, in particular, is essential. Adult education as a program is provided for women to narrow gender gaps in a certain culture. According to Longwe (1998), adult education for empowerment is concerned with the process of enlightenment, conscientization, and collective organization. Adult education is seen as one of the most effective channels for reducing inequalities between men and women that ensures maximum participation of women in the development process (Chattier, 2013). It is a tool for those feeling neglected to find themselves. Through the consciousness of using adult education programs, women would be able to enlighten themselves from the harsh social structure by focusing on the fight against patriarchal beliefs.

In this review, women empowerment can be explained in the form of social, political, and economic participation. When thinking about empowerment, we have to make sure that women are actively involved in the bellowing three aspects in society.

Economic Empowerment

Women's economic empowerment is a significant determinant that strengthens their involvement in productive activities (Sell & Minot, 2018). It is the ability for women to control. The economic empowerment is advantageous for its own and societal resources, and copes with challenges to foster economic well-being. Women constitute half of the population, so any investment in the development of human capital ignoring the female population will be detrimental to the progress of a country (Chattier, 2013). As they are half of the population and have multi-dimensional interactions naturally with other segments of the people, women's economic participation is crucial in fostering entrepreneurial habits and economic development.

However, women's self and public employment trend is hindered by many factors: cultural values, limited permission from their husbands, and the lack of specialized skills and education are some of these challenges from self-employment, employment, and economic involvement at large (Kagitcibasi et al., 2005). According to Chattier (2013), most studies assert that women's empowerment is entirely hindered by the cultural practices surrounding their lives. In the development of the country, ignoring the contribution of women puts the economy at the back. Chattier also states no society has ever liberated itself economically without involving women in developmental issues. Women's participation in adult education is the best alternative to increase the Gross Domestic Product of the country. Chattier also argues that the higher ratio of educated women increases the per capita income of a country, which may be a core factor in the overall economic development of a nation.

Social Empowerment

Social empowerment like economic empowerment, is a crucial issue in improving life situations of women, yet often not clearly stated in the literature about women empowerment. Even so, in this review, it can be understood as the process of improving self-directedness, self-esteem, and the ability to work and live individually and collectively to reconstruct the existing partial relationships and social structures that ignore unprivileged segments of the population that is women (Kagitcibasi et al., 2005). Kagitcibasi and his colleagues also explained that social empowerment is women's ability to integrate and live with individuals, groups, and societies with a miscellaneous culture. As a result, without women's social empowerment, aiming to achieve social development at large is not tenable.

Women's social empowerment has an important contribution to increasing the life expectancy of citizens and it improves birth weight (Rao et al., 2013). It also improves their children's chance to attend school and improves women's health ramifications and demographic situations. Indeed, adult education lays profound contributions for the improvement of women's social empowerment. As to Kagitcibasi et al. (2005), women who participate in literacy programs are found to achieve a higher status in the family, group, and society level than those who are deprived of literacy. Gul (2015) also states that women without education are exposed to suffer intense humiliation, harassment, and traumatic experiences with prolonging depression. Despite their underpinning contributions in individual, family, group, and society affairs, women's social empowerment is intentionally neglected by patriarchal ideology. Therefore, to improve such a phenomenon, education, particularly adult education, has an immense role to help women escape from such a social structure.

Political Empowerment

Political empowerment is the process of having a position in the political structure of the country. Political empowerment is also the practice, which helps women to control resources and to make decisions. According to Longwe (1998), political empowerment increases women's control over the allocation of resources by identifying and ending the discriminatory practices which halt the progress. Typically, political empowerment is a means that assist women to break from myths and proverbs, which hinder their political involvement (ሴት ወደ ማጀት ወንድ ወደ ችሎት, i.e., female to cooking room male to court). Therefore, this kind of

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empowerment helps women to lead social changes within the circumstances where they live in (Holland & Skinner, 2008). Indeed, it is related to women's active participation in voting, development projects, community mobilization, demonstration, and any other political agendas (Kagitcibasi et al., 2005). Women's participation within the developmental process provides the opportunity to increase political empowerment. However, women's participation in political issues in the world particularly in developing countries remains insignificant. Even in those countries, which have a high performance in literacy, women's participation in political issues is acknowledged as limited (Longwe, 1998; Kabeer, 1999).

Methodology

The study aims to investigate women's empowerment through the IFAE program. The social-constructivist paradigm shapes the researcher's worldview. Among the competing paradigms, the constructivist research paradigm asserts the researcher should focus on the complexity of views (Taylor et al., 2016), rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories. In pursuing its goal, the research relies on the views of individual participants (Starman, 2013) and understandings of the social phenomena primarily acquired by interpreting the perceptions of individuals and of the issues being investigated (Woods, 2006). The constructivist paradigm involves a qualitative approach, which was, therefore, employed for this study. According to Creswell (2007), a qualitative approach to research is a legitimate mode of inquiry in social and behavioral science studies. All of the procedures in this study depend upon a qualitative research approach and interpretation.

All empirical research, to meet its goals, employs one research design, implicitly if not explicitly (Yin, 2003). To accomplish the stated aim, a qualitative case study design was used since researchers should interpret meaningful human actions and the interpretations that people present for themselves or others (Creswell, 2007). A case study is a special kind of qualitative design that investigates a contextualized contemporary phenomenon within specified boundaries (Merriam, 2009), for instance, a program, an institution, a single community, an event or a process (Dawson, 2002; Hatch, 2002; Yin, 2003). According to Merriam, a case could be an individual, a thing, an entity, any unit limited by boundaries. In the same vein, Stake, in 1995 (as cited in Yazan, 2015), indicates that a case is a specific, complex, functioning thing, more specifically an integrated system with a boundary, with working parts within it and a purpose. This research, therefore, focuses on a particular case: the IFAE program. The participants in this research were female learners in the IFAE program in Bahir Dar City, Kebele 17.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, four women, who had graduated from the IFAE program with good classroom participation records were selected for interview. The program is provided in three terms; each has six months of duration. The sample attended more than 95% of the class out of the total period. Of the four, the first participant is selected purposively with the help of facilitators as a key informant. The other three women were selected using a snowball sampling technique. The process of data collection was carried out through interviews. In a qualitative case study, data collection should be extensive and can be done through the interview (Babbie, 2007; Creswell, 2007).

To investigate the contributions of IFAE to women's empowerment, many female learners have participated in the research. In the study area, 15 women were attending the program and they came from the outskirts of the city. The woman who participated in this study were 30-45 years old Askalu, Tigist, Workit and Selam (See Table 1) who have been attending adult education program in Belay Zeleke Sub-City, Kebele 17 since 2008.

Through interviews, a researcher wants to find out what is in someone else's mind (Merriam, 2009). In this study, semi-structured interview guides were used to increase the investigation of the issue the researcher aimed to understand. Qualitative researcher should employ interviews as a data collection tool so that he/she would not restrict the opinions of the participants to raise important information (Creswell, 2012; Dawson, 2002). Indeed, in this study, semi-structure interviews helped the researcher gain opportunities to collect in-depth data. Interviews were also conducted to explore and interpret women's personal understandings of the empowerment process. Therefore, interviews took place on face-to-face basis and were instructed by interview guides. Interview guides were used as indicators of the issue but not limitations of the interview process. The interviews lasted 40, up to

Table 1
Characteristics of the Participants

Name	Sex	Age	Status	Educational level
Askalu	F	45	Married	None
Tigist	F	36	Married	Primary
Workit	F	43	Divorced	None
Selam	F	40	Divorced	None

Source: Researcher's Data

60, minutes each. The interviews were recorded based on the participants' willingness and consent to be recorded in the interview process.

According to Creswell (2012), analyzing qualitative data passes through six steps. In this study, to analyze the data, Creswell's six steps to data analysis were implemented. The first step is organizing and preparing data for analysis. In this stage, I have organized the collected data. In qualitative research, organizing data is crucial since a large amount of data is collected. The second step involves reading the transcribed data. In this stage, I have thoroughly read and reread the transcribed notes of the research to obtain a general sense of transcriptions. In the third step, I had begun a detailed analysis with the coding process. In this step, I have segmented and labeled the transcribed information to form descriptions and broad themes in the data. The fourth step is using the coding process to build themes. To do so, I have examined the data in detail and developed themes or broad categories of ideas. The fifth step is representing and reporting themes through constructing narratives to explain what the researcher have found in response to the research questions. Thus, I have interwoven and interconnected the emergent themes in narratives to represent and report based on the participants' response. For the sixth stage, interpreting meanings of findings, I have focused on boldly stated ideas, the major points participants figured out, and their interests in IFAE. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the strategies recommended by eminent qualitative researchers (e.g., Merriam, 2009) were used. To enhance the credibility of the findings, checks were performed by sending the participants a copy of their interview transcripts and asking them to verify the accuracy of the content and review the study findings, as they emerged.

Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Gondar, Gondar, Ethiopia, approved this study. To enter into the field, the researcher submitted a formal letter, written by the IRB for the administrative office of Belay Zeleke Sub-City to obtain the permission. In the field, the researcher used the Kebele officer as a key informant to access the participants. The participants' willingness to participate in the study was confirmed through an information letter followed by a consent form. Before they agree and sign the consent form, the participants were informed the aim of the study, how the results will be used, and the likely social consequences the study will have on their lives in face-to-face discussion. Throughout the study, participants are guaranteed the right to refuse or withdraw from the participation. In the report of the study, their privacy and confidentiality were protected and anonymity was kept using pseudonyms.

Findings of the Study

In the sub-city, adult education is a program provided at Meskerem 16 General Primary School in Kebele 17. Adult learners attend the program twice a week on Fridays and Sundays, Friday 5:00-6: 30 pm and Sunday 11:00-1:00 am. The first participant, Askalu, has three daughters and divorced seven years ago. She was born in 1968 in Hamusit, South Gondar Zone. She said, "When I was early childhood I come to Bahir Dar City with my mother and I grew here." Currently, Askalu lives in Belay Zeleke Sub-City in Kebele 17, Bahir Dar City, with her three daughters. The main cause of the divorce was her husband's alcohol addiction and mismanagement of income. Tigist, another participant of this study, is married with two boys and two daughters. She is the main breadwinner of the family through baking and

selling Injera[3] in individual retail selling, as well as wholesaling for cafeterias. The third participant of this research is Workit, a married woman with two boys and four daughters. She grew up in Adet, in West Gojjam Zone, no more than 40 kilometers from Bahir Dar. Similar to Tigist, Workit runs her business to generate income through selling wood for house construction. The fourth participant of this study is Selam, divorced two years ago with three boys, she works for different activities, including cash-crop retail selling. However, her constant source of income is sheep cultivating. Through these activities, she covers housing and schooling expenses for her boys.

Participants of this study, all divorced, explain the participation from IFAE helped them to be the breadwinners and decision-makers to better the future of the family. Most participants claimed the program is indispensable to lead a healthy family without any social problems. Program beneficiary and divorced woman, Askalu said:

> "My daughters have good behaviors that most of the other daughters no more have. They are disciplined and most individuals admire my family. However, one of my daughters was so sick and her father was not on her side. After two months of illness, God had mercy for her and currently, she is in a good condition."

Therefore, Askalu is very happy with her family's current situation when compared to children of other families in her village who often show deviant behaviors. Through taking part in an educational program, the women could hold the good family management, especially traditionally disciplined children that are expected from the patriarchal family. Women's involvement in adult education programs transforms the traditional taboos deeply

rooted from the contexts that daughters from the matriarchal family are expected to be undisciplined. Similarly, Selam also said, "Although I am divorced, my boys are disciplined too, they did not show any kind of behavior . . . insulting when I said anything from them."

Economic Benefits of Functional Adult Education

Integrated functional adult education improves adult learners' economic situations through providing basic skills, knowledge and attitudes. Economically, Askalu said:

> "Before I attend this program, life was very difficult and I could not feed my daughters. There was nothing in my home. Now I can feed my family and afford my first daughter's college fee. I can also buy home materials including a bed. My first daughter completed grade 12 in 2008 and unfortunately, she cannot join university. Now she studies accounting in a private college. Before I began attending this program, I didn't have a bank account. But today I can deposit money from my regular income that is traded (fruit selling)."

She thought adult education programs are important for the economic empowerment of the learner. One of the aims of adult education programs is to provide skills relevant for improving adult learners' economic situation. Workit, another participant, pointed out that knowledge acquired from the classroom reveals a change in her family's life. However, providing the program only at the literacy level is not sufficient to improve female learners' lives. Askalu said, "Before I entered this class, I cannot read, write, and calculate. However, now I can calculate, read, and write, and these helped me to increase my income. The facilitator

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[3] Injera is tin bread and a prominent kind of food in Ethiopia

helped me develop these skills; I would like to thank him."

In Askalu's opinion, a woman, who is literate would have a better job and income. In this regard, Askalu also believes the adult education program is a way to have better opportunities. She thought adult education provided by the government is a gift to help her life, but the researcher understands it as an educational program that must be provided for all adults as a human right and a functional purpose in an appropriate time and place, with need-based content. Tigist said from the program, "I can learn how, when, and where money can be spent." Most of the participants believed that the adult education program empowers the learners, through teaching the wise management of income. For example, Askalu said, "Now I have a diary to register daily income and expenses." She also forwarded, "Based on this mechanism, I can use the money appropriately". Workit indicated the mismanagement of money is the main cause of the challenging life. Askalu pointed out that before her divorce, there was a high mismanagement of money because of her being illiterate and her husband's alcohol addiction. She said, "My daughters are wise ones; they do not spend money inappropriately." Almost all of the participants thought that the adult education program helps them transition from the previous dismal situation. Selam said, "All that I have now happened because of the facilitators' help, he is here to help us." However, she thinks that this program is provided by the will of the facilitator, not that she has a right to attend an adult education program. Therefore, the women identify the skills they are getting and the difference it makes to their lives, but they are not expressing any awareness of their human and legal rights to attend the program.

Social Benefits of Functional Adult Education

Another relevance of integrated functional adult education is the social empowerment of the participants. The importance of functional adult education is explained in terms of adult learners and their families' participation in the social system. The participants of this study asserted that the high relevance of the program is to increase their social empowerment. Askalu said,

> "Now I have a good relationship within my family and I can manage in the way other good families do. Neighbors and others from the workplace appreciate my family relationships and they said, 'You have disciplined daughters and you are lucky. I have good social relationships with my clients. I know how to communicate and form intimate relationships with anybody.'"

Tigist also mentioned that she manages families in different ways from other families. She said, "Today in the home I developed social skills of how to solve problems with my families and neighbors." Another participant, Selam, said,

> "Before I participate in the program, I don't know how to share ideas with an individual I haven't known before, but today I am not shy with anyone, even I know where about the formal organizations and ways of communications with them."

Integrated functional adult literacy builds the social empowerment of the participants through developing the skills and ways to communicate with formal organization staff. Workit pointed out that before she participated in this program, she was only at home and unable to communicate with any individuals within and out of the village. She reflected on her past social abilities,

"I don't believe in myself as I can communicate, when anybody comes to a home from anywhere including governmental offices my word was only one, that is I can receive a message but I can't respond, you can ask him [Workit's husband] for your concern."

All of the participants of this study have pointed out that IFAE builds toward their social empowerment. Specifically, the participants believed the adult education program increased their interactions with individuals from the neighborhood and the workplace, this is repeated by Selam who said,

"Now, unlike before, I know how I could keep in touch with my customers with smooth communication and smile face, but before my participation from this chance I am not conscious about well customer service is means to my business [cash-crop retailing]."

Many said illiterate women are the ones that cannot communicate and make relationships with other individuals, even with their family. Indeed, participants who look out towards social empowerment have importance in finding one's potential. The participants positioned that unless one can interact with friends it is impossible to learn from the classmates or anybody. For example, Askalu, a divorced woman said,

"Before I join this program, I feel afraid to talk with other individuals. When I was with my husband, he did not voluntarily allow me to converse with my women friends. If he saw me, when I am having conversations outside the house, with my neighbors, he would beat me. Occasionally, I had talked with them secretly, when he goes somewhere far from the home. But through the help of this program, today all things become history. All situations already passed, now I can do whatever I want because education builds my confidence."

The adult education program yields an opportunity for female learners, through opening the door, to form a relationship with other individuals. The participants thought when a woman interacts with others, she can find available resources in her environment. According to participants, it would seem that most women live in poverty because of the lack of social interaction. Workit said,

"Some years before because of my lack of social ability to communicate and interact with individuals I lost a chance to get place[4] [container] for business, consequently, I was in poverty, until I attend this program."

From participant's beliefs, one can easily understand as they did not understand that providing the workplace for women is the government's responsibility. Most of their answers show the presence of an unequal distribution of resources among the groups, youth, and female learners. Particularly, women are the ones who did not take the opportunities available in their past. Moreover, Askalu also shared the above idea by forwarding the following:

"I was living at the periphery of Bahir Dar City. I do not interact with anyone and because of that, I lost many opportunities. When most women get to marketplace, I cannot get to the marketplace. This resulted from my illiterateness and lack of communication and interaction with others. If I were conscious of available opportunities, now I would be a rich woman."

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[4] The place is a container for running a temporary business provided by the government for a certain period of time.

Participation in adult education programs has also improved the health condition of the learners' families. Women's involvement in functional adult education decreases the expansions of transmitted diseases. A participant pointed out that this program had contributed to the awareness of HIV/ADIS. There is a high rate of women exposed to different sexually transmitted diseases because of their lack of awareness and social interaction. Askalu said,

> "Even if I lost many chances in life, I want to thank my God to keep me free from the disease [HIV], Most of my friends died. . . [tearing]. . . because of disease, as they were not conscious and illiterate. After I attend here, I am conscious about disease, I don't want to marry again."

Similarly, other participants also explained the social benefits of adult education. To quote their sayings, Workit unequivocally explained the following, "In my home before my attendance to this program, there was medicine at least painkiller, but today my families are healthy, I know how to throw out the garbage." From the participants' words, adult education has an immense contribution to empowering women through providing basic life-skill training to protect them from transmitted diseases. HIV/ADIS has caused severe problems in the Sub-City where she lives. From this, the researcher understands that there is no accessible prevention and protection method for women, from HIV/ADIS and other transmitted diseases.

Based on their opinions in this study, an adult education program is indispensable for women's social empowerment. They highlighted that literate women can take social responsibilities in social

"Women's participation in social associations helps build confidence, gain help in challenging situations, and save money regularly."

associations. Women's participation in social associations helps build confidence, gain help in challenging situations, and save money regularly. They are today members of Idir, Iquib, and Women's Association [Yesetoch Mahiber] in their villages. For example, Tigist said, "Of course I don't have responsibilities, but I can take and discharge responsibilities from Iquib, Idir, and Women's Association because now I can read, write, and calculate." She thought that the adult education program provides basic skills, knowledge, and attitudes to execute responsibilities they take from the social system. Similarly, Workit said,

> "A few months ago, I was the chief of our Women's Association with 10 Birr[5] in a week from each member, but today I resigned from this responsibility but not from the association because of our internal problems, that is, one member deceive 78 Birr and I was annoyed."

From her claims, the adult education program could help the participants to protect themselves from different kinds of oppression and abuses.

Indeed, another advantage of adult education for women is to empower them to be able to decide on household issues. They felt the adult education program helps women understand the extent of decision-making at the family level. The program builds women's capability to decide on issues equally with men. This can be observed from Askalu's response:

> "When we live together, my husband often undermined my ideas in making decisions. Only he was the decision-maker in anything

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[5] Birr is the standard unit of money in Ethiopia.

in the house. He believes that I cannot take any responsibilities to lead a family. However, I can make decisions about my family issues. Today the program builds my capability to make decisions independently."

Men's superficial perception about women's ability to make decisions is one of the problems that women face in their daily lives, which hinder their empowerment processes. A husband's attitude toward the involvements of women in decision-making is detrimental; the inculcated patriarchal ideology in the social structure is the crux of the problem, which directly and indirectly contributes to women's oppression. The participants of this study thought there is an unfair distribution between men and women in the social spheres. They also felt their husbands oppress women in any social structure. However, women did not understand that the unequal distribution of power from social dimensions in different levels emanated from this ideology. In social activities, women are oppressed not because they are incapable of making decisions. Therefore, through providing adult education program opportunities, the potential of women can play a decisive role in transforming the social structure, followed by their empowerment.

Political Benefits of Functional Adult Education

Education, in general, and adult education in particular, used to develop the individual's consciousness and political participation. Being able to write, read texts, and understand the environments, as well as predicting the future of their milieu is often believed as highly dependent upon the accessibility of educational opportunities. Aside from formal education, adult education is expected to raise the learners' awareness of their identities. The learners' understanding of their identities directly or indirectly allows for participation in the political arena. In this study, the

contribution of adult education to women's political empowerment is not extraordinary. Regarding political empowerment, most participants believed that by attending adult education, it was possible to participate in different political issues. They thought adult education gave a chance to forward ideas, take notes, engage in group discussions and dialogues with individuals or groups, and other activities in political meetings. This can also be observed from Askalu's saying:

> "I participated in different political meetings in my village, raise questions and suggestions. I can take notes from what the chairperson of the meeting said when I take per diem I can sign and write my full name. When they saw my signature and the written name they admire me, they said if so, we would provide political responsibilities to you."

However, currently, she does not have a political position. Askalu is affiliated with the current ruling party of Ethiopia, and she works as a member of the political structure. In this situation, inequality exists when women do not have a position in the political system. She seems to assume that political position is something provided by those who have power. This shows that the participants as adult learners are not conscious of their rights and unfair distribution of power in the areas they live in. She can play a political role based on her convictions, regardless of her membership in political parties. Besides Askalu's idea, Selam and Workit indicated they are participating in political issues at the cell level. They discovered, through this political structure, how different social problems are solved and they are active members of the cell. Their participation helps them work with others to clean their homes and villages through regular discussions. However, from the above findings, it is clear that women's participation in political positions, at least within

their village, is still constrained to be insignificant. Despite their contributions to peace and security, family betterment, and community progress, women are segregated from political positions, even in local decision-making positions.

Challenges of Women's Participation in Functional Adult Education

Different factors challenge women's participation in adult education. A lack of awareness about the relevance of education is the major detrimental factor, resulting in less participation of women. The participants indicated that women are not well informed about the relevance of integrated functional adult education, which is corroborated by participants' voices. "We women are not willing to participate when something comes for us. Most participant dropout from this class because they don't know this program is for them", said Askalu. "At the beginning of my participation and before I come to here [program center], I was cynical about its relevance to my life, but then after I get it being essential to everything for me," Workit reflected. To provide sufficient awareness of adult education programs, it is essential to empower women in Belay Zeleke Sub-City, Kebele 17 and extend awareness creation programs as they are insufficiently repeated. In the Sub-City, there is also a high rate of women who drop out from the program.

Often, women's participation in adult education can be hindered by their physical health (Skilton-Sylvester, 2002). When women become older, they begin to encounter different health and fitness issues. Askalu said, "Now I can write, read, and calculate, and I am also trying all tasks provided in the classroom, but now my eye can't see well, there is some problem in my eye when I read texts." The absence of priority and attention from the government for adult education results in the exclusion of those women who need assistance.

Adult education centers do nothing to provide learning for women with special needs. Adult education provision centers should consider the presence of diversified learners.

Women learners' participation is limited by different factors in addition to the above awareness problems. Persistent poverty is a highly dominant problem hindering women's participation in educational opportunities. The presence of economic problems consequently requires women to engage in income-generating activities for survival. The challenge can be found in this study from the verbatim of the participant, Workit,

> "the main problem I have face is lack of time to get chance to go adult education classroom unless I can't work in a daily manner, I can't feed my families, for example, often I miss the Friday's class because I have to work but always I attend Sunday's class."

In addition, women's participation in literacy programs is also challenged by their economic situation. Their low level of economic status hinders their participation. Similar to Workit, Askalu also talked of the economic challenges to participate by saying, "I prioritize our work then this education, because most of the learners live a subsistent life, usually I miss the class sometimes because I have to work at that time." Unfair economic resource distribution can also be observed from her sayings and these result in women's lessened participation in an adult education program. Relative to men, a high rate of women is exposed to poverty. This unequal distribution of economic resources should be changed to increase women's participation in adult education programs, and ultimately empower them.

The distance from the program center to a women's home is another challenge to participation. Like other variables, the remoteness of women's villages contributes to the dropout of learners. Askalu said,

> "There is a woman who comes from a remote area, the place they come from would have to pay 10 Birr for transport. They come to the program center occasionally. However, for me, the maximum transport cost is only 2 Birr."

Compared to the formal education, integrated functional adult education is mostly provided by local resources, but the provision is not accessible in all areas in the Sub-City. Adult education should be provided at a convenient location and time for female learners.

Finally, the result of this study shows participating in adult education programs leads to women feeling empowered. As a result, it is essential to provide IFAE for all women to improve their participation in different social structures. Concisely, Askalu said; *"today's my live is different from the past (የድሮዉ እና የዛሬዉ የኑሮ ሁኔታ የየሰማይና የምድር ያክል ልዩነት አለዉ), Now I feel as a full person (አሁን ራሴን እንደ ሙሉ ሰዉ ነዉ የማስበዉ)."*

"Women's economic empowerment is the main concern of integrated adult education programs as it includes the women's ability to be self-reliant in economic aspects and the extent of involvement in entrepreneurship."

adult literacy to empower women in a myriad of ways. Prins's (2008) study in El Salvador identifies the importance of adult literacy in empowering women in their social and economic lives. The study finds that women's empowerment in social and economic aspects through the adult education program.

Certainly, integrated functional adult education envisions women as important in the major economic areas to increase their income. Women's economic empowerment is the main concern of integrated adult education programs as it includes women's ability to be self-reliant in economic aspects and the extent of involvement in entrepreneurship. In this study, after women attend adult education programs, they lead their life in better ways. Chattier (2013) shows similar finding that women's participation in the adult education program increases their economic dominance. The participants of this study improve their income through participation in adult education and they can afford educational expenses and college fees. Kagitcibasi et al. (2005) reveal that women in functional literacy programs have improved their living standards through improving income via accessing job opportunities. Similar to their findings, this study shows women's participation in functional adult education broadens women's chances to participate in different breadwinning activities.

Social empowerment is the main issue in adult education programs provided to improve women's life. In this study, adult learning opens the door for women to make a relationship with others, to take part in social associations, to increase decision-

Discussion

Providing adult education for women, who are beyond formal schooling, economically poor, and dropouts from formal school, is important for development. It is invaluable to empower those women. Academic literature and different organizations report the importance of functional

making ability, and to improve family planning, health, and relationships. The same result also found by Gul (2015) that women's participation in adult education improves their interaction with individuals, groups, and society as a whole. This finding is also corroborated by findings of Kagitcibasi et al. (2005), which states women who participate in functional literacy find higher status in the family, group, and society, as well as in decision-making processes.

Political empowerment is a critical issue in the empowerment process of women. In this study, relative to other empowerment issues, political empowerment is not achieved as expected. The participants of this study, after participating in adult education, they affiliate with political parties, but currently, they do not have power in the political system. Political empowerment is seldom achieved through adult education. The same finding also shows in Longwe's (1998) study; political empowerment yields women's control over the resources and ends segregation. Longwe also concludes that even if the provision of adult education is significant to women, political empowerment remains low. Kagitcibasi et al. (2005) also asserts that women's political empowerment is minimized, even with their participation in the adult education program. Therefore, the finding shows that women who participated in adult education in Belay Zeleke Sub-City, Kebele 17 are politically unable to be fully empowered.

However, women's participation in adult education is challenged by different factors. The findings of this study reveal women's involvement in the program was hindered by awareness problems, economic situations, distance, and learners' health conditions. Kagitcibasi et al. (2005) also concluded the same result; women's participation in functional adult literacy is challenged by their low level of economic status. However, Kagitcibasi and his

colleagues' study does not conclude distance between women's homes and literacy centers as a challenge in adult education provision. The study also found the awareness problem that learners' husbands are another cause of women's low participation in adult education. Therefore, despite its contribution, women's involvement in adult education is challenged by different factors.

Conclusion

The role of integrated functional adult education to improve women's empowerment is unquestionable. In the study setting, the provision of functional adult education is necessary for individual, group, community, and national development. Since women are half of any population, sidelining them in any development paths makes the track difficult to reach goals. Women who are beyond school age are the major group of any society's development. Forcing silence on these women eventually leaves any development without progress. Therefore, in Ethiopia, the provision of adult education for women should be a fundamental focus rather than an alternative for others. The participants of this study indicated the program's relevance in their day-to-day lives, however, the provision of the program is not exhaustive. Not all women with illiteracy are mobilized towards adult education. Women, who participated in this study, except in political empowerment, in social and economic spheres, have demonstrated improvements through functional adult education.

Further research may come up with another perspective by employing either quantitative or mixed methods to fill the gap of this paper. Another issue that challenges this study is the lack of sufficient literature in functional literacy. However, in this study, at Belay Zeleke Sub-City in Kebele 17, it is very important to have a depth of understanding of the major contributions of adult education in

empowering women through qualitative study. Moreover, understanding the potential challenges that women might experience in participating in adult education can lead to corrective measures to increase the effectiveness of the program. The participants of this study admitted and acknowledged the significance of the program to empower women. Therefore, the providers of the program should address all women in the study area. Indeed, this study also shows the provision of adult education should be accessible to all areas to increase women's participation and empowerment.

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