Enhancing the Provision of Integrated Functional Adult Education Program through Community Engagement: The Case of Mettu University in Oromia National Regional State

Tagel Mahammed[1] and Takele Kebede[2]

Abstract

The aim of the study was to investigate the contribution of Mettu University in enhancing the provision of Integrated Functional Adult Education through community engagement in Ilubabor Zone of Oromia national regional state. The study employed descriptive design and mixed method. Data was collected from 134 respondents selected from IFAE program center facilitators, coordinators, zone and district education offices, and Mettu University staff. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used in this study. Questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussion were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative information was analyzed by using frequency count and percentage, and the qualitative information were expressed through descriptive statements, interpreted and supplemented with the quantitative data. The major findings of the study were: Mettu University limited itself to the training given inside the university; the academic staff of AECD department of Mettu University engaged with the IFAE program in Ilubabor Zone only via student practicum and not through academic staff engagement; there is lack of organized communication channel of zone and district education offices within Mettu University with regards to community engagement. It can be concluded that the contribution of Mettu University to enhance the provision of IFAE program is low, and it is limited to the academic setting. It is therefore suggested that the academic and non-academic staff of the University should recognize the potential and contributions of instructors; the University should integrate issues of IFAE in its community engagement practices; it should also create an opportunity in which both its university teachers and students can provide service learning in the area of IFAE to enhance the provision of IFAE through community engagement.

Keywords: University-community engagement, community engagement, Integrated Functional Adult Education.

[1] Lecturer, Department of Adult Education and Community Development, Mettu University.Email-yomteg@gmail.com

[2] Assistant Professor, PhD in Philosophy of Education, Ambo University. Email-gaooyuta2018@gmail.com

Introduction

Background of the Study

In recent years, university–community engagement has been implemented by an increasing number of universities across the world. Activities such as service-based learning and participatory research are receiving more and more attention from various stakeholders such as policymakers, academics, and authorities (Grau *et al*., 2017). Coincidentally, these changes are taking place during a time when universities are expected to have a global impact through their research.

In a knowledge-driven economy, universities play a vital role in creating new knowledge – either independently or in collaboration with external actors. This knowledge is then transferred or integrated into society as a whole, and into the public and private sectors. Firms' interaction with universities may grant access to specialized knowledge and the opportunity to conduct high-quality research (Hussler *et al*., 2010; Laursen & Salter, 2004; Raesfeld *et al*., 2012), thereby creating new possibilities for innovation development (Mansfield, 1991; Cohen *et al*., 2002; Dahlander & Gann, 2010).

Since its establishment besides teaching and learning, Mettu University has been engaged in various community service activities. The community services aimed at enabling the local community to cope with daily life problems by creating development opportunities to make the community beneficiary from the university's resources. Mettu University has also embarked many study programs so as to expand education opportunities to the society, and the Department of Adult Education and Community Development (AECD) is among the academic units in this university.

Mettu University has been involved in the training of adult educators through well-designed curricula on degree programs. In addition, Mettu University places undergraduate students to the nearby local districts and get them investigate tasks accomplished through the Integrated Functional Adult Education (IFAE) program.

Adult learning takes place in a number of settings such as colleges, universities, vocational training, business and industry, professional education, community action, literacy education, or informal learning networks. Adults learn best in a collaborative setting in which they are taking and giving knowledge and wisdom. Hence, facilitating adult learning is the result of collaborations, networks and interactive learning across diverse types of actors.

Universities are expected to be "good neighbors," and university–community engagement is presumably a way to meet these expectations (Benneworth *et al.*, 2008). By engaging locally, it is argued that universities could ensure their relevance to society, strengthen public trust, and partially justify the public resources they receive (Benneworth *et al.*, 2008; Hart & Northmore, 2011). Academics should reinvent themselves, get out of the perceived "ivory tower," and engage with local communities. Supposedly, this would lead to the enhancement of the goals of universities while also increasing local actors' capacity to address and resolve the issues they confront.

Mettu University recognizes community service as a key area of activity so as to share a high level of expertise with the community. Engagement with society and communities flows from the University's teaching and research functions and translate the policy in ways that are consistent with the institution's vision and mission, linking

the best of the research and teaching skills of the staff and students to the specific needs of the local community.

Mettu University has been working on the following Identified Community Service Thematic Areas: Health Sciences, Agricultural Sciences, Natural Sciences, Engineering and Technology, Social Sciences, Business and Economics, Law, and Education and Behavioral Sciences. Mettu University's community engagement/service directorate indicates that multiple issues are categorized under these thematic areas, and adult education and community development is one of the areas considered as one part of its community engagement practices.

Unless this diversity of capabilities and resources are not successfully organized, change in the livelihood of adults cannot be happen. It is this capitalization of knowledge that is the heart of a new mission for the university, linking universities to users of knowledge more tightly and establishing the university as an economic actor in its own right. To this end, the researchers investigated the contribution of Mettu University in enhancing the provision of Integrated Functional Adult Education program through community engagement.

Mettu University has been engaged in serving the community in various service providing activities. In fact, Mettu University community engagement is providing many short-term training for employees who are working in different government sectors aiming at filling skill and knowledge gaps related to the employee's daily duties. Besides providing such training, Mettu University has contributed financial and

material resources that directly serve the community for health institutions, agriculture, secondary schools, including community's cultural issues.

Developing human capacity in general and the productive adult population in urban and rural Ethiopia in particular are necessary both to further strengthen these efforts and realize the international and national development goals. Hence, it is essential to provide an integrated functional adult education (IFAE) program that is not only closely related to daily life, health, income generation, productivity, etc., but also improves these and other aspects of life (MoE, 2011: 3).

A study conducted by Kitessa and Tekalign (2017) in Ilubabor Zone showed that there was poor management and organization of integrated functional adult literacy program with regards to planning, monitoring, evaluating and getting feedback of the outcome of the program. Besides, there were lack of motivation and willingness of adults/learners to participate in the program. Additionally, many of the facilitators did not receive the initial training which could equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge of teaching for instructional planning and classroom management. However, there has been no improvement.

Regarding IFAE program provision and implementation, a study by Andualem and Wubayew (2017) revealed that the program was ineffective, and the achievement standards of the trainers were insufficient from one level to the other. Organization of the program was not integrated to ensure a relationship among the concerned offices to ensure the achievement of the program in between sectors. The program in practice was comprehensive.

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On the other side, from the researchers' observation of Adult Education Program in the sampled districts of Ilubabor Zone, the performance of the facilitators and the coordinators of the program was weak; they assumed as if it was additional work given to them. Consequently, the overall program seems to be forgotten or it might be terminated at some level.

To the knowledge of the researchers no study has been conducted to explore the reasons behind lack of effectiveness of IFAE program in the study area. The researchers think this study will help to fill the existing gap by searching other possible opportunities like working collaboratively with higher educational institutions. Since Mettu University has been involved in training of adult educators for the past nine years and has professionals with accumulated experiences in this field of specialization, it will be possible to link this knowledge with that of the university's community engagement practices. Looking at the great motto of Mettu University which says "We are dedicated to serve the Community", the researchers aimed to investigate the contribution of Mettu University in enhancing the provision of Integrated Functional Adult Education (IFAE) program through community engagement.

Methods

Description of the Study Area

Illubabor is a zone in Oromia Region of Ethiopia. It is bordered on the south by the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region, on the southwest by the Gambela Region, on the west by Kelem Welega Zone, on the north by West Welega Zone, on the northwest by East Welega Zone, and on the east by Buno Bedele Zone.

Illubabor Zone is about 600 kilometers far from the capital Addis Ababa. According to the government structure, the Illubabor Zone is sub-divided into 14 Districts. Yayo, Hurumu, Alle/Gore, Ukka, and Bure districts are the focus areas of this study among the 14 districts. Mettu University which was taken as the other focus area of this study is also found in Illubabor Zone. It was established among the third generation universities with the primary mission to ensure quality education, undertake problem-solving research, and carry out multi-dimensional services to the communities. Adult Education and Community Development is one of the departments found in this university.

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive design. The researchers preferred descriptive design for two main reasons. The first is using descriptive design helps to describe the present status of existence or absence of what is being investigated (Osuji, 2012). Second, descriptive design allows the combined use of a great variety of instruments in the data collection, saving time and energy as well as money that the researchers spend over data collection (Osuji, 2012: 76).

Research Approach

In this study, mixed method was used to generate and examine information obtained from respondents. Because it provides a more complete picture by noting trends and generalizations as well as in-depth knowledge of participants' perspectives (Creswell *et al*., 2002). The quantitative method would help the researchers to examine the quantitative data obtained through questionnaire with close-ended question items and the qualitative method would also help to examine the data obtained through the

use of open-ended questionnaire, focus group discussion (FGD), document analysis, and interview.

Target Population, Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The target population of this study was IFAE Program Center Facilitators (161), IFAE Program Coordinators at district level (20), IFAE Program Coordinators at Zonal level (7), Mettu University AECD department head and instructors (9), and Mettu University top level administrative (5), the total number was 202.

Here the researchers preferred to use a simplified formula to determine or calculate sample sizes by referring to Yamane (1967, p. 886), which is presented as

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n = sample size

N = population size

e = error (0.05) reliability level 95% or; e = level of precision always set the value of 0.05

❖ For selecting total sample size: $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} = \frac{202}{1+202(0.05)^2} = \frac{202}{1.505} = 134$

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❖ For each categories of Respondents: for example

To determine samples from facilitators**:** n $=$ $\underline{RPS}$ (n) $=$ $\underline{161}$ (134) $=$ 107

N   202

To this end, the researchers drew the representative sample through simple random and purposive sampling techniques from the target study population. "Purposive sampling helps to ensure selecting the sample who are pre-determined in number and are best positioned to provide the needed information for the study" (Kumar, 2011, p. 167). To this end, by using random sampling 13 AEP coordinators, Mettu University president and 2 academic vise-presidents as well as AECD department head, and 5 AECD department teachers were selected. Additionally, simple random sampling technique was also employed for selecting IFAE center facilitators from the five districts (Yayo, Gore, Hurumu, Ukka, and Bure). As a result, out of 161 IFAE center facilitators listed, 107 samples were selected randomly. Five IFAE program coordinators from Ilubabor Zone Education Office were also chosen because of their experience in the area of IFAE program, and totally 134 respondents were involved in this study.

Type and Sources of Data

The data for this study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source was the University's administration body, AECD department head and teachers, IFAE facilitators and coordinators at zonal and district levels; these were directly involved in the program. Secondary data source were the document or the

record which is available in Mettu University/AECD department and in AEP coordinators both at zonal and district levels.

Data Collection Tools

The researchers carefully collected the relevant IFAE information from the sample through three data gathering tools. These are: Questionnaire (composed of close-ended and open-ended items), Interview, Focus Group Discussion, and Observation.

Interview

Semi-structured interview was used to gather data from the University's president, vise-presidents and AECD department head and University instructors, as well as each district AEP coordinators. Accordingly, a one-hour interview was conducted with each respondent; and the questions were about the university's community engagement activities, university-community linkage, contribution of the university in enhancing IFAE program in terms of resources, and the challenges hindering the university in enhancing the provision of IFAE program through the community engagement activities.

Questionnaire

By and large, questionnaire is the most preferable among instruments for data collection when studying large population. For this reason, the researchers prepared 31 items questionnaire composed of 25 close-ended and 6 open-ended items to collect information from IFAE Program center facilitators. The questions were about the

competency level of the facilitators, the administration of IFAE program, the support MU is providing to IFAE program enhancement and the effectiveness of the university's community engagement from IFAE program perspective.

Focus Group Discussion

Focus Group Discussions were conducted to verify, build on and add depth to the result of Key Informant Interviews. One focus group discussion with one group with 6 participants was conducted with the coordinators of IFAE program at zonal education office. The participants of the discussion were 4 male and 2 females, and the discussion was conducted for 60 minutes in the compound of the zone education office. The questions were about the status of IFAE program in Ilubabor Zone, the required competency level of IFAE program facilitators, relations Mettu University has with zone and district education offices, areas of Mettu University community engagement, the contribution of Mettu University in supporting the provision of IFAE, and effectiveness of Mettu University's intervention from IFAE program perspective. The discussion was facilitated and guided by the researchers.

Observation

Observation was conducted to verify, build on and substantiate the results obtained through the other data collection instruments. The researchers conducted observations on the sampled districts using an observation checklist.

Method of Data Analysis

Views from the sample participants in the interview, open-ended questionnaire, and FGD with further literature and research on the issue studied were coded and given value and finally analyzed through qualitative narration. This was done by identifying the words of the respondent and by reviewing the documents carefully. The quantitative data collected through closed ended questionnaire was analyzed using frequency tables and percentages.

Validity and Reliability Analysis

Validity

The data collection tools developed by the researchers were used in this study. In order to ensure the validity of the research instruments, the researchers gave the draft research tools to senior colleagues in the field to evaluate appropriateness of the items and to ensure that all the questions asked in the tools fully reflect the research objectives and the research questions. In addition, a pilot test was conducted on Mettu District which was not included in the sample; feedback from the pilot survey was also used to check the appropriateness of the questions.

Reliability

After designing the data collection tools, a reliability analysis was done to ensure measurements are reliable for the study. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using a reliability test with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. That is, the Cronbach's alpha for organizing stage, performance stage, and evaluation stage were measured to identify the internal consistency of the survey is found to be good. Literature indicates that reliability or internal consistency reflects the

extent to which items within an instrument measure various aspects of the same characteristic or construct. That is, Cronbach's alpha indicates the degree to which the items in the scale correlate with each other in the group; for an instrument to be reliable, the Cronbach's alpha value should be above 0.7. Various authors suggest that, if the range of Cronbach's alpha value is above 0.9, the internal consistency is considered to be excellent; if it is 0.8-0.9, the internal consistency is good; if it is 0.7-0.8, the internal consistency is acceptable; and if the range is below 0.7, the internal consistency is considered to be questionable or poor or unacceptable. Accordingly, the calculated values of Cronbach's alpha values for the variables of the study were above 0.7. That is, 0.965 for organizing state, 0.889 for performance stage, and 0.869 for evaluation stage. Hence, the Cronbach's alpha values of all the variables of the study were above 0.8, indicating the internal consistency is in the range of excellent and good. The calculated Cronbach's alpha values of the variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha Value

Reliability Statistics		
Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Organizing stage	0.965	5
Performance stage	0.889	5
Evaluation stage	0.869	4

Results and Discussions

Background Characteristics of Respondents

The data collected on the characteristics of the facilitators indicate that, the majority of facilitators, that is, 104 (97%), were found to be between the age of 15 to 34 and 3 (2.8%), were between the age of 35 to 50 years. This shows that the participants are young enough who can contribute to the development.

The educational background of the majority of respondents (facilitators), 92 (86%), were grade 10/12 completed; those facilitators who had qualifications above secondary education were 15 (14%). This shows that the qualification of the facilitators was up to the standard and it is a good opportunity to implement the program. The facilitators recruited for IFAE program must have completed at least grade ten, be familiar with language, culture and living of the community, be acceptable by the community; female candidates are given priorities (MoE, 2011b).

The data collected on the employment background of the IFAE facilitators indicate that 79 (73.8%) of the respondent facilitators are permanently hired, the remaining 20 (18.7%), and 8 (7.5%) are temporary workers and volunteers (free servants), respectively.

This shows that most of them were permanently employed. However, the employment status of both temporary and free servant facilitators might have negative attribution on the implementation of the program because they may not give due concern for the profession rather concentrate on searching other work that may invite them to be permanently employed.

Mandate of Mettu University's AECD department in supporting the provision of Integrated Functional Adult Education program

As one of the departments in Mettu University, AECD department has been engaged more on teaching-learning and research, but not actively participating in community activities as a department. The university's system couldn't give them an opportunity to engage in such activities rather it gives an opportunity to other departments to participate on community engagement activities.

Regarding the mandate of AECD department, the respondent stated:

> *As a department we do have a regular program to produce skilled man power who can shoulder society's burden, to conduct problem solving research and projects and to provide community services. In this essence, we have been giving different training courses for adult education program coordinators working at woreda level in first degree program. However, it was not so much effective because it only focused on the training of education office experts and even limited inside the university campus.*

This indicated that Mettu University's AECD department has done good to support the provision of IFAE, but it limited itself to the training given inside the university and could not consider providing technical support including provision of training for the program facilitators and adult learners outside the university.

As the participant replied,

> *This is similar with the above issue. What I can say surely is without having communication or interaction with the community outside the academia, how can we transfer knowledge? To do this, first there should be a way to create community linkage in order to share our expertise knowledge in the area of IFAE.*

This shows that the attention given to department-community linkage is very low although this might lead to the question who the responsible body, apart from the department leader, is.

There is an opportunity that allows both teachers and students of this department to interact with the external community. However, the purpose of this interaction is for the sake of practicum work which helps the students to get insight on the theory they have learnt in the classroom with its application on the ground. This is done through observation of IFAE adult learning centers around the local districts.

This indicates that the department's interaction is somewhat good when seen from the students' perspective. This shows that the contribution of Mettu University's AECD department teachers is very low as they were not directly involved in the process. That is, the academic staff of AECD department of Mettu University engaged with the IFAE program in the zone only via student practicum, not through academic staff engagement.

There is no formal relationship with the education offices at zonal and/or district level. They communicate sometimes when the department needs some information for

its own purpose. This revealed that lack of horizontal or vertical relationship with the education offices at zonal and/or district level hindered the knowledge exchange between Mettu University's AECD department instructors and local community with regard to IFAE program. So lack of such relationship might be one factor for the weak department-community linkage.

Mettu University's AECD department assessed the gaps faced by AEF & Coordinators in implementing the program in Ilubabor Zone local districts in two ways: indirectly from the department students' interaction with the local community through practicum works, and directly from the research done by department teachers. In this essence, poor awareness on the program, lack of cooperation and coordination among the stakeholders, low competency level (knowledge, skill, and attitude) of IFAE facilitators, and lack of knowledge of coordinators on planning, organizing, evaluating as well as monitoring the program are the main gaps identified in implementing the program.

Mettu University's AECD department has contributed to the area of IFAE through the training of coordinators through its program. This showed that to some extent it might minimize lack of skilled human power in the area. However, regarding the contribution in terms of knowledge sharing, learning material resources, and allocating budget, there is no such support provided by this department for the improvement of IFAE.

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Mettu University's Role in Supporting IFAE Program

All the respondent samples of Mettu University' administration had served 6-10 years in Mettu University. On the other hand, they have 3-5 years of experience at their current work position hence they might have more information in the area of Mettu University' community engagement practices.

The respondents sampled from Mettu University' administration indicated that, Mettu University's mission holds three main categories: Teaching and Learning, research, and community engagement/service. The overall mission of Mettu University is stated as:

> *Offering quality education to produce competent graduate, conducting need-based researches that alleviate societal problems and offering need based multidimensional services to the community.*

According to the available literature on this issue, the basic function of this third dimension of any mission refers to the knowledge transfer from the academic environment to the whole society, and it covers everything besides traditional teaching and research (Jongbloed, Enders & Salerno, 2008).

Other studies have shown that policies and related administrative directives are believed to be pressures that are important drivers of institutionalization (Sanchez-Barrioluengo, 2014; Pinheiro, Langa & Pausits, 2011).

As the data revealed, translating the University's mission, vision and goal is the prior mandate of each department. Of course, Mettu University offers each department

to be engaged in community activities, but the academic staff members of Mettu University did not fully engage in community activities. The literature on this issue state that "As in any other professions, working conditions, the overall environment under which academic staff perform their daily tasks, determines not only their motivation to work but also their sense of belongingness, attachment to their institution, and even their self-esteem" (Ayenachew, 2013).

On the issue of university-community linkage and knowledge transfer, all the respondents stated that Mettu University has been working in this area by establishing different mechanisms, creating awareness through the University's community FM, and engaging community elders. However, this linkage is not good enough in the area of knowledge transfer for local community outside of Mettu University. Both Mettu University students and teachers interact with external communities in regular time bases, during practicum works, practice, and field observation, project or/and assignment work, case study. As they stated, this interaction has tangible result in serving the local community especially on the issue of health and agriculture. But still there are gaps with regard to Mettu University teachers' interaction. This indicated that the interaction of Mettu University teachers with external local community is very less as compared to Mettu University students.

It is evident that even though the University instructors in Ethiopia are supposed to teach, conduct research, and engage in community service, the teaching mission takes much of their time (Semela, 2011).

Mettu University has established department of Adult Education and Community Development and engaged in training of adult education coordinators at district level who come from Oromia and Gambella region. Regarding other contributions, as one of the respondents' word,

> *It is the mandate and responsibility of AECD department to facilitate and to work/engaged more in enhancing the provision of IFAE, this department should have to enforce the University to integrate an issue of IFAE in its community engagement practices. To do so, it needs the department (AECD) first to have motivation by itself, plan what to do, then presenting it to the responsible bodies so as to change the department's plan into action.*

The community engagement plan considers the identified needs of the local community. The decision depends on the need assessment undertaken prior to the practice. As a result of this, most Mettu University's community engagement practices were implemented based on the specific needs of the local community. Its responsiveness is measured by how it solves the existing problems in the community. Accordingly, the best responsive one is the practice in the area of Health, formal schools and Agriculture.

The literature evidenced that, the curricula (formal and hidden) of universities, their choice research programs, the uses to which the outcomes are put to use, should all be planned by reference to real needs and problems in the community (Castro-Martínez, 2007)**.**

On the other hand, significant change could be seen through the involvement of Mettu University community activities/services. This involvement provided the local community to share the University's resources especially in the area of formal schools (primary and secondary), agriculture, women empowerment, health, culture, environmental protection and conservation. However, the community needs in terms of IFAE program was not considered as one of the thematic areas in Mettu University's community service issue.

This shows that no satisfactory effort is made by Mettu University from IFAE perspective. UCE is the involvement of universities with their local and regional communities in a shared process of learning, development and knowledge-making puts AE & LLL center-stage (Johnson, 2020).

As the data revealed there is Adult Education and Community Development department, trained professionals and undergraduate students in the area of IFAE, various community development programs started by Mettu University in local districts. The availability of all these resources might be an opportunity to support the provision of IFAE.

Status of Mettu University's Intervention from IFAE Perspective

The concept and the perception of community engagement varied among the academic staffs of Mettu University. Some of them explained it as it is teaching the community outside of the University during free time, whereas others defined it as it is participating in community work for the sake of development issues. There is no identified and practical engagement put for the department's teachers to take part directly in community activities rather they sometimes participate only during practicum works. This indicates that they have different perceptions on the concept of community engagement. It seems that there is no experience on the issue.

AECD department engaged in teaching undergraduate students in a way they change the theory they have learnt in the class-room into practice depending on the real context of the community they are living in. As they all said, there is no transparent/clear way set for them to change this into practice through community engagement activities. AECD department offers teachers and students opportunity to interact with the nearby district communities during practicum works in order to allow students to investigate whether or not IFAE is going on as the principle and the theory they have learnt in the class-room, and only allowed them to reflect the result of the investigation as a report. But this has no contribution for the improvement of the program except taken as the students' assignment.

Mettu University has done various things for the local community through its community engagement program to contribute to their needs especially on issues of health, agriculture, formal education, culture. However, the effectiveness of Mettu University's intervention is null/nothing when seen from IFAE perspective since it only

focused on supporting formal education areas. This indicated that the responsiveness of Mettu University's Community Engagement practices to the specific needs of the Local Community is unsatisfactory from IFAE perspective. As Duke and Hinzen (2014) stated that "there is a notion to establish networks with universities, teacher associations and civil society organizations" and work towards "improving capacity building and the professionalization of adult educators".

The result of data collected from facilitators through questionnaire indicate that, IFAE program has been given by untrained individuals, low competency (knowledge, skill and attitude) of both facilitators and coordinators, weak experience on planning, organizing, coordinating, implementing, evaluating and monitoring the program, no collaboration of the concerned body, and weak interest of the facilitators are the gaps seen/identified in the program. However, Mettu University's contribution is not as such if seen in terms of knowledge sharing/capacity building, financial support, and providing learning material resources to respond to the challenges faced by Adult Education program facilitators and coordinators at local district/zonal level.

Several challenges hindered Mettu University and its AECD Department from supporting the provision of IFAE through community engagement activities. These include: difficulty organizing advanced knowledge-sharing programs aligned with the university's community service initiatives, limited capacity to mobilize the required resources, limited interaction between department teachers and students, and lack of commitment from stakeholders. Adult educators and universities must both address the real needs of a stressed fast-changing world through community engagement activities (Duke and Hinzen, 2014).

Assessment of knowledge, skill, and ability regarding IFAE program by adult learning facilitators and AE coordinators

Table 2

The Required Competency Level of Facilitators

	Required Competency Level	V. low 1		Low 2		Medium 3		High 4		V. high 5	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	**Organizing stage-knowledge dimension**										
1.1	Knowledge about how adults learn and understanding the psychology of adults	9	8	86	80	12	11	_	_	_	_
1.2	Knowledge of methods in AE and learning	5	4.6	92	86	10	9	-	-	_	_
1.3	Skills in preparing value-based (democratic and humanistic) programs	7	6.5	79	74	21	20	_	_	_	_
1.4	Planning and organizational skills	4	3.7	96	90	7	6.5	-	-	-	-
1.5	Good knowledge of the subject	-	-	93	87	14	13	-	-	-	-
2	**Performance stage – skills dimension**										
2.1	Ability to motivate for learning – before, during and after the learning process	7	6.5	26	24	74	69	_	_	_	_

2.2	Development of learning environment in accordance with students' needs, focusing on self-directed learning	5	4.6	82	77	20	18.6	_	_	_	_
2.3	Skills to activate learners	-	-	22	20.5	85	79.4	-	-	-	-
2.4	Communication skills	-	-	16	15	91	85	-	-	-	-
2.5	Skills and experience in transferring subject knowledge to different target groups	17	16	76	71	14	13	_	_	_	_
3	**Evaluation stage**										
3.1	Skills in self-reflection and critical thinking	-	-	86	80	21	20	-	-	-	-
3.2	Skills in evaluating and promoting self-evaluation in oneself and students	9	8	83	77.5	15	14	-	-	-	-
3.3	Experience in using different Methods of evaluation	21	19.6	77	80	9	8	-	-	-	-
3.4	Assessment of learning needs and attainment levels	14	13	81	75.7	12	11.2	-	-	-	-

Adult learning facilitators need specific competences (skills, knowledge and attitudes) in order to carry out their (professional) tasks such as teaching, managing, program design or planning, assessment and evaluation, etc. (Buiskool *et al*. 2010; Zarifis, 2009; Zarifis, 2012). But, the results of the data analysis indicate that majority of IFAE facilitators have low knowledge about how adults learn about and understand the psychology of adults.

Facilitators should learn to incorporate methods of learning that prove effective in every learning situation. Combining methods will help both facilitators and learners to achieve better (Mohammad, 2013). However, the result of the data analysis indicate that majority of the IFAE facilitators have low knowledge of methods in AE and learning.

Facilitators are key professionals in the process and advancement of IFAE programs. As a result due attention should be given to their training to increase the acquisition of knowledge, skills and aptitude according to the levels of competency (Esayas, 2014). But, the results of the data analysis indicate that the majority of the IFAE facilitators have low skills in preparing value-based (democratic and humanistic) programs; have low planning and organizational skills; and low knowledge of the subject.

The result of the data analysis indicate that, the majority of the IFAE facilitators' ability to motivate adults for learning is at a medium level; have low skills on the area of development of learning environment in accordance with the adult learners' needs (focusing on self-directed learning); have medium skills to activate learners; and their communication skill is at medium level.

The result of the data analysis indicate that the majority of the IFAE facilitators have low skills in self-reflection and critical thinking; low skills in evaluating and promoting self-evaluation in oneself and adult learners; low level of experience in using different methods of evaluation; and low level on assessment of learning needs and attainment levels.

The required competency level of the facilitators

As the response (data) in Table 2 indicates, regarding knowledge dimension, most of the facilitators have poor/weak knowledge of the methods and knowledge about how adults learn about and understand the psychology of adults. Regarding the skill dimension, most of the facilitators do not have the necessary skills that are minimally required for their profession. Concerning evaluation stage/dimension, their response showed that most facilitators have less awareness and inexperienced on how to use different methods of evaluation.

Data obtained from facilitators through interview

Depending on the provided open-ended and close-ended interview, the sampled facilitators responded the following response accordingly.

The facilitators responded that IFAE program is not planned, organized, implemented, monitored and evaluated in a structured way at their district level. Participants stated that this was because of absence of concentration, lack of experience on the area, weak knowledge, skill, and attitude toward the program, and perceiving the program as an extra load.

There is no organized structure/connection with Mettu University in relation to community engagement/activities that provides support to their work, but very often Mettu University's AECD department offered teachers and students the opportunity to engage in practicum work at selected and nearby adult learning centers. However, this interaction has no contribution for their profession as well as for the program's improvement.

Respondents said that they did not get any knowledge sharing and/or training opportunities in relation to the required competency (knowledge, skills, attitudes, personal attributes) from Mettu University's professionals in the area of their work. Ethiopian's Ministry of Education indicates that a thirty days pre-service training on andragogy shall be given to all other newly recruited facilitators (MoE, 2011b). However, the poor training of facilitators negatively contributed to poor performance of IFAE programs.

Concerning the question on the contribution of Mettu University in terms of capacity building, material resources, and financial support: according to the responses repeatedly given by the respondents, it is difficult to state what this university/department contributed to respond to the challenges faced by Adult Education program facilitators in the entire program implementation.

There should be functional interaction between Mettu University and district education offices. Hence, Mettu University's AECD department professionals should work on capacity building or/and share their knowledge outside the university, and Mettu University should create an opportunity in which both its university teachers and students can provide service learning in the area of IFAE. Mettu University should also enhance the provision of IFAE through community engagement.

According to Fryer (2010), Community Service Learning can be used to enhance students' learning in areas such as global citizenship, critical community issues, and academic fields of knowledge. It can also be used to apply the resources of the university (people, knowledge, and methods of inquiry) to address critical

community issues (social, ecological, and economic). Further, the community service learning can be used to strengthen the capacity of the university and community organizations to engage in successful university-community partnerships and to evaluate the processes and its outcomes, and disseminate the results so that the lessons learned through the planning and implementation can benefit adult learning field.

According to the discussion held by focus group participants, IFAE program has been given in all districts of Ilubbabor Zone. It was integrated program that help adult learners to solve their problems by relating each components of the program with their daily life activities. However, due to various complex challenges, its overall implementation is very low. At their discussion, the participants raised IFAE is not going in an organized and cooperated way, no commitment among the responsible bodies.

As the researcher understood from their discussion, due to lack of trained human power in this profession (IFAE), each district education offices hired individuals who completed at least grade 10 and 12 as facilitator of adult learners. Nothing has been done to update their facilitation skills, knowledge, and attitudes. For that matter, most facilitators do not fulfill the required competency to facilitate the program, they don't have moral to stay there and they perceived the work as valueless. This is also real for program coordinators at district level. Nonetheless, there are qualified coordinators in some district who trained in the area of this profession.

As the idea revealed from group discussion, Mettu University has been working with zonal education office on some identified areas of community engagement/activities especially on providing support for formal primary and

secondary schools, but this did not include the area of IFAE. The participants' discussion highlighted that the University's presence in the local area coupled with the availability of AECD department and trained professionals in the area of Adult Education are golden opportunities to work in collaboration with Mettu University's AECD department regarding knowledge transfer.

In their final discussion, they repeatedly pointed out the need for Mettu University to integrate issues of Adult Education in its community engagement practices, showing its activities in other local community development issues. They emphasized the need for trained professionals who should tangibly share their knowledge with those untrained facilitators and coordinators, creating meaningful cooperation between Mettu University and zonal and/or district education experts. They highlighted the role of Mettu University and/or AECD department professionals in the improvement of IFAE in the future.

Summary of the Major Findings

The aim of this study was to investigate the contribution of Mettu University in enhancing the provision of Integrated Functional Adult Education (IFAE) program through Community Engagement.

The study revealed that Mettu University established an AECD department and this department was engaged in the training of education experts (IFAE Coordinators) with degrees in the regular program. This indicates that Mettu University's AECD department made significant contributions good to support the provision of IFAE, but it was only limited to the training given inside the university and did not consider the

program facilitators and adult learners outside the academia. This suggests that the department's interaction was somewhat good when seen from the students' perspective as compare to the teachers'. This shows that the contribution of the Mettu University's AECD department teachers was very low as they were not directly involved in the process and it was not functional to the level expected when seen from the university's contribution to the outside the local communities.

Offering need-based multidimensional services to the community" is the overall mission of Mettu University. It was found that Mettu University has included the area of 'Andragogy' to work on it as its third mission (community engagement). However, the university did not change this into practice to enhance IFAE program. It only focused on the training for adult education program coordinators given in regular degree program inside this university. On the other hand, significant change could be seen through the involvement of Mettu University community activities/services. This involvement provided the local community to share the University's resources especially in the area of formal schools (primary and secondary), agriculture, women empowerment, health, culture, environmental protection and conservation. However, the intervention didn't consider an issue of integrated functional adult education program.

There is no identified and practical engagement put for the department's teachers to take part directly in community activities rather they sometimes participate only during practicum works. This indicates that they have different perceptions on the concept of community engagement. It seems that there is no experience on the issue. The study disclosed that most development activities that were implemented by Mettu

University's community engagement were fruitful, and they helped the local community in various forms. However, this intervention did not touch the area of Integrated Functional Adult Education (IFAE), and but the effectiveness of this intervention was invisible when seen from IFAE perspective.

The study has indicated that there was no organized structure/connection with Mettu University in relation to community engagement/activities that provides support to their work, but very often Mettu University's AECD department offers teachers and students some opportunities by placing them to some selected nearby adult learning centers for the purpose of undertaking practicum work by undergraduate students. However, this interaction has no contribution for their profession as well as for the program's improvement. IFAE facilitators expected Mettu University's AECD department professionals to share their knowledge on the gaps they faced on the implementation of the program, but the department did not support them on the issues they need help with. As a result of this, the IFAE facilitators have undesirable attitude toward Mettu University as well as the Department of AECD.

Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions

Even if it was an opportunity to have AECD department in Mettu University, the Department was not able to transform its mandate into practice. As a result, the department did not do enough to support the provision of IFAE. Although Mettu University recognizes community service as a key area of activity so as to share a high

level of expertise with the community, its contribution to enhance the provision of IFAE is limited to the inside academia.

Mettu University developed valuable community engagement/service programs, and has made great changes on the development of the local community. However, it only focused on supporting formal education areas. As a result of this, the effectiveness of Mettu University's intervention was very low when seen from IFAE perspective. Since higher education institutions are perceived as supportive environments essential for transformation and meeting societal expectations and needs, individuals involved in the provision of IFAE expected much from Mettu University's AECD professionals to share their expertise and knowledge to help fill the gaps they faced in implementing the program. Unfortunately, the professionals were unable to do this. Consequently, the local district IFAE facilitators and coordinators developed undesirable attitude toward Mettu University's AECD department.

Implications

The potential and the contribution of AECD department professionals should be recognized by all academic staffs as well as non-academic staffs of Mettu University. AECD department should know and play its responsibilities in mobilizing every resource, and should establish strong relationships with education office experts both at zonal and at district levels.

Mettu University should integrate issues of IFAE in its community engagement practices as it has made changes in other local community development issues; it should

also motivate trained professionals to practically share their knowledge with those untrained facilitators and coordinators.

Mettu University, through its community engagement/service program, should develop valuable systems that evaluate the effectiveness of its intervention from IFAE perspective.

There should be a functional interaction between Mettu University and district education offices, AECD department professionals should work on capacity building or/and share their expert knowledge outside the university. The University should create an opportunity in which both its teachers and students can provide service learning in the area of IFAE to enhance the provision of IFAE through Community Engagement. Finally, the researchers would like to suggest that other researchers conduct wider scope studies on the issue.

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