



RESEARCH PAPER

Community Learning Centres in Afghanistan and Mongolia: A Document Review

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to elaborate the opportunities and challenges of community learning centres in low income countries as Afghanistan and Mongolia. Community learning centres are the collaborated program of governments with local people to uplift the literacy rate, reduce poverty and attain sustainable growth in the communities. This study was a qualitative, document review research that was based on the official documents of governments of Afghanistan and Mongolia and the international agencies such as UNESCO and UNICEF. In this study, 10 documents were selected for the review, those were retrieved from February 01, 2023 to July 31, 2023. Document review as prescribed by the World Bank WBI Evaluations was followed and results were obtained by thematic analysis. Background, organization and program implementation, learning activities and facilities, challenges and impact were the major themes of the analysis that create insight from the hard-hitting countries of Afghanistan and Mongolia. It concludes the significant role of donor agencies supported with the policies of the countries to raise literacy rate and human capital in the harsh circumstances of these low-income countries.

KEYWORDS Community Learning Centers, International Agencies, Literacy Rate, Poverty Reduction, Sustainable Growth

Introduction

As the world strives to achieve universal primary education by 2030, about 258 million children are still out of school (UNESCO, 2022). Sustainable Development Goal 4 is UNO's commitment that ensures equitable, effective, quality education for all by 2030. In this modern era, learning has evolved and emerged as a continuous activity that develops knowledge, critical thinking, and skills within the interaction of the environment in a person's life cycle (Handrianto, et al., 2021). The idea of lifelong learning is based on acquiring intellectual competencies and complementing technical tools to participate and contribute to society throughout the lifespan. It relates to the multiple and parallel roles of a person in society. It enables the persons to act, reflect and respond according to the challenges of time and society (Manzoor Ahmed, 2014; Ammar et. al., 2021).

Community engagement in such educational programs provides the local people a forum to gain knowledge and skills following the needs of the vicinity, delivers counselling and socialization, prevents hoaxes, addresses the actual issues with the help of community resources. It develops a learning environment in the community and establishes a learning-friendly community in the broader term. The different East Asian and South East Asian countries have adopted laws for the systematic approach and procedures to facilitate community engagement in the form of Community Learning Centers, Lifelong Learning, Social Learning, and Kominkan (Zolfaghari, Sabran & Zolfaghari, 2009; Arai & Fuse, 2013; Mutiara, Koesmawan, 2020; Ansel, Sorenen, Torfing 2022; Belete et al., 2022).

The literacy situation in Pakistan unpropitiously is affected by the low enrolment and high dropout at the primary level. In enrolment, there is wide variation in the area, gender, and special education needs. Furthermore, Pakistan has signed the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals but has not been able to attain the benchmark of 100 % universal primary education till 2015. Along with universal primary and secondary education, Pakistan is now aiming for the other indicators of Sustainable Development Goals that relate quality education with lifelong learning in an inclusive society. The SGD 4 can be accomplished when all primary and secondary-aged children have access to education and maintain a hundred percent survival rate. The way to achieve these targets requires access to education, completion, and effective learning outcomes. It should be free, equitable, and inclusive for the whole population including vulnerable groups such as girls and children with disability (Malik, Raza, Rosa & Singal, 2022; Page et. al., 2022).

In this study the situation analysis of community learning centers in the hard-hitting countries of Afghanistan and Mongolia present different opportunities and challenges that are comparable to Pakistan.

Material and Methods

In this research, a qualitative world view was used to create an insight into the phenomenon of community learning centers. Henceforth, it was a qualitative research by method and interpretive in its paradigm. A qualitative document review was conducted in this research to gain understanding and present interpretation in thick description. Document review is a process that is based on existing documents and provides a systematic procedure to identify, derive and analyze needed information (Glenn A. Bowen, 2009). In this research, document review procedure as guided by the World Bank WBI Evaluation Group, 2007 was followed. In a systematic way official documents published by the government or by United Nations’ agencies were accessed, synthesized and evaluated. A document review protocol was developed and deductive themes based on the priori framework (developed by Carroll C., and Booth A., 2013) were derived.

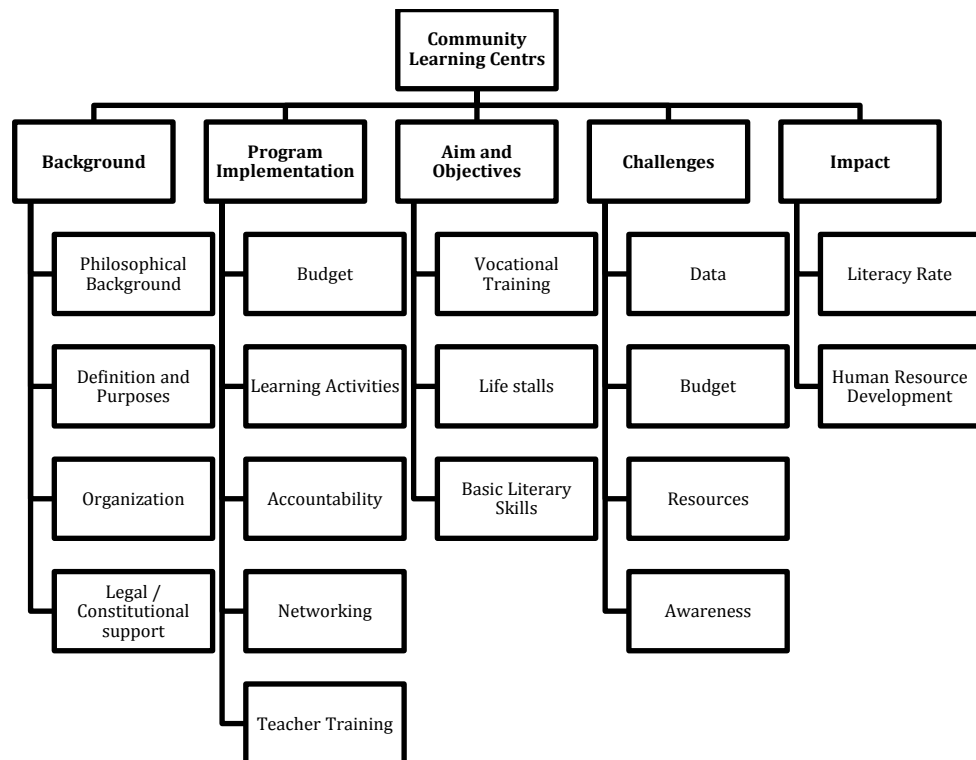


Figure 1 Themes and codes for thematic analysis

In the document review protocol an inclusion criterion for the documents was established to maintain the validity of this research. A deductive thematic analysis was proceeded but later few inductive themes were emerged and included in the data analysis.

Inclusion Criteria: The researchers have used the public record of the government offices and United Nations' agencies, to ensure the valid and internationally acceptable information about the community learning centers. From the low-income countries as distributed by the World Bank, Afghanistan and Mongolia were selected, both the countries struggling to survive from the hard situations can present a range of opportunities in such difficult circumstances. The documents included from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Government of Mongolia, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP, World Bank and published research work. For the selection of the documents, the four factors of authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning were maintained as discussed by Morgan H., 2022 in his work. The researchers tried to maintain the data from last 10 years but the lack of official and reliable documents from these under developed countries, the data from last twenty years was included.

Search of Documents: The government official websites and United Nations' database were searched for reliable reports and plans. The documents were retrieved between March 01, 2023 to July 31, 2023. Firstly, 53 documents were downloaded, thoroughly studied and short listed for the document review. Finally, the following 10 documents, five from Afghanistan and five from Mongolia were included for the document review:

Table 1
Documents included for the Review

Country	Document	Publisher	Year
Mongolia	1- Education Sector Mid-term Development Plan 2021-30	Ministry of Education and Science, Government of Mongolia	October, 2020
	2- Community Based lifelong Learning and Adult Education	UNESCO	2016
	3- Getting Herder Families and Community Ready for School: A Lifelong Learning Approach	UNICEF	2020
	4- Creation of Community Learning Spaces and Centers	Ministry of Education and Science, Mongolia	2017
	5- Sub-Sector Study Report on Lifelong Education, Mongolia	Technical Report, Ministry of Culture, Science and Sport, Asian Development Bank	2019
Afghanistan	6- Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in Rural Afghanistan: Findings from Accelerated Learning Centers	UNICEF	2022
	7- Increasing Access to Basic Education and Gender Equality-Community Based Education (CBE)	USAID	2016
	8- Adult Literacy Teaching and Learning at Community Learning Centers in Afghanistan	Khalil u Rehman Hanif, Karlstads University, Sweden	2014
	9- Policy Guidelines for Community Based Education	Ministry of Education, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan	2012
	10- National Report on Situation of Adult Learning and Education	Ministry of Education, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan	2008

Data Analysis: For the data analysis, a matrix was developed in MS Excel and all the documents with the priori framework themes were inserted for the data analysis, later different codes and emerging themes were integrated in the analysis during the familiarization and synthesis of the documents.

Results and Discussion

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, around 44% of primary school aged children are unable to attend any kind of school (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Education, UNICEF & Hall, 2018). Among them, 60% are girls. Afghanistan faces severe learning poverty (USAID, 2019). In Afghanistan the learning poverty rate has reached 93% among the highest in the world (World Bank, 2019). Currently, Afghanistan ranks 172 of 187 countries on the UNDP's Human Development Index and becomes one of the poorest countries across the globe. Half of the population confronting extreme under ability. while 36% of the population lies below the poverty line (USAID, 2019).

The Constitution of Afghanistan, in Article 43 guarantees the provision of education for all children, up to the university bachelor degree without any discrimination. Afghanistan is also a signatory of Convention on the Rights of Children, and has accepted the education as the basic right of all children. For advancing the major sector in education, Ministry of Education has strived to meet the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in the coming years. In this situation, during the past two to three decades, the Ministry of Education has developed different programs for community-based education across Afghanistan in order to expand school access and increase its capacity. The long walking distance in the continuous insurgency situation, has become an obstacle in rural areas. The Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), Community Based Education (CBE) and similar models have proven successful in this situation. Now in 2020, 4351 community-based education centers were operational throughout Afghanistan (UNICEF,2020). Moreover, the UNICEF is supporting 110 ALCs in 41 districts of Afghanistan (UNICEF,2021). The UNICEF, USAID, World Bank, UNESCO and NFUAJ are the partner organizations of the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for taking education to remote areas.

In 2003, according to the treaty between Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), National Federation of UNESCO Association in Japan (NFUAJ) and Ministry of Education (MoE), the concept of Community Learning Centers (CLC) was developed there. The CLC s have been operationalized. The literacy rate is 26% in 17.2 million adult population of 15 years and above aged (12% for female and 39% for male) according to the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP II, 2010-2013). The different type of CBE programs such as Let Us Learn, Accelerated Learning Centers (ALC) were also contributing to education. The ALCs convert six years of schooling to just three years primary schooling to focus the out of school adolescent girls.

Now UNICEF is supporting 145 Accelerated Learning Centers across seven provinces of Afghanistan (UNICEF, 2021). The ALCs are based on Community Based Education Model, that was a popular concept in 1990s when the regular or formal schools were halted or interrupted. The CBEs were constituted in the remote villages to lessen the distance. Additionally, they use the existing infrastructure instead of building bricks-and mortar schools. The ALCs are the specially designed learning centers for the dropouts and out of school children, in them mostly are girls. In primary school age group, almost 60% girls are out of school. The reason behind is the drop out or the long distance from their schools. The ALCs help the female students to catch up the curriculum and further increase the chance to mainstream into the formal education system. For girls, the safety issues with long walking distance in remote areas and unavailability of female teacher are a big hurdle in formal schools. The ALCs help to minimize the gender gap in the education system of Afghanistan.

The community learning centers possess the lifelong learning approach and based on the constructivism that maintain the role of learner as an active participant in the whole learning process. In the world, the purpose of the community learning center is to enhance

the literacy learning and life skills building for every individual of society irrespective of any discrimination to access the learning services in their own environment. In Afghanistan, the aim of CLCs is to provide the literacy and vocational skills that includes leather work, embroidery, tinsmith, waving and cooking. The provision of religious education is also included in the objectives of these activities. The reading and writing in Dari, Pashto and basic math skills are targeted in these programs.

Organization and Program Implementation

The donor organizations are providing the finance and facilities to the Ministry of Education (MoE) for the organization and implementation of community programs. The MoE provides national curriculum & learning materials, conduct exams, monitor teachers and students, finance teachers' salaries and implement teachers' trainings with the help of partner organizations. It implies the cluster approach; each cluster has a number of five schools and their network is connected to the hub schools. The networking of clustering help in provision of books, school materials as well as monitoring, registration of students and teachers. These community programs are typically demand base where communities are expected to provide secure learning spaces that can be a covered, safe room or a community hall such as a mosque. The community establishes a shura for active participation and maintenance of school materials. The walking distance from the public school must be more than three kilometers.

Learning Activities and Facilities

Foundational literacy and numeracy skills and lifelong learning in the form of vocational training are targeted in these programs. The government sponsors broadcast of radio, television and internet which are used for the learning purpose. The most common remote form education is textbooks. The ALCs and CBE follow the regular school calendar according to their areas. Usually, they provide slightly more facilities such as electricity, heating, lighting, internet and separate washroom for girls and boys as they are established in informal setting of homes and community places.

In CLCs the teachers usually have chalks and blackboard, some posters and flip charts are also available. Computers and printers are sometime available. The open discussions, question/ answer sessions, group activities and assignments are most common teaching-learning activities (Karlstad University, 2014). In ALCs the most common method is textbook, the parents and family members are involved in the learning process.

Monitoring and Supervision

General Education Directorate of the MoE is responsible for the supervision of Community Based Education program, Provincial CBE officers are further designated and School Shura are established to the grassroot level of monitoring and supervision with CBE implementing partners.

Recruitment and Teacher Training

The teachers are selected from the acceptance of community, preferably from the location of learning centers on the basis of their qualification and furthermore females are prioritized. The local culture hinders the education of female students from the male teachers. The requirement of female teacher qualification is at least high school graduates and many have the bachelor degree. Usually, the teachers are younger in age in comparison to hub schools, mean age of ALC teacher is 28 years and 35 years for hub school teachers. Shortly, after their recruitment the teachers are given mandatory two rounds of workshops, first 12 days workshop about the teaching methodology then second for the follow up, mostly by facilitating partner or the Department of the Teachers' Training (MoE) and then

annual trainings. The content of the training is designed by the implementing partners with the consultation of MoE.

Challenges

Political and physical securities are big challenge for the operation of community-based education especially in remote areas particularly for the girls. Policy safeguard, unavailability of accurate data and provision of resources are the constraints for the efficient working of community institutions. Provision of female teachers affects the enrollment of female students. Some community learning centers are without such basic needs as clean drinking water, separate toilets for girls and boys, electricity, and boundary walls. In the time of pandemics, the lack of learning materials, lack of access to technology and shortage of textbooks and printed materials were the challenges seen. Furthermore, a study of Karlstad University found the text material irrelevant from the local perspectives and needs.

Impact

The international agencies have targeted young out of school children and focused on girls' education. In 2021, findings from a study by UNICEF revealed that ALCs were the effective way to reach out-of-school children and girls in remote areas. In ALCs 86% students were girls, whereas in hub schools they were 46% that helped to narrow the gender gap. Also, the ALC students had performed better than their counterparts in hub schools. The attributes that contributed to the success of ALC students were small class size, monitoring procedures and teachers' trainings.

According to a USAID (2019) report, in 2015 in 13 provinces of Afghanistan 915 community-based schools and 71 ALCs in four provinces were established. It had benefited 45,000 out of school children and youth which consist 35% of female students. Moreover, 903 communities were mobilized with the help of school shura, and 190 professionals were trained.

Mongolia

Mongolia is a landlock country of Asia, and has passed its constitution in 1992 and Law on Education in 2002. The global educational agenda including, Education for All, Millennium Development Goals and Declaration for Education 2030 Framework for Action has established the grounds for traditional forms of education. Their significance for alleviation in poverty, social inclusion and protection has recognized its importance. The National Program on providing basic education was implemented in 1995-2005, moreover the National Program on development of NFE (1997-2004) was approved in 1995. In the transition period of 1990s, the UNESCO supported the project "Learning for Life". The policy and legislative framework for social transformation, empowerment and quality of life was targeted by initiating non-formal education and lifelong learning.

The total population of Mongolia was 3,238,479 and 50.4% were female and 49.6 were male as reported in 2018. The National Statistical Office (NSO) in 2018 has reported, the 28.45 as the national poverty rate, where 35.7% of total population was employed. In the employed population, the population with high school successful completion was higher and 11.2% were with no formal education. The current literacy rate in Mongolia is 98% and Mongolia has planned to achieve 99% by the year 2030.

Community learning centers in Mongolia are known as the NFE Enlightenment Centers, first established in 1997 for literacy and equivalency program (PE) training that was designed for dropout and out of school children as "National Program on NFE Development". In national and subnational educational administration, the NFE Enlightenment centers were highly recognized and aligned with the educational policies. In

recent years, NFE Enlightenment centers have effectively addressed the challenges of drop outs, illiterate population and literacy trainings. Education Law 2002, has specified different literacy responsibilities to district level. From 1997 to 2002 the NFE enlightenment Centers number have grown to 3262 centers, and 2003 the “Model Regulation for NFE Enlightenment Centers” was approved that has optimized NFE Enlightenment centers to local communities, and their role VET and lifelong learning.

Organization and Program Implementation

NFE Enlightenment centers (community learning centers) has provided the literacy and new life skills to the population along creating the sense of community. These centers are hub for socialization, development of self-esteem, ideas and common experiences specifically for the disadvantaged people. For the life skills training and literacy, NFE Enlightenment centers facilitators has established close collaboration with the community. The facilitators often invite different trainers from the community. The strength of NFE centers stems from the close collaboration of communities and the synergies to the sectors. The multi-sectoral approach in these programs include four sectors of education, health, communications and local business market. This multi sectoral approach helps to widen the scope, improve the quality and relevance to the local community. Members of the community with particular skills are invited in the NFE Enlightenment centers when required such as, production of halters and rein for horses, leather skills and different herding skills. Sometime they make them aware of related legal issues.

In 2003, with the help of UNESCO project “Learning for Life”, lifelong education system was introduced then extended and funded by different international agencies such as UNICEF and United Nation Population Agency. Now, the NFE are interchangeably referred as the LLE (Lifelong Education) centers. The lifelong education had focused the four pillars of SGD4 and in 2013, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has approved its five distinct areas namely family, civic, moral maturity, life science and aesthetic education. These centers have recognized and valued the local community, their leaders and stakeholders.

Learning Activities and Facilities

The community learning centers have established their contribution to the challenge of drop outs, socio-cultural disadvantaged and special needs persons. It has focused the lifelong learning skills to improve the quality of life. Community learning centers were equipped with literacy and life skills training including wool processing, sewing and baking. As of 2019, in 354 lifelong learning centers, 373 types of courses were conducted. Included resources are different literacy, post literacy and distance learning manual, textbooks, audio lessons, documentaries, health manual, life skills manuals, guidelines for research and different videos (UNICEF,2020). As of 2018, 354 centers were provided with 208 laptops, 239 desktops, 63 color printers, 3 video players and projectors, 102 black printers, 80 camera and 32 televisions (Asian Development Bank, 2019).

Recruitment and Teacher Training

Under the UNESCO’s project “Promoting Community-Based Education for Sustainable Development” was organized. Fifteen teachers as the master trainers, from the eight provinces of Mongolia joined the training under the umbrella of Reflect-share Act. Then, they have reached the training of 300 teachers of long-life education centers and contributed to 18000 local people.

Challenges

In Mongolia, remote herding communities are still semi-nomadic so the data is a bottleneck for such communities. It is a regional challenge and a failure to reach the SGD17, which indicates the high-quality data. The lack of integration of community learning centers into mainstream education and the biased understanding attributes poor acceptance and stigmatization in the society. There is no cohesive strategy for the engagement of relevant department such as TVET and higher education department that dominates the public policy. The funding for the community learning centers has risen but still insufficient to meet the growing needs of learners. Lack of investment results in limited learning venues, materials, and equipment. For the professional development and training, there is no secure public funding which is currently driven by donor agencies.

Impact

The community learning centers have contributed to literacy programs, equivalent program training, and life skills. Since, National Program of Literacy Education (2004-2012) and 83,124 people have been trained in classroom or non-classroom forms. In LE centers, during the period of (1997-2018) 174,342 people participated in different training programs. The children with disabilities' proportion in LE trainings are dominant, during 2018-2019 academic year 12.8% or 933 were disabled in equivalency training. Due to these services, in 2010 literacy rate has reached 98.3%. That increased in Human Development Index of Mongolia, which is above the world average.

Conclusion

War in Afghanistan and harsh climate in Mongolia are the major constraints that had affected the population and economy in these countries. The community learning centers have proved their contribution in these hard circumstances by a rise in literacy rate, squeezing the dropout and out of school children and youth and trainings in different vocations. The donor agencies have helped the government to develop laws policies and frameworks for social learning and lifelong learning sources of community learning centers. Pakistan as a developing country can learn from the Mongolia and Afghanistan explicitly from the legal and constitutional support for the community learning centers in Mongolia and a shorter primary school period to mainstream the drop outs and out of school children for secondary education.

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