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POLICY ON ADULT AND LIFELONG LEARNING: INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

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Structure



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Learning Objectives



After going through Unit 2, it is expected that you will be able to

- ❖ Discuss the shift in international policy perspective from fundamental education to adult literacy and learning
- ❖ Describe the gradual transformation in national policy discourse from marginal status of adult education in national planning to integration of literacy, functionality and social awareness in adult learning programmes
- ❖ Articulate your own views on the current status of policy perspective on adult education in India.

2.1 Introduction

After obtaining in Unit 1 a global, regional and national overview of literacy, it is now time to talk about

the national and international perspectives about policy on adult and lifelong learning (for a simple

explanation of the terms ‘lifelong learning’ see section 3.2 of Unit 3). As will become clearer, much of the action on adult learning has always been based on policy directives and for this reason, it is necessary to become familiar about issues entailing different policies in the

international and national contexts. Unit 2 has two parts. Its first part deals with the international policy discourse while the second part provides a historical overview of the national perspective on adult education.

2.2 The International Perspective

Since the 1950s, there has been significant shift in the international policy discourse on adult education. It has been influenced by the changing perspectives put forth by the United Nations Education, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Discussion in this section gives an overview of international perspective on literacy and lifelong learning (UNESCO 2005:153-55).

2.2.1 Fundamental Education (1950s-1960s)

In the post-Second World War period, UNESCO recognized the acquisition of literacy as fundamental aspects of individual development and human rights and supported literacy as part of its efforts to promote basic education. It advocated *fundamental education* to eradicate illiteracy. The focus of fundamental education was primarily on imparting the basic literacy skills of reading and writing. Subsequently, interest in the worldwide campaign for universal literacy weakened due to the Cold War. Although the international community recognized the need to eradicate illiteracy and finding ways to promote acquisition of a basic set of autonomous literacy skills, only isolated national literacy campaigns were undertaken in developing countries.

2.2.2 Functional Literacy (1960s-1970s)

In the 1960s and 1970s, international

organizations advocated human capital models of education that perceived education as one of the key inputs for economic development. Within this perspective, literacy was viewed as a necessary condition for economic growth and national development. UNESCO proposed the concept of functional literacy and emphasized interrelationships between literacy and economic development. The Experimental World Literacy Program (EWLP) introduced in 1966 and implemented with financial and technical assistance of United Nations Development Organization (UNDP) and other international agencies in eleven countries till 1973 to enhance efficiency and productivity of individual farmers. In 1978, UNESCO adopted a broader definition of functional literacy, which is still used today:

A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his (or her) group and community and also for enabling him (or her) to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his (or her) own and the community’s development.

Subsequently, the broader concept of functional literacy has incorporated divergent human concerns and a range of people’s functions encompassing the whole life. Lifelong education is implicit in the expanded concept of functional literacy

2.2.3 Paulo Freire's Radical Approach to Literacy (1970s)

In the 1970s, UNESCO's conceptualisation of literacy and other international agencies was also influenced by Paulo Friere's radical approach to literacy. In this approach, acquisition of literacy skills of reading, writing and arithmetic were not seen as an end in itself, but as a means to create the conditions for acquisition of critical consciousness about one's social reality and take necessary action to challenge and change it. Freire's influence on UNESCO's conception of literacy was reflected in the Persepolis Declaration (1975) that acknowledged that literacy must go beyond the process of acquisition of basic literacy skills and underscored transformative potential of literacy. In practice, however, pseudo-Freirian approach was adopted in many literacy programs in developing countries for imparting development-oriented literacy skills and knowledge, while maintaining the status quo.

2.2.4 Broadening the Definitions of Literacy (1980s-1990s)

During 1980s to early 1990s, international investment and interest in promoting adult literacy programs declined substantially. With growing pressures of the World Bank's economic reforms on the education sector, investment in primary education was favored at the cost of adult education. UNICEF and UNESCO voiced concerns against such trend throughout the 1980s and brought the focus on literacy and education for all. Over the 1980s and 1990s, the definitions of literacy were broadened in response to the growing demands created by new technologies and other information media in the developed countries for increased levels

of knowledge, skills and understandings. The concept of literacy was broadened to encompass not merely the ability to read, write and count, but also a broad set of information processing competencies and multiplicity of skills. The International Literacy Year (1990) and the World Declaration on Education for All, adopted in Jomtien, Thailand placed the challenge of literacy within the broader context of meeting the basic learning needs of all children, youth and adults. Furthermore, the Hamburg Declaration (1997) also endorsed literacy as essential for lifelong learning and as a catalyst for active community engagement.

2.2.5 Renewed Emphasis on Adult Literacy and Learning

Involvement of the international community in literacy since 2000 has revolved around two goals articulated in the Dakar Framework of Action:

“ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programs, and achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults”.

Following the World Education Forum in Dakar (2000), there has been renewed interest among international planners in improving literacy levels. Many international organizations (for example, ILO, World Bank, OECD, UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNDP) have acknowledged the challenge that illiteracy poses for development. While renewed interest and commitment to literacy has emerged, there are marked differences in understanding about literacy across organizations. The United Nations Literacy decade (2003-2012),

launched in 2002, perceives literacy as essential life skills for every child, youth and adult to participate in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century and as an essential step in basic education (UNESCO 2003). In the recent years, the World Bank advocates Adult and Nonformal Education (ANFE) that focuses on not merely literacy but all the possible learning needs of children and adults (Easton et. Al. 2003)

Despite renewed interest in adult literacy and learning, it is important to underscore that although education is one of the key goals in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2000 dedicated to reducing poverty, within which education is a key goal, adult literacy and education however, is not explicitly included in the MDGs. Focus

on adult education is implicit in the Goal 3 related to promoting gender equality and empowering women.

In summary, international conception of literacy has shifted from defining literacy as technical and discrete skills to functional human resource skills for economic growth to human capabilities for social-cultural and political change. Over the years, broader understandings of literacy have emerged, encompassing 'conscientization', multiple literacies, literacy practices and lifelong learning. There is now growing recognition about the social context in which literacy is acquired, developed and sustained. Literacy is not merely perceived as a skill but as socially and culturally determined practices

2.3 The National Policy Perspective: Historical Overview

In India, the educational policy provides a broad framework for education planning, and gives direction for overall educational development in the country. Adult education in India is planned within the broader context of the general educational policy (Patel 2000). The central government plays a leading role in policy formulation and planning to direct overall educational development in the country, while individual states are responsible for the expansion and growth of education in their respective areas on the basis of specific directions and guidelines provided by the central government. This section highlights divergent approaches to adult education since the independence.

2.3.1 Marginality of Adult Education in Development Planning (1947-77)

Despite massive illiteracy and low level

of education in the workforce, the central government after the independence in 1947 neither took any Constitutional responsibility for educating the adult illiterate population nor emphasised adult education within the general educational policy. The major thrust of the general educational policy in the first three decades of planned development was on the expansion of the pyramidal system of formal education. It was implicitly assumed that expansion of the general educational system, particularly elementary education, would solve the problem of illiteracy in the adult population. Hence, adult education was relegated to unimportant position, both in terms of the educational policy and finances.

During the first three decades of planned development (1947-77), adult education

programs with limited coverage and funds characterised the state's approach to educating the vast population of adult

illiterates. Each program followed a different strategy and approach to adult education (see Box 1).

Box 2.1: Major Programmes of Adult Education during 1947-77

Social Education Program: The First Five Year Plan (1951-56) rejected the term “adult education” as narrowly confined to literacy work and proposed social education as a comprehensive approach to educating adult illiterates. The major thrust of Social Education Program was to make illiterate citizens conscious of their rights and responsibilities for building a democratic nation, while incorporating the components of health, recreation, and economic life. Imparting basic literacy skills was not assigned priority in the social education program

Farmers Functional Literacy Program: In the early 1960s, the focus of adult education shifted from citizenship training to skill-training for development. The Farmers' Functional Literacy Project (FFLP), known as Kisan Saksharata Yojana, was launched as a centrally-sponsored scheme in the Fourth Plan (1969-74) in three districts as an experimental project under the Experimental World Literacy Project of UNESCO. The FFLP was one of the three components of the Farmers' Training and Functional Literacy Project (FTFLP), which aimed at upgrading human resources to improve agricultural productivity of the farmers. The focus of the FFLP was on upgrading the occupational skills of farmers and inculcating among them modern attitudes, values, and behaviours to attain self-sufficiency in food production. It advocated the concept of functional literacy and emphasised imparting basic literacy skills along with practical and technical agricultural knowledge.

Non-formal Education Program for Youth (15-25 years): The Fifth Plan (1974-79) advocated non-formal education for several categories of learners – unschooled children, youth, and adults at all levels of education. It also launched the Non-formal Education Program for young adults who had missed schooling to provide them the second chance for learning. The primary goal of the program was to provide them functionally relevant education in order to prepare them as producers as well as responsible citizens. The underlying assumption was that acquisition of appropriate skills and knowledge about the welfare-oriented development programs would increase their participation in this development and help improve their economic conditions. In practice, the program remained a traditional literacy program and its overall implementation was poor.

2.3.2 Towards the Nationwide Programme of Adult Education (1977-84) edit

It was with the shift in the direction of general educational policy in 1977 from higher levels of education to basic education, that eradication of illiteracy came to the forefront of development planning. A draft policy statement on adult education was issued for the first time by the government in 1979, which was operationalized in the form of a nationwide program of adult education, known as the National Adult Education

Program (NAEP). The NAEP aimed at covering an estimated 100 million illiterates in the age group of 15-35 over a period of six years (1978-84). The conceptual framework of NAEP integrated literacy, functionality and social awareness. Adult education projects were implemented nationwide under the NAEP by voluntary agencies, educational institutions (universities and colleges), local bodies (for example, panchayats and municipalities) and the central and state governments. Launching of the NAEP led to creation

of administrative and organisational structures for adult education at the national, state and district levels.

However, promise of the NAEP was not fulfilled. Though the NAEP was intended to be a mass program of adult education, it never assumed the mass character as envisaged in the policy statement. The coverage and intensity of projects under the NAEP remained rather limited. In practice, the NAEP remained a traditional centre based, honorarium based and hierarchical program of adult education, which was funded and controlled by the government. With the fall out of the Janata government in the late 1979, the NAEP continued with minor modifications as the Adult Education Program (AEP) without making a significant dent in eradicating illiteracy.

2.3.3 The Shifting Approach to Adult Education

The National Policy on Education (NPE), introduced in 1986 (Ministry of Human Resource Development 1986a and 1986b) and revised in 1992 (Ministry of Human Resource Development 1992a and 1992b), has been a major landmark in the history of adult literacy education as it articulated for the first time the national commitment to addressing the problem of eradication of adult illiteracy in a time bound manner with planned, concerted and coordinated efforts. The policy also provided impetus to development of a mass approach to eradication of literacy with mass mobilisation and support of divergent sections of society. The NPE (1986) contributed to widening the scope of adult education in order to provide flexible learning opportunities to out-of-school youth and adults. Specifically, it advocated the following:

- a) Expansion of non-formal, flexible and need-based vocational education programs for neo-literates, youth who have completed primary education, school drop-outs, and adults;
- b) Provision of non-formal vocational education and training for workers of the unorganised sector through the existing institutions and agencies. For example, community polytechnics, *shramik vidyapeeths* (polyvalent adult education centre), rural institutes, Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and Training for Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) of the District Rural Development Agency.
- c) Promotion of continuing education as an indispensable tool not only for human resource development, but also for the creation of a learning society. Besides advocating distance and open learning for higher levels of formal education, the policy recommended continuing education for neo-literates and school drop-outs through *Jana Shikshan Nilayams* and proposed need-based non-formal vocational education programs and training for divergent groups (workers, youth, farmers, etc) to upgrade their knowledge and skills to improve their productivity and their skills.

2.3.4 The Campaign Approach to Literacy

It was in pursuance of the mandate of the NPE (1986) that the National Literacy Mission (NLM) was launched in 1988 as a societal and technological mission with the objective of imparting functional literacy to 80 million adult illiterates in the age group 15-25 years by 1995 (Ministry of Human Resource Development 1988). The NLM assigned

National Literacy Mission - India

Literacy Campaign and Operation Restoration | Continuing Education | Jan Sikshan Sansthan | Support to NGOs







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Figure 2. 1 NLM Website Home Page for PALDIN Learners to Consult

priority to eradicate illiteracy among women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and other disadvantaged groups through mass mobilisation and support of the wider sections of society.

The launching of National Literacy Mission in 1988, and the subsequent emergence of Total Literacy Campaigns in different parts of India, led to the emergence of the concept of developmental literacy which included the components of self reliance in basic literacy and numeracy, social awareness, acquisition of relevant skills and imbibing the values of national integration, conservation of environment and gender equity.

The NLM introduced Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) as area-specific, volunteer-based and time-bound literacy campaigns and they became a viable strategy for promoting literacy on a mass scale, advocating planning and implementation of TLCs through decentralised administrative and organisational structures. TLC introduced a strategy of mass mobilisation to generate social demand for literacy, while involving wider sections of society in promoting literacy. Although NLM policy document envisaged nationwide expansion of post-literacy and continuing education through new institutional structures, better utilisation of the existing infrastructures and open and distance learning, post-literacy and continuing education for neo-literates was neglected as the major focus of NLM strategy remained on mass literacy campaigns till the mid-1990s (see Figure 2.1.) In practice, the focus of TLCs remained on imparting rudimentary literacy skills and not functional skills and knowledge (Ministry of Human Resource Development 1994).

2.3.5 From Literacy to Post-literacy and Continuing Education

In 1999, the NLM was revamped by the central government to attain the goal of total literacy, i.e. sustainable threshold literacy rate of 75% by 2007. It continues to focus on imparting functional literacy to non-literates in the 15-35 age groups, specifically among the socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Although the group of 15-35 is identified as a primary target group of literacy programs, NLM does not exclude those age groups that are interested in literacy and other programs.

However, NLM has modified its approach to achieve its goal (Planning Commission 2002). Based on the premise that the TLCs succeeded in making a large adult population literate, NLM has shifted its attention to tackling the problem of residual illiteracy. It has adopted an integrated approach, amalgamating all the features of earlier TLC/post-literacy phases under one project, called 'Literacy Campaigns in Operation Restoration'. This new approach envisages integration of basic literacy teaching-learning with post-literacy activities to ensure a smooth transition from TLC to post-literacy on a learning continuum (see Daswani 2002). It assumes that such an approach would achieve continuity, efficiency and convergence and minimise necessary time lag between the two. The Post-literacy program is also treated as a preparatory phase for launching continuing education that aims at creating a learning society. In other words, NLM has de-linked post-literacy from continuing education and linked it closely with TLC. Continuing education program is envisaged to link literacy with actual life situations by imparting relevant technical and vocational skills.

Furthermore, NLM has changed its approach to promote decentralisation. Specifically, it has promoted decentralisation of financial and administrative powers to the State Literacy Mission Authorities for sanctioning literacy-related and continuing education projects. It continues to involve non-government organisations (NGOs) in environment-building for TLCs, but assigns them a major role in implementation of continuing education projects. NLM has strengthened State Resource Centres (SRCs) to increase their involvement in continuing education program. It has also enlarged the activities of Jan Shiksha Sansthan so that they could function as repositories of vocational/technical skills in urban and rural areas not only for youth and workers with low-level of education, but also for neo-literate youth and adults.

2.3.6 Marginality of Adult Education in Legislation

The Constitution of India recognises the significance of education for social transformation. During the last decade, two major changes have taken place in the Indian Constitution, which have far reaching implications for education. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act (2002) makes free and compulsory education a justifiable fundamental right for all children in the age group 6-14 years. It guarantees eight years of elementary education to each and every child in the country. However, the focus of Constitutional amendments in education is primarily on elementary education of children (6-14 years), and not on adult education and lifelong learning for youth/adults. The underlying assumption is that universal elementary education among children (6-14 years)

will automatically tackle the problem of adult illiteracy. Hardly any efforts are made to justify adult literacy being a part of the Constitutional provisions and guarantees. The right of the vast population of non-literate youth and adults for basic literacy education and learning has remained invisible in the government policy.

On the other hand, enactment of the 72nd and 73rd Constitutional Amendments has paved the way to decentralisation of educational governance at the local level. The new legislation will have far reaching consequences for the provision of adult/non-formal education for women as well as the roles and responsibilities of central government, state government and local bodies in governance of non-formal education, and adult education.

2.3.7 Conclusion

In summary, despite massive illiteracy and low level of education among the adult population, adult literacy did not receive adequate attention in the first three decades of planned development in India. Until the late 1970s, the government's policy of adult education was characterised by the sporadic programmatic efforts through pilot projects, which were linked with the government's development strategy. It was with the shift in the direction of general educational policy in 1977 from higher levels of education to basic education, that adult education received some attention in the educational policy. NAEP, the first nationwide program of adult education, proposed to integrate literacy, functionality and social awareness in the program. However, It did not succeed in making a dent in promoting adult literacy as it remained a traditional, honorarium-based,

hierarchical and government-funded and controlled program.

It was the NPE (1986) provided impetus to development of a mass approach to eradication of literacy with mass mobilisation and wider support of divergent sections of society. The NLM, introduced as a technological and societal mission, adopted the campaign to eradicate illiteracy on a large scale, but did not pay adequate attention to post-literacy and continuing education. Since late 1990s, there is a noticeable

shift in NLM policy towards integrated approach to amalgamating literacy, post-literacy and continuing education phases, devolution of financial and administrative powers from national to state and local levels, and strengthening and revamping of existing institutions. Nonetheless, marginality of adult education has continued in legislation, and development planning. It is critical that adult literacy and learning is placed at the heart of the agenda of basic education for all.

2.7 Apply What You Have Learnt

Write a note of approximately 800 words on your views about shifts in policy discourse on adult education. Your note needs to include the direction India's policy on adult education has received from international policy

discourse in this matter. Do take into account your own professional experience as an adult educator and include your own understanding of critical policy issues in the area of adult literacy and learning.

