

# Country Reports



Nicoletta Tomei

# A regional perspective on tutorship as a potential lifelong and adult guidance tool

## Abstract

This paper deals with some experiences in professional guidance developed in Tuscany in order to underline the role of tutorship in training and education as a potential lifelong and adult guidance tool. It reconstructs the Tuscan approach to professional guidance by presenting what has been done concerning the services addressed to early school leavers. It links that with the evolution of the concept of lifelong learning and the discussion on the implicit models that underline the concept. Focusing on the importance given to the construction of an integrated lifelong guidance system, the paper tries to highlight as the model of tutoring guidance, put in place for the early school leavers, can be presented as a good practice. The results of the analysis speak of an educational model that, counting on the systemic and distributed conception of tutoring, could be able to answer to the very different needs expressed by early school leavers throughout their experience. Interpreting the activities carried out by tutors working in the Tuscan initial vocational and educational training system in the perspective of lifelong guidance allows us to foreshadow the possibility to build a similar kind of service for those adults who experience critical transitions. The key contribution of the paper consists in the fact that it empowers the perspective of lifelong guidance, presenting an experience that can be a valid alternative to the usual advisory services.

## Introduction

This paper deals with some experiences in professional guidance developed in Tuscany. It links those experiences to the important role that guidance has assumed in the context of lifelong learning strategies. The approach followed in this paper focuses on the development of the conception of lifelong learning and the evolution of guidance practices. Reconstructing the transition from a paradigm centered on attitudes to a paradigm centered on the abilities to manage changeable life paths, this paper aims to underline the role of tutorship in training and education as a potential lifelong and adult guidance tool.

The assessment of the functions of tutorship highlights the importance of looking at it through the lens of the contribution that it can provide to build a personality capable of dealing with uncertainty and complex decision-making processes. The experience with tutoring guidance offered to early school leavers

in Tuscany seems to foreshadow the possibility that a similar kind of service may also be effectively provided to adults in transition.

The purpose to project the model of tutoring guidance on the practices in place for early school leavers—rather ambitious for a contribution of this scale—suggests that the limits be specified in advance. The perspective adopted will not comprehensively consider the factual implications of this proposal. It simply suggests that the provision of a well-established guidance service, whose responsibility is shared among different actors, could empower the coping strategies of adults who usually can only profit from advisory services.

The contribution consists of four sections. The first attempts to reconstruct the evolution of the debate on lifelong learning. The second presents the most acknowledged explanatory models to understand the transformation of guidance practices. The third focuses on the role that tutorship plays in educational and training contexts. It also suggests using the model of tutoring guidance in order to re-read the traditional functions of the tutor in the light of an increased importance of guidance activities. The fourth section presents the activities carried out by tutors working in the Tuscan initial vocational and educational training system to show the convergence of theory and practice. In conclusion, some remarks present what Tuscany has done for early school leavers in terms of a good, empowered, and customised guidance practice that can also be extended to the adult population.

## **Tutorship as a Potential Guidance Tool**

In the last twenty years, the paradigm of complexity has emerged in all fields of knowledge. Many authors state that Western society in particular, but more generally all societies in the world, have entered into an era marked by very strong economic and cultural interdependence (Morin, 1990; Beck, 1997, Appadurai, 2001). This rapid technological development, which started in the 1960s, is both a cause and a consequence of the globalisation process that has transformed the contemporary world, making obsolete many of the traditional conceptual models. In a global society in perpetual transformation, the need for individuals and organisations to adapt to changes without losing their identity has meant that a key role was assigned to the education of a personality able to cope with uncertainty. In this perspective, knowledge and learning have become essential dimensions for people to prosper and survive in the global era.

## Lifelong learning and the knowledge society

Rethinking the role that education takes in these circumstances has contributed to the enlargement of the temporal and spatial boundaries within which is possible to situate learning experiences. This rethinking has led to the spread of the concept of lifelong learning (LLL). As Colin Griffin explains, 'the concept of LLL had evolved, long before the onset of the present context' (Jarvis, 2011, p. 263). For this reason, placing it in relationship with the concepts of adult, permanent, continuing, recurrent, and lifelong education can serve to illuminate its current meaning.

In general, the concept of *adult education* encompasses 'all the ongoing learning processes, formal or otherwise, whereby people regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or professional qualifications' in a perspective of full personal development and rich participation in an autonomous and well-balanced social, economic, and cultural development (UNESCO, 1997, p. 1).

Besides this definition, which is shared by Griffin, it is possible to find the concept of *permanent education*. This term is identified by the author as the first formulation of lifelong learning by the Council of Europe in the early 1970s. This concept 'advocated the availability of learning opportunities throughout an individual's lifetime' (Jarvis, 2011, p. 264), and underlined that 'with respect to cultures, the contents of this permanent education must aim at the development of a critical attitude' (Council of Europe, 1970, p. 469).

The challenges connected to the possibility of translating into policy this critical perspective have stimulated the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to formulate the concept of *recurrent education*, 'as a strategy for lifelong learning that stressed the alternatives and recurring sequence of education and other sources of individual's learning throughout life' (Jarvis, 2011, p. 263). In Griffin's reconstruction, the concepts of permanent and recurrent education were finally replaced during the 1980s by the concept of *continuing education*. The author points out that continuing education 'constituted a swing away from the radicalism of the concept of permanent education' and 'came to be of some significance in relation to the focus on education for workforce formation and employability' (Jarvis, 2011, p. 265).

The need to recover a conception of education that 'encompassed elements of both vocational and adult liberal education' (Jarvis, 2011, p. 266) is, in this perspective, at the base of the spread of the lifelong education idea. In the context of adult education studies, a lot has been said on this concept by those who suggest a close link between educational policy and the discourse on adult education

(Biesta, 2013; Fejes & Olesen, 2010; Rubenson, 2006). As Barros underlines, in an article published in 2012, 'lifelong education is understood, as an educational project that is continuously inter-relating with the individual as well as the social dimension of education, and is aimed at the construction of a "new man", and the offer of a humanist collective system of values' (Barros, 2012, p. 27).

The current concept of lifelong learning contains many of the elements of the ideas out of which it evolved and which have been outlined above. In spite of many common threads, for many authors the conceptual shift from 'education' to 'learning' points to different educational paradigms that involve the adoption of specific underlying principles. In 2012, Milana reconstructed this shift using OECD documentation. According to her reconstruction, the publication of the report *Lifelong learning for all* (OECD, 1996) demonstrated that 'originally intended as a means for personal and social development, the concept (of adult education) today is primarily associated with economic growth and the global competition of nations and geopolitical regions' (Milana, 2012, p. 45).

The same opinion was expressed by Lima and Guimarães in their work *European strategies in lifelong learning: A critical perspective* (Lima & Guimarães, 2011). This contribution provides an analytical approach to adult learning and educational policies based on three models. The first of these models is the democratic-emancipatory model. 'In terms of political-administrative orientations, actions undertaken under this model are noted for the decentralised control of education policy ... and for the high degree of autonomy enjoyed by the organisations that stimulate ALE actions' (Lima & Guimarães, 2011, p. 42).

The second model is the modernisation and state control model. It values education in a context of social and economic modernisation for the construction of a democratic capitalist state. It involves a set of centralised processes that are directed at ensuring equal learning opportunities for everyone in the conviction that education has a functional nature. 'The most striking conceptual elements are related to reducing the field of adult education practice to formal education and to stressing the importance of targeting vocational training at promoting economic growth.' (Lima & Guimarães, 2011, p. 49)

The most recent analytical model is the human resources management model. This model emphasises the functional nature of education, taking it 'as an instrument for producing human capital that is functionally adapted to the demands of economic growth and competitiveness' (Lima & Guimarães, 2011, p. 56). In this scenario, education converts itself into the most attractive investment for anyone who wants to become the master of their own competences. Consequently, a shift in the state's role from being a service provider to being a service coordinator is

implied by the individual duty to be able to acquire competences on an ongoing basis throughout their life and in all sorts of places.

The critical perspective exposed by Lima and Guimarães highlighting the risk of subordinating adult learning and education (ALE) to a pedagogism rooted solely in economics and management does not allow for affirming that the authors uphold the idea that a hybridism of orientations in educational policy is impossible and even undesirable. At the end of their work, Lima and Guimarães identify the contribution of UNESCO in the construction of a globally structured agenda which links personal, social, economic, cultural, and political development with ALE. In order to appreciate this contribution, a brief overview of the most relevant commitments made during the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) can be appropriate.

The conference, which has taken place every 12 to 13 years since the late 1940s and is based on three organising principles—namely ‘a culture of sustainability, a democratic participation approach, and the inseparability of culture and education’ (UNESCO, 2010, p. 36)—aimed to concretely highlight the crucial role of adult learning and education in meeting current societal challenges. Assuming that ‘lifelong learning—from cradle to grave—is a philosophy, a conceptual framework, and an organising principle of all forms of education based on inclusive, emancipatory, humanistic, and democratic values’ (UNESCO, 2010, p. 37), it commits their participants to pushing forward the recognition of ALE as an important factor conducive to LLL by promoting and supporting more equitable access to learning opportunities. In doing so, it underlines the relevance of well-designed and targeted guidance systems and the role of adult educators ‘as the most important element in quality of adult education’ (UNESCO, 2010, p. 18).

The importance assigned to guidance systems and educators suggests a close link between the functions of guidance and educators’ practices. As Bartlett, Rees, and Watts suggest, ‘guidance becomes intrinsically connected to learning because learning itself becomes an oriented measure to meet the individual needs throughout their lives’ (Bartlett, Rees, & Watts, 2000, p. 73). From this point of view, the interest in lifelong guidance is strictly connected to the understanding of the concept of lifelong learning. Some of the most frequent interpretations of the concept present lifelong learning as the best educational tool to help people adapt to change. The concept is also perceived as a policy to prevent forms of social conflict and a factor of employability and professional promotion. From this perspective, guidance systems and policies have to be seen as a strategic element to guarantee the conditions that enable learners to benefit from relevant and empowering learning programmes.

## Lifelong learning and guidance

In many appreciated contributions on guidance and counselling, many authors insist on the plurality of approaches that characterise the evolution of modern guidance systems. If it is possible to define guidance as an 'educational process which allows individuals to become self-conscious to progress, in relation with the diverse need of life, in their studies or professionally and following a double purpose of societal and personal development' (UNESCO, 1970, p. 52), a historical overview can help to identify some of the steps that have produced the current conception of lifelong guidance.

As some authors point out, if the need for guidance is a need intrinsically connected to the developmental dimension of human beings, the interest in guidance, as a social practice, is linked to a specific historical period (Guichard & Huteau, 2001; Di Fabio, 1998; Pombeni, 2005). With the advent of industrial society, traditional ways of life were strongly altered by new production requirements. This meant that the tacit and informal guidance received in the family and in other places of socialisation became less effective. In this period, a series of studies to determine the correlation between individual attitudes and specific professional requirements were developed in order to maximise corporate profits.

Around the 1930s, attitude assessment was considered inaccurate, on the basis of the weight that interests and socio-affective dimensions have in the guidance process. From the 1930s to the 1950s, characterological studies proliferated. The taxonomic work on psychic types helped scholars and researchers focus their attention on subjective experience, individual's past, and unconscious motivations. Underlining how this clinical-dynamic approach featured guidance practices well into the 1960s, Di Fabio has found that a change of perspective occurred from that moment on: 'While first efforts were directed to find a psychic structure that fits to a given working structure, now, once the psychic structures are traced we proceed to search within the vast panorama of the professions all the dynamic elements that can meet the needs of the subject.' (Di Fabio, 1998, p. 13).

In the next phase, which is characterised by an approach to career choice as realisation of self-image, guidance takes the form of vocational development. In this period, studies began to refer to the autonomy of the subject and to emphasise that the results of the guidance process were closely linked to ability: to explore the various possibilities, to crystallise the information collected, and to specify and implement one's own authentic life project.

With the development of the humanistic approach, the role ascribed to the individual turns guidance actions into an empowering tool for strengthening 'the capacity to congruently choose in relation to the complexity of the outside and



inside world' (Pombeni, 2005, p. 16). Taking into account the outside world and the ability to congruently choose highlights the importance of the heavy effects of the environment on individual interests and choices.

It seems clear, at this point, that the transformation of education systems has helped shape the current definition of lifelong guidance. From this perspective, lifelong guidance includes 'all activities that enable citizens of any age, and at any point in their lives, to: identify their capacities, competencies, and interests; make meaningful educational, training, and occupational decisions; and manage their individual life paths in the settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used' (ELGPL, 2012, p. 13).

Based on this reconstruction, it is possible to make two observations. The first concerns the central role that different forms of work organisation have in structuring the approaches described above (Guichard & Huteau, 2001, p. 13). The second relates to the possibility to identify a series of transversal functions, such as the information, training, and counselling function, within guidance practices.

## **Tutorship and the Guidance Process in Italy**

Although the weight of each of these functions has varied over time within the stratification of the legislation that shaped the different guidance systems in Europe, a brief review of the Italian situation can help to better understand why this paper focuses on the guidance function of tutors.

In a work of 2002, Bonini includes municipal facilities (*Informagiovani*), trade-union and trade-associations desks, desks aimed at specific user groups (immigrants, women, disabled persons, etc.) in the range of guidance services that make up the Italian system. In addition to these services, she identified employment centres, whose main function is to match work demand and supply; the national resource centres for guidance, established within the euroguidance network, and educational, vocational, and academic institutions (Bonini, 2002). A similar kind of list can be found in Loiodice (2004), a work dedicated to adulthood guidance.

If the presence of some of these services can be easily explained by the information function that they perform with respect to the various users, the fact that the list includes vocational training centres, educational institutions, and university desks for guidance and placement highlights two related things. The first is the role that the training function has assumed within guidance systems; the second is the role that guidance has gained in educational and training contexts.

At the normative level, even if Italy shares a guidance approach related to the lifelong and lifewide perspective, it has historically favoured school-university guidance over professional guidance (MIUR, 2009, 2014). However, the special

attention paid to the professional sector points out the role that the regions have played during the (re)organisation of the vocational training system and during its progressive integration with other training paths offered in the region. In Tuscany, this process of organisation and coordination of training services started with regional law n. 32 of 26 July 2002. The 'consolidated legislation on education, instruction, guidance, vocational training, and employment' has enabled a fruitful reflection on the presence of people able to guide individuals before, during, and after their choice of a particular path.

### **A regional perspective**

In this regard, the choices of the Tuscan Region have been geared, in many cases, to the inclusion of tutors in training and guidance services in the region. The reasons for this are related to the fact that tutorship is presented as 'a complex educational practice, complementary and preliminary to the beginning of a training process, whose specific function is to facilitate the path of personal and professional growth of the subject' (Baudrit, 2002, p. 7).

The term *tutor* derives from the Latin verb *tutari* (intensive form of the Latin verb *tueri*), which means 'to care'. This term, used in juridical language, has gradually lost the connotation of protection and dependence of a person from another and has been increasingly associated with educational and empowering practices.

Many of the authors who have examined the subject agree that during the late 1980s, the term has spread on international educational agenda through the cultural mediation of Anglophone educational studies (Van Esbroek & Watts, 1998; Baudrit, 1999; Torre, 2006). In that area, in fact, tutors have been a traditional presence in different contexts such as schools, workplaces, and academia.

Research and studies on tutoring focused on the following lines of investigation: the devices of tutorship, the role and functions of the tutor in various contexts, and the effects of tutoring on learning and personal development. Concerning the first line of research, pastoral care and peer tutoring were the devices which gained more attention among Italian scholars (Torre, 2006; Scardella, 2007; Gemma, 2010). Pastoral care is defined as the educational practice developed in a school environment through which 'a teacher takes care of a small group of students who follow the path of learning and growth' (Torre, 2006, p. 8). Peer tutoring means 'an educational practice through which learners help each other and learn by teaching' (Goodlad & Hirst, 1989, p. 36).

In the second line of investigation, the most relevant studies on the subject identify the tutor 'as someone who has a different role than the teacher and who is responsible for following the development paths of learners by providing specific

and customised support to the process of growth' (Torre, 2006, p. 12). This definition clearly reflects the tendency to interpret the tutor role as a mediating role in formal processes of teaching and learning. However, its presence in contexts in which learning processes take place in an informal way makes it harder to clearly identify its functions and tasks.

Beyond the generic function of support and reinforcement of learning, in initial vocational training the tutor may have a function centred on the coordination of the project, on the development of individual training, and on mediation between the parties involved in the training process (students, teachers, coordinators of the structure, etc.). In in-service training, it is possible that these functions take their place alongside those related to the transfer of skills, the construction of professional identity, and socialisation at the workplace. The function of making connections between classroom training and distance education are typically carried out by tutors who work in the context of e-learning or blended learning (Trevisol, 2002, p. 94).

Piccardo and Benozzo (2006) analyse the role and skills of tutors who are concerned with the training of adults and present a series of metaphors of the profession. These metaphors define the tutor as a coordinator, mediator, motivator, controller and secretary, facilitator, and agent of classroom climate (Piccardo & Benozzo, 2006). In this view, the tutor appears as a multifaceted role whose dominant feature is service.

The same opinion is expressed by Avallone (2006), who affirms that the main task of the tutor is to provide services 'aimed at guiding and assisting individuals throughout the training process, so as to overcome any inconvenience, to remove potential barriers, and to allow their successful participation in the activities' (Avallone, 2006, p. 17).

Returning to consider the role of tutors from a regulatory point of view, the Italian university system law identifies three main areas of behaviour that the tutor should foster in individuals: decision-making, autonomy, and responsibility (law n.341 / 1990 article 12 and 13).

Regarding the research on the effects of tutoring on learning and personal development, the brief overview presented above suggests a greater development of the former than the latter. However, as Van Esbroeck and Watts recall, tutorship has often proven to be an effective tool 'in guiding the subjects, making them capable of autonomously responding adequately to different situations ... allowing them to reach a suitable knowledge about themselves and about the environment in which they live in order to evaluate and select the field, the values, and the networks for developing their own life' (Van Esbroeck & Watts, 1998, p. 137).

The convergence of what emerged from this literature review and the assumption about guidance has allowed some authors to elaborate the concept of tutoring guidance, or in other words to reinterpret the traditional functions of tutors in the light of an increased importance of the guidance function (Gemma, 2010; Pombeni, 2007).

The model of tutoring guidance was introduced in Italy starting from some experiences of the Ri.TMO project, carried out in the Friuli region. In this region, in 2005, tutoring guidance was introduced on an experimental basis in the transition from the first to the second cycle of education. The aims of the experiment can be summarised as follows:

1. to model good practices of enhanced and customised tutoring
2. to test in the field the coordination/integration between school and community services
3. to identify some conditions conducive to implementing tutoring guidance at the local level alongside information and advisory services.

The project, which started from the assumption that enhanced and customised tutoring cannot be completely provided from the resources of school system, activated a service that involved teachers of final classes of the first cycle of education, teachers of the first classes of the second cycle, and operators of regional guidance centres.

According to Pombeni (2007), who was the scientific coordinator of the project, tutoring guidance 'encompasses all the actions that accompany, enhance, and personalise a learning experience in order to develop the learner's capacity for self-orientation' (Pombeni, 2007, p. 29). Because the development of a process of self-orientation implicates different types of guidance activities, Pombeni aims to manage them on the basis of two elements. The first concerns the transversal functions of information, training, and counselling. The second concerns a diachronic reading of the tutoring process. In the table below, it is possible to see the systematisation of the model of tutoring guidance based on the different stages of the process, the needs expressed by learners, and the actions and activities through which the system can respond.

Table 1: Tutoring Guidance Model (Source: Author's own)

Phases of the process	Needs	Actions	Activities
<b>Preparation</b>	Maturing conscious choices	Counselling function	Activities aimed at enhancing the development tasks and strengthening personal resources and interests in order to actively manage the situation
<b>Information<sup>1</sup></b>	Develop prerequisites and get information	Informative function	Activities aimed at acquiring useful information to decision-making process
<b>Development</b>	Self-monitor the process and plan further steps	Training function	Activities aimed at developing auto-regulation and decision-making skills
<b>Support</b>	Summarise the information gathered	Counselling function	Activities aimed at supporting the decision-making process understood as a moment in which the subject makes personal and coherent commitments to their objectives

## From Theory to Practice

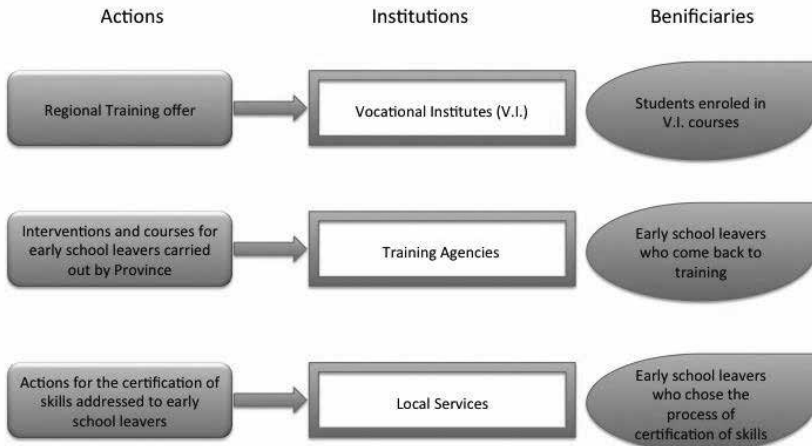
This model, although not explicitly mentioned in the planning of regional training and guidance initiatives, appears to be perfectly realised by the setting that the Tuscany region provides for some paths in the initial vocational training system (IeFP).

After law n.144/1999, which imposes that 'no young person can interrupt their training without having obtained a degree or at least a vocational qualification by 18 years of age' (MIUR, 2007), the region has begun to reshape the relationship between public employment services, educational institutes, and training agencies who provide vocational training courses.

Through successive adjustments, the regional initial vocational training system (IeFP) took the following structure:

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1 This phase can be thought as a recurrent steps of the process.

Table 2: *IeFP system in Tuscany (Source: Author's own).*

This structure has increased the role and meaning of integration between the various segments of the system due to the permeability between its pathways. Individuals can in fact leave the vocational institutes to go through a phase of drop-out and then re-enrol in a provincial training course or, vice versa, at the end of the course return into the regional institutions.

Beyond this important aspect, it is possible to talk about the guidance function of tutors only where their presence is overwhelming compared to that of other figures. A brief review of the main figures who provide support to each category of users can help to better understand why the model of tutoring guidance applies specifically to vocational training courses delivered by accredited training agencies at provincial level.

For students who attend vocational institutes, support measures essentially consist of the presence of a teacher-coordinator and the presence of an internship tutor. For early school leavers, in contrast, guidance types vary depending on the path that they choose. Those who choose to begin the process of certification of skills meet mainly operators of local services, while those who commit themselves to re-entering training encounter a series of tutors: namely, the tutor for compulsory education who works in the employment centres, the classroom tutor, the internship tutor, and the external counsellor, who often meets the students in relevant phases of their training.

Because each of the identified figures contributes to the activities included in the model of tutoring guidance, it is possible to project the model on the tutoring practices which characterise provincial vocational training courses.

Before focusing on the reasons in support of what has been said above, it is necessary to provide a brief description of the pathway followed by people who attend this kind of course. As mentioned earlier, these courses are designed for students who dropped out of school. After being reported by schools to their province, these students are welcomed in the employment centres by tutors for compulsory education. The tutors, after an initial survey phase, involve them in the drafting of a customised growth plan, which includes their participation in training activities. Upon entering the course, students are asked to perform 2,100 hours of training. During the course, the presence of the classroom tutor ensures constant and progressive support. The classroom tutor's frequent contacts with the internship tutors who follow the students allow for meaningful monitoring of the student's progress. The requirement to devote a number of hours specifically to the construction of a post-qualification growth plan completes the training programme proposed by the agencies.

Based on this brief description, it is possible to say that the training process of people who attend these courses follows, in its main phases, the moments predicted by the model of tutoring guidance. Moreover, these phases seem to include groups of activities perfectly consistent with the model. Based on Catarsi's (2004) definition of what is carried out by the tutor for compulsory education, such as the 'enhancement of personal resources which enable people to be directly engaged in the search of overcoming difficulties' (Catarsi, 2004, p. 19), it is possible to recognise a certain degree of convergence with the counselling activities proposed by the first phase of the model (Pombeni, 2007). Furthermore, if we include among the activities of classroom and internship tutoring the possibility to 'stimulate in the trainees a constant reflection on their progress in order to prevent experiences of failure and in order to plan future actions' (Trevisol, 2002, p. 46), the convergence is once again confirmed. These are precisely the actions that Pombeni proposed from the pilot phase. Without forgetting the importance that the information held throughout the process, the contribution that the counsellor gives through their advice seems to recall in a clear manner the activities that the model suggest in order to facilitate the accountability process held by students (support).

The work done so far allows for some remarks. First, it seems appropriate to point out that the device proposed by the provinces with respect to early school leavers can be seen as a good empowered and customised practice in the per-

spective of lifelong guidance. Second, since the experience of coordination and integration between local services is consistent, what is provided for early school leavers in terms of guidance may help identify some conditions conducive to the implementation of similar services geared specifically to adults in transition, for whom guidance often consists only in the possibility to access advisory services.

Without going into the details of the factual implications of this proposal, the operative plan for regional investments of the European Social Fund (POR FSE 2014–2020) seems to offer this possibility, focusing its efforts on the modernisation of labour market institutions (Priority A5 of employability axis) and working on the adaptation of lifelong educational services to the current economic and social challenges (Priority C3 of the education and training axis).

From this point of view, operators who provide advisory services in employment centre can collaborate with enterprises and training agencies in order to provide a form of shared tutoring guidance which accompanies individuals before, during, and after the transition from one path to another.

## Conclusion

In the attempt to deal with the guidance function that tutors play in vocational training in Tuscany, we have tried to frame their presence within the regional training system on the basis of a wider discourse on lifelong learning and lifelong guidance. First of all, we took care to highlight the diverse ideas from which the concept of lifelong learning has emerged. We then looked at some analytical models to underline the risks of a purely functionalist definition of learning. At this point, after emphasising the importance of guidance for the construction of an inclusive and equitable system, we reconstructed the different approaches that have followed since the beginning of the century. Based on this assessment, we defined lifelong guidance as the series of activities that 'enable citizens of any age, and at any point in their lives, to: identify their capacities, competencies and interests; make meaningful educational, training, and occupational decisions; and manage their individual life paths in the settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used' (ELGPL, 2012, p. 13). Building on this definition, we finally described the Italian system of guidance in order to propose a regional perspective linked to the role that tutors play within the Tuscan system of vocational education and training. After presenting an overview of the main functions associated with the role of the tutor in different educational contexts, the introduction of the concept of tutoring guidance allowed us to explore the experience of the training courses that provinces offer to early school leavers. The concluding proposal of this work was elaborated on the basis of the European



Social Fund's operative plan for regional investment, focusing on the possibility to offer what has been provided to early school leavers (e.g. shared tutoring guidance) to the adult population to extend guidance services to adults, who often only have access to advisory services.

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Shalini Singh

# India towards a knowledge economy: Alternatives for the global demographic challenge and inclusive development in India

## Abstract

This paper gives an overview of Lifelong Learning and Adult Education in India and India's drive towards creating a niche in the emerging global knowledge economy. It presents the current picture of India in terms of the knowledge economy criteria provided by the World Bank. It also highlights India's readiness to provide solutions for the demographic challenge in Europe and across the globe. The paper mentions the challenges that India is facing in its transition to a knowledge economy and outlines the opportunities and scope that international players have in the Indian market. The paper also highlights the fact that the transition to a knowledge economy should not come at the cost of the starving millions who are waiting for a 'trickle down' to occur because the government has no other solution for them. International players can provide an inclusive model of sustainable development in India in return for a big market and huge pool of resources. This would be a win-win situation for all.

## Introduction

Poor Ganga Devi gets up every morning with no hope in her eyes. She is 60 years old with an annual household income of around Rs.3,000 in a small, unelectrified village called Jhawani in Assam in North-East India. With no one to look after, and no one to care for, her eyes are devoid of any dreams, and she keeps on carrying her life on her emaciated shoulders with tears in her eyes. Her two illiterate sons, along with their families, left her almost 10 years ago to work far away in Rajasthan, a state on the Western frontier of India, as they could not find any jobs nearby. The same story gets repeated every day, in thousands of villages, in endless numbers of households, all across the country.<sup>1</sup> Facing the century's largest rural-urban migration with more than 10 million people moving to urban areas every year from the rural scarcity-ridden mess (Dahlman, Carl/ Utz Anuja, 2005), India confronts a lot of challenges in terms of housing these migrants in urban

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1 This story was recorded on October 20th 2014 during a study conducted by the author in the Jhawani village of Tezpur, Assam, India for the RHEES-BURD project and her own PhD.

areas. In the absence of appropriate places to live, breed, grow, develop, and earn a respectable livelihood, millions are left behind in reckless poverty and hunger, with fewer options to live than to die in isolated villages of a 'rising economic giant'. Can India's move towards becoming a knowledge economy bring some hope to Ganga Devi's eyes? Can it make the burden on her emaciated shoulders a little lighter? Can it bring home her long-gone sons? Can it bring a little hope to millions of households in India? Or is the advent of a heartless neo-liberal order likely to plunge millions more into another reckless 'virtuous circle' of profit generation and consumerism, this time in the name of 'knowledge'? India is rising as an economic giant, ready to carve out a major share in the global economy. But will this come at the cost of more poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment back at home, or will a transition to a knowledge economy make India a better place to live for its starving millions?

## An Overview of India

The job market in India is offering fewer and fewer opportunities for the average citizen getting wound up day by day to earn a livelihood. At a rapid pace, the great digital divide is engulfing those standing on the verge of poverty (cf. Kenston, K./Kumar, D. (eds.), 2003). India is the world's second-largest democracy and fourth-largest economy, inhabited by about 1.252 billion people (World Bank 2015). Its leapfrogging performance has raised a mixed reaction of concern as well hope among many advanced countries and its competitors that are looking desperately for new markets but fear competition. Most of the concerns are targeted at the largest and youngest workforce ever to emerge anywhere in the world in the past few centuries, with about 50 per cent of the total Indian population below the age of 25 years and about 65 per cent below the age of 35, as per World Bank estimates for the year 2020 (World Bank 2015). According to a BBC report, the average age of an Indian by the year 2020 would be 29 years, which would push the dependency ratio<sup>2</sup> to just about 0.4 per cent (cf. Basu, K. 2007).

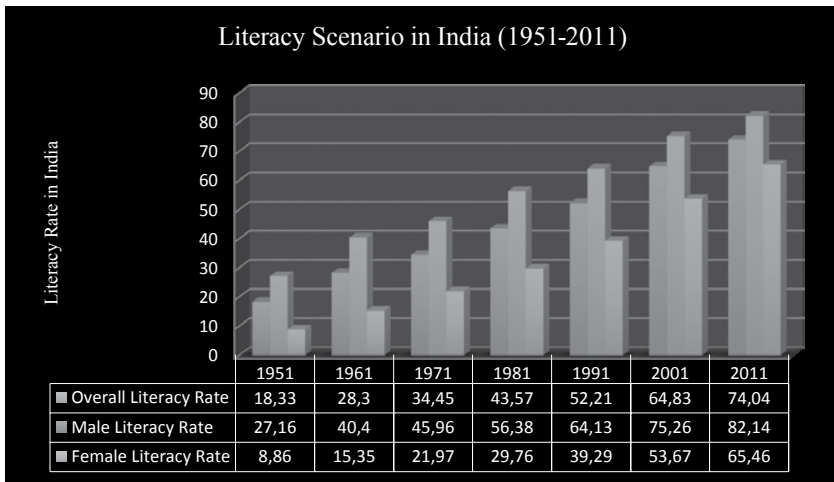
In 2011, India registered a literacy rate of 74.04 per cent, with 82.14 per cent among males and 65.46 per cent among females. Kerala was the most literate state among all Indian states, with a literacy rate of 93.9 per cent, whereas Bihar was the most illiterate state, with a literacy rate of 63.08 per cent (Census of India 2011). The CIA World Fact Book ranked India at 177 out of 205 nations in terms of

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2 Dependency ratio, or the pressure on the productive population, refers to the percentage of people in an economy that depends economically on the working population for the fulfillment of its basic needs.

literacy (The World Fact Book 2012). With extreme socio-cultural and economic variation based on factors like caste, class, gender, vernaculars, and the like, India has to carve out a successful future for itself to drag its 400 million living in abject poverty (equivalent to one-third of the world's poor) out of poverty and to ensure that other millions of people (about 53 million during 2005–10) who have recently escaped poverty do not fall back into its vicious circle (India Overview 2015).

Figure1: Literacy Scenario<sup>3</sup> in India (author's own based on 2011 Census).<sup>4</sup>



For this, India must mobilise all its potential to evolve into a kind of a system that can take care of its vast diversity and differences without widening the existing gap between them. Is becoming a 'knowledge economy' a viable answer to the challenges that India is facing today? Or will turning itself into a 'knowledge economy' push India into another, stronger structure of 'pseudo-development', where a handful of people have access to and ownership over a majority of resources while the masses suffer in scarcity and poverty? Should India be afraid of creating

3 The literacy rate in India is measured according to the criteria provided by UNESCO. A census is conducted every ten years in India (the most recent one in 2011) in which measuring the capability to read and write is an important factor. The percentage of people who know to read and write is termed the literacy rate in India.

4 This table has been collated by the author from the data taken from Chapter 6, Census of India, 2011 available at: [http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data\\_files/india/Final\\_PPT\\_2011\\_chapter6.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/Final_PPT_2011_chapter6.pdf).

another great internal divide between the rich and the poor that might tear the economic giant apart, leaving behind, small fragmented markets to be captured and exploited? The answer lies in the alternatives that India will choose for itself in the next few years. However, before understanding whether and how India chooses to become a knowledge economy, we must define in clear terms what the concept of a knowledge economy means in the global and the Indian context.

## The Knowledge Economy in the Indian Context

The concept of a knowledge economy, in the mainstream understanding, is not much different from the one popularised by Peter Drucker as the heading of the twelfth chapter of his book *The Age of Discontinuity*, in which he referred to the economist Fritz Machlup and the father of scientific management, F. W. Taylor, to trace the roots of the concept (cf. Drucker, P. 1968). To Drucker, a knowledge society (as he used and popularised the concept) was a society that uses knowledge as both a product and a productive asset (cf. Powell, W. W./ Snellman K. 2014). In 1942, an Austrian economist called Joseph Schumpeter identified innovation as a key factor in economic growth. Schumpeter referred to this process as 'creative destruction', explaining how the creation of new business opportunities leads to the destruction of old ones in a knowledge society (Schumpeter, J. A. 2014). Stanford professor Paul Romer came up with a new growth theory, which stated that innovation is the key to long-term growth and that people can innovate faster than diminishing returns (cf. Romer, P. M. 1986). The World Bank's definition of a knowledge economy is not very different from all these interpretations and understandings. It describes a knowledge economy as one that '...creates, disseminates and uses knowledge to enhance its growth and competitiveness'. Further, it rests on four pillars:

1. *An economic and institutional regime* that provides incentives for the efficient creation, dissemination, and use of existing knowledge.
2. *An educated and skilled population* that can create and use knowledge.
3. *An efficient innovation system* of firms, research centres, universities, consultants, and other organizations that can tap into the growing stock of global knowledge and assimilate and adapt it to local needs, as well as to create relevant new knowledge
4. *Dynamic information infrastructure* that can facilitate the effective communication, dissemination, and processing of information. (Dahlman & Utz, 2005 p. 9).



Most definitions of the knowledge economy convey the same. They talk about a system in which knowledge is the predominant component of all the basic functions of an economy. Knowledge is produced to be sold in the market as a commodity; knowledge is consumed in the market as a commodity; knowledge is accumulated and reproduced; or knowledge-producing entities are accumulated as capital formation.<sup>5</sup>

Of the roughly 950 million illiterate adults across the globe, 600 million are women, and over one-third of the world's total illiterate population comes from South Asia. According to the most recent data provided by UNESCO, 75 per cent of the world's total illiterate population come from only nine countries, including India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Indonesia, Iran, and Brazil (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2012). Is it justified to 'impose' the meaning of the knowledge economy in countries like these, which do not share the context where the definition of the term originated? Probably, there is a need to widen the narrow definition of the knowledge economy somewhat.

In context of a country like India, integrating knowledge into the economic system as a factor of production and as a product may not be enough. In order to understand the role that knowledge should play in India while the country evolves into a knowledge economy, the trajectory of adult education and lifelong learning in the country must be understood.

## **The Roots of Lifelong Learning in India: Adult Education Initiatives**

In India, the concept of Lifelong Learning emerged only recently, and none of the premier institutions are working dedicatedly in this field. However, adult education initiatives in the country are the roots from which this concept originated in India. The story of India in terms of adult education has not always been too splashed with the colours of hope. When India achieved independence, the colour of remorse and scarcity veiled the country more prominently. India has seen a long history of colonial subjugation and exploitation under the British Empire for 200 years.

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5 According to basic economic theory, an economy has three major functions: production, consumption, and capital formation.

The trajectory of adult education programmes in India can be classified into various stages or phases, which might be presented as follows:

### **The phase of indoctrination (colonial period)**

During the colonial period (1502–1947), while the British were trying to take up their ‘white man’s burden’<sup>6</sup> in India with the ‘healing touch of Christianity’, the first adult education programme in India was launched.<sup>7</sup> A handful of British people carried a vision about the transformation of an uncivilised, backward mass of men and women through basic education. However, lack of finances and political will led to ‘downward filtration’, and the idea of adult education was forced to take a backseat (Pannickar, 2000, p.10). In the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, India saw the rise of numerous reform movements led by social reformers who insisted on the need to educate the masses for the transformation of Indian society from a feudal orthodoxy to a liberal, humane, modern social order. They opposed the idea of restricting the education of women and lower castes in society and fought for introducing equal educational opportunities for all. The primary idea behind their efforts was to set education free from the clutches of casteism and orthodoxy and to unleash its power for widespread socio-economic change. For achieving their aim, it was important not only to disseminate education but to disseminate it in vernacular (cf Bhushan, 2002). The curriculum included the ‘three Rs’—reading, writing, and arithmetic<sup>8</sup>—along with a few stories of historical importance and basic lessons about health, hygiene, and first aid (Govt. of India 1940: 49). However, despite all serious efforts of socio-political reformers in India, adult education could not step out of the night schools and continued to advance at a very slow pace, primarily due to the contrary interest of the new middle class (Acharya, 1988:1124).

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- 6 The poem called ‘White Man’s Burden’ by the British poet Rudyard Kipling was published in 1899. It conveys the notion that the British were entrusted with the duty to colonise non-white countries for the benefit of the latter.
  - 7 The British missionaries wanted to educate Indians so that they could study the bible. Their basic literacy programmes, which consisted of imparting skills to read and write, were not officially called ‘adult education programmes’, but they targeted India’s adult population. For further reference, see Shah, S.Y. 2010.
  - 8 The term refers to the foundations of a basic skills-oriented education programme. The phrase ‘the three Rs’ is used because each word in the phrase has a strong R phoneme at the beginning.

### The Era of Marginalisation (1947–77)

The context changed after India achieved independence and there was a need to move ahead from the three Rs towards a much broader category of ‘social education’. The government of India, in its policy documents, announced a social education programme for imparting basic skills for citizenship (cf. Shah, 2010).

The literacy rate grew a bit from 16.07 per cent in 1951 to 31.11 per cent in 1961, but the pattern was not quite even all over the country. In Kerala, it was as high as 55 per cent, whereas Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan recorded a rate as low as between 20 to 22 per cent. The state of female literacy was even worse (Athreya & Chunkat, 1996:ß, pp. 52–53). In 1959, a literacy programme called the Gram Shikshan Mohim was started in rural areas of the Satara District, Madhya Pradesh, to impart basic literacy skills within a short span of four months, but the programme failed due to lack of adequate infrastructure and appropriate follow-up, resulting in a massive relapse to illiteracy (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2015). In 1971, the Education Commission of India came up with its report called *Education and National Development* (Ministry of Education, 1971), which emphasised how important it was to educate the masses for development (or modernisation), stressing that development is directly related to education. The report emphasised how during the 1960s, the country was longing for a revolution to achieve development by attaining food sufficiency, but the masses were not ready. A wide gulf persisted between the laboratory and real life, and it was extremely difficult to bring on the ‘Green Revolution’<sup>9</sup> in India without educating farmers about technology.

In the years 1968–69, the Farmer’s Functional Literacy Programme was launched with an objective to make farmers aware of the technical complexities of using HYV (high-yielding varieties) seeds, chemicals, fertilisers, pesticides, insecticides, and the like. About 30 million farmers were enrolled under this programme out of the estimated 100 million, and only 80 million rupees were spent

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9 The Green Revolution in India (1960s) was a comprehensive programme launched by the Indian government to improve agricultural output in India through agronomic technology, primarily including the use of high-yielding varieties (HYV) seeds, fertilisers, and better techniques for irrigation.

on the whole process instead of the allocated 200 million (Dutta, 1986, p. 67). The programme failed to percolate to the bottom layers of society and remained exclusive in nature, leaving most of the disadvantaged masses on their own (UNDP, 1976: pp. 48–54).

The reasons for the remarkably poor results in terms of literacy during three decades of planned development were numerous, but the most significant of them all was the marginalisation of adult education in education policy and a failure on the part of the government to understand that prioritising primary education over adult education to solve the problem of mass illiteracy was inadequate.

### **Formation of a structure (1978–86)**

The programme was changed to Rural Functional Literacy Programme (RFLP) in the fifth five-year plan. In 1978, the National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) was launched. With a target to achieve the literacy of about 100 million aged between 15 and 35 over a period of five years (1979–80 to 1983–84), the focus was now not only on 'three Rs' but also on functionality and awareness. This meant that apart from the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, the curriculum included knowledge of vocational skills that could help people earn livelihoods, and awareness of their rights and the tinted story of their exploitation, poverty, and deprivation (Shah, A.B. 1980: 85). Thus, literacy became a tool for creating awareness that could in turn bring on a social transformation (Ramachandran, 1999, p. 87). Strong efforts by different stakeholders to make the programme a success included efforts like preparing study materials and conducting research and training activities through the involvement of central and state governments, institutions like colleges and universities, local bodies like *panchayats* and municipalities and a number of voluntary agencies (Bordia, A./ Kaul A. pg 57). Despite these efforts, the programme failed to achieve much, as it remained exclusive in nature and women, scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes could not benefit from it (Ministry of Education & Commerce, 1980: 86–87). However, the programme left a new administrative and organisational structure at the central, state, and local level.

### **Formulation of a policy (1986–1991)**

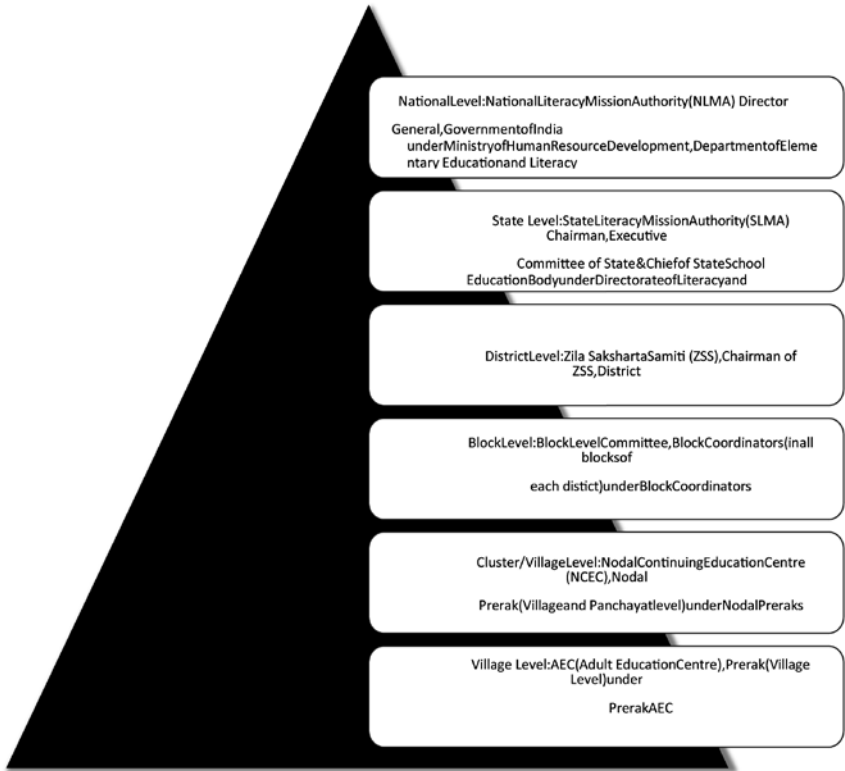
The generational change in the country's political leadership was reflected at the policy level, too, when the government declared that appropriate political decision-making and an all-inclusive national reconstruction require extensive literacy on an urgent basis at the level of a mission (Ministry of Education, 1985).

pg 41) In 1986, the Ministry of Human Resource Development came up with the National Policy on Education. Adult education was to be delivered in a time-bound, planned manner through a particular structure including institutions (e.g. *shramik vidyapeeths*, polyvalent adult education centers, industrial training institutes or ITIs, and community polytechnics), and agencies (like TRYSEM or Training for Rural Youth for Self Employment of District Rural development Agencies) to out-of-school youth and adults. Distance education programmes and open learning were promoted for formal higher education, and *Jana Shikshan Nilayams* were proposed for non-formal vocational education for specific interest groups like workers, farmers, and women for the betterment of livelihood skills. As a result, the National Literacy Mission was launched in the year 1988 with an aim to cover about 80 million adult illiterates between 15 and 25 years of age under the functional literacy programme by the year 1995. The programme focused on developing literacy but also touched on issues like national integration, the conservation of the environment, and gender equality through Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) all over the country in an area-specific, time-bound, volunteer-based manner at a mass scale. Imparting functional literacy to illiterates was accompanied by efforts to create awareness among them of their socio-economic condition, its causes, and solutions, as well as values linked to the third generation of human rights<sup>10</sup> (Ghosh, A. 2000. pg 7). However, several drawbacks in the programme did not allow it to succeed. The lop-sided excessive focus on imparting literacy skills to illiterates rather than balancing functional literacy and post-literacy follow-up programmes and continuing education for neo-literates did not allow the mission to achieve its goal. The literacy machinery in India can be represented as follows:

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10 The third generation of human rights includes developmental rights.

Figure 2: The Government Institutional Structure in India for Literacy (author’s own).<sup>11</sup>



Likewise, a timeline of various adult education efforts in modern India can be summed up as follows:

11 The figure has been created by the author to explain the government institutional structure in India under the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The highest authority (NLMA) in this arrangement is at the national level, which takes care of all the initiatives to provide literacy across the country. Under this are the SLMAs, which operate in Indian states. Each state is divided into smaller areas called districts, which are further divided into blocks and then into clusters of villages. These divisions are used for administrative purposes, policy planning, and their implementation by the government.

Table 1: *Adult Education Efforts in Modern India.*<sup>12</sup>

Year	Agent	Effort	Guiding force/ idea/ target	Focus of Curricu- lum	Literacy rate (as percensus) in per cent		
					Total	Male	Female
Part of colonial period (17th to 19th century)	British missionaries	Reading the bible	Spreading Christianity and cultural predominance	Bible	Official data not available <sup>13</sup>		
Part of colonial period (18th to 20th century)	Few British officers	Reading the bible	Social transformation	3 Rs			
18th–19th century	Indian social reform leaders	Social reform organisations, movements, and individual efforts	Social transformation	3 Rs			
1951–56	Government of India	Literacy, extension, general education, leadership training & social education	Eradicate illiteracy amongst adults	3 Rs and citizenship skills	18.33	27.16	8.86

12 This table was created by the author based on general information available about adult education initiatives in India; information about the literacy rate in India has been taken from the Census of India (2011), which is conducted every ten years. Official data on the part of Government of India is not available for the in-between period, and therefore changes in literacy rates over shorter spans are not reflected in the table, available at [http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data\\_files/india/Final\\_PPT\\_2011\\_chapter6.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/Final_PPT_2011_chapter6.pdf).

13 No official data on the part of the Government of India is available for access.

Year	Agent	Effort	Guiding force/ idea/ target	Focus of Curricu- lum	Literacy rate (as percensus) in per cent		
					Total	Male	Female
1958	Government of India	Gram Shikshan Mohim	Imparting basic literacy skills	3 Rs, functional literacy about agriculture	18.33	27.16	8.86
1968-69	Government of India	Farmer's Functional Literacy Programme	Facilitating the Green Revolution in India	Technical know-how about farming using HYV seeds, machines, chemicals, fertilisers, pesticides, etc.	28.3	40.4	15.35
1967	Government of India	Setting up of workers social education centres or polyvalent adult education Centres or Shramik Vidyapeeths	Facilitating existing adult education programmes	Continuing the existing programmes in an integrated manner	28.3	40.4	15.35
1975-76	Government of India	Functional literacy for adult women	Eradicate illiteracy amongst adult women, health awareness, hygiene, and child practices			34.45	45.96
1977	Government of India	Non-formal education programme	Imparting literacy among youth aged 15-35	3 Rs, functional-literacy, vocational-courses		28.3	40.4



Year	Agent	Effort	Guiding force/ idea/ target	Focus of Curriculum	Literacy rate (as percensus) in per cent		
					Total	Male	Female
1978	Government of India	National Adult Education Programme	Making 100 Million illiterate adults aged 15–35 functionally literate within five years	3 Rs, functional literacy, vocational courses		34.45	45.96
1979	Government of India	Rural Functional Literacy Project	Impart functional literacy to illiterate aged 15–35 in rural areas	3 Rs, Functional literacy, vocational courses		34.45	45.96
1988	Government of India	National Literacy Mission	Impart functional literacy to 80 million illiterates aged 15–35 (30 million by 1990 and remaining by 1995)	3 Rs, Functional and development literacy		43.57	56.38
1977	Government of India	Non-formal education Programme	Imparting literacy among youth aged 15–35	3 Rs, functional literacy, vocational courses		28.3	40.4

### Towards a knowledge economy (1999 onwards)

The National Literacy Mission was revived by the new government under Vajpayee, which aspired to achieve a literacy rate of 75 per cent by the year 2007. In the year 2002, literacy campaigns in operation restoration were launched with the objective to consolidate the total literacy campaigns and post-literacy programmes in a single programme (cf. Daswani, C.J. 2002). Technical and vocational skills were included in the continuing education programmes that followed after the preparatory phase of programmes under the Literacy Campaigns in Operation Restoration programmes. Apart from that, financial and administrative powers

regarding the programmes related to adult literacy were decentralised and given away to State Literacy Mission Authorities. The participation of NGOs and State Resource Centres was encouraged under the National Literacy Mission, and *Jan Shiksha Sansthan*s played a key role in imparting vocational and technical skills in urban as well as rural areas. In the year 2002, the Indian Constitution was amended to make education a fundamental right of all the citizens.<sup>14</sup> In 2005, the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was established to create, apply, and disseminate knowledge and convert India into a full-fledged knowledge economy. In December 2006, the Commission came up with a *Report to the Nation* (National Knowledge Commission 2006), which included several micro-level suggestions with regard to making India a knowledge economy.

### **India as a Knowledge Economy: Challenges and Opportunities**

As a potential knowledge economy, India shows lot of hope. A PESTL (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, and Legal) analysis of India shows that it features all the components suitable for a transition to a knowledge economy. Politically, it is the world's largest democracy, and with the last general elections held in 2014, it has shown quite positive signs of having a stable government for at least the next ten years. After about two-and-a-half decades of coalition governments, a single party has now come into power at the centre with a full majority, and that trend seems to continue in the states, too. This has given promising signals for market investments, too. India's market is continuously growing, and the government has speeded up the process of opening up through reforms. The Indian diaspora present across the globe is being invited to invest in India through programmes like 'Make in India'<sup>15</sup> and Vibrant Gujarat.<sup>16</sup> Apart from that, free-market operations are gaining prominence in India, and economic reforms are on their way at an unprecedented pace. All in all, the economy is getting liberalised and opened up to integrate with the international economy increasingly to carve out a niche for itself in the international market. At the social front, Facebook and Whatsapp have by and large reduced distances and social differences. In the massive migration from villages to cities, casteism and

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14 The 86th Amendment Act of the Indian Constitution, inserted in Article 21A of the Indian Constitution, made provision for free and compulsory elementary education to all children between the age of 6 to 14 years so that no one remains illiterate in the country in the long run. For further details, see [mhrd.gov.in/rte](http://mhrd.gov.in/rte).

15 A policy initiative declared by the new Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi, to encourage investment in India's manufacturing sector in India.

16 An initiative of the State of Gujarat to deal directly with foreign and Indian investors.

social exclusion are being left out at a faster pace. That trend picks up speed when travelling in the metro train without asking the caste of the person sitting next to you, and when having a day out with colleagues in the office without any concern about their social background. English, which has become a style statement and a means to gain respect among peers today, has become the lingua franca of Indian youth. Pricewars among providers of phone and Internet services have produced the 'unintended consequence' of inexpensive access to information and communication technology across the country, and the number of connected nodes that can be easily converted to business is increasing every day.

However, in order for India to realise its complete potential as a knowledge economy, a lot more needs to be done. The current picture of India is bleak in terms of the capabilities that remain latent and unexplored. An analysis of the current situation in India regarding the four components of a knowledge economy defined by the World Bank (cf Dahlman C./ Utz A. 2005) is given below, but the problems that have been pointed out show that there is a lot of scope for improvement.

**Economic and institutional regime:** After India gained independence from the British in 1947, it decided to go ahead as a mixed economy with a tilt towards socialism. However, economic reforms in India were introduced in 1991 under international pressure to address a major economic crisis it was facing. Despite opening up, the economy has remained much isolated from the global economy. The current government in India (since mid-2014), however, has a different approach towards economic development, and it seems keen to integrate India with the global economy more openly and aggressively. As a result, the government is investing more in infrastructure and open market reforms in addition to improving relations with other countries, especially with the West.

In 2015, the World Bank group ranked India at 142 out of 189 countries for ease of doing business.<sup>17</sup> India lacks much in terms of infrastructure, and the accounting standards followed in India are different from and less logical than those followed at the international level. Apart from that, India's skilled and most productive population is concentrated in a few areas, especially in metro cities, rather than scattered across the whole country. Transportation is pathetic in qualitative terms, and the condition of roads, highways, railways, and communication leads to wastage of resources. Similarly, the public distribution system needs overhauling and revival.

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17 Doing Business, The World Bank Group Data available at: <http://www.doingbusiness.org/data/exploreeconomies/india>.

The Globalization Index used to measure economic interdependence and integration with the global economy has placed India at 107 (KOF Index of Globalization 2014), showing that there is a long way to go ahead. Similarly, India's 71<sup>st</sup> rank in the World Economic Forum's 2014–15 Global Competitiveness Index shows that the Indian economy needs a lot of improvement for attracting international business and reaping the benefits of its integration with the global market (World Economic Forum 2015). Institutions in India need to be more transparent and open, technological readiness needs to be increased, and labour laws and legal structure (including the patent regime) need to be reformed. Health and education are in a bad state; innovation lacks investment and security. According to the 2013 Open Market Index by the International Chamber of Commerce, India ranks at 64 in the category of below-average openness owing to its trade policy, with import as its only saviour (International Chamber of Commerce 2014). This has been a major cause of the reduced inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) in India. India is at the 20<sup>th</sup> position in terms of global FDI inflows, behind China, Russia, and Brazil (Wikipedia 2015).

Apart from this gloomy picture of India in terms of performance, the GINI index World Bank estimate shows that India needs to redistribute its income and consumption expenditure by 33.6 percent owing to its economic inequality (World Bank 2015). The reforms in India need to be comprehensive and instrumental. Western countries can collaborate with India to develop a basic infrastructure, and India can upgrade to international standards in terms of governance and accounting.

**Educated and skilled workers:** India has the potential to meet the needs for human resources across the globe due to its huge numbers of young people. Its limited domestic employment options and the shortage of skilled workers across the developed world, combined with the skyrocketing costs of global outsourcing, may result in prospects for India's huge workforce to be used in developed countries in the near future. However, the Indian workforce lacks appropriate skills for employability, and today's India is a classic case of structural unemployment with an alarming mismatch between the jobs available in the market and the skills possessed by people seeking jobs. The 2013 Human Capital Index, prepared by the World Economic Forum ranked India at the 100th position (cf. World Economic Forum 2015), which highlights the fact that India has failed to groom its vast population into a productive human resource.

Despite the growth in primary- and secondary-level opportunities for education brought on by various government initiatives and efforts from non-state actors, the majority of the population has limited opportunities for skill development due

to certain socio-economic and political reasons. For almost two decades (1991 to late 2000s), after economic reforms were introduced in India (1991), the country witnessed a period of 'jobless growth'. The current skill and employability trends on the basis of available data suggest that the demand and supply gap for workforce across different industries and sectors in India by the year 2020 is estimated to be about 75 to 80 percent. More than 90 percent of India's working population is employed in low-productivity, low-income jobs. Half of the 25-year-olds are not literate, one-third of the remaining half only had primary schooling, four in five entrants to the job market never had any skill training opportunities, and the booming information technology sector still lacks about half a million engineers (cf Perez-Gore, I. 2014). Out of the total 60 percent employable population in India, only 25 percent can be used by the job market. In core professions, the gap between demand and supply has grown to an alarming 82 to 86 percent (Wheebox 2014). On top of it, about 47 percent of the total youth are not employable because of a lack of English language skills (Wheebox 2014). With 86 percent of the total employed population working in the informal sector (including self-employment) (Okaya A. 2012), only 10 percent of the workforce receive some kind of training with formal training subsidising at just 2 percent, whereas 80 percent of entrants never get an opportunity for skill training (FICCI 2012).

India needs a structured policy and implementation mechanism for skill enhancement and training primarily along two lines:

1. To meet the requirements of the international job market targeting the employable skilled and semi-skilled urban educated population with linguistic, interactive, and communicative competency to match international standards.
2. To support its own economic base and promote social inclusion targeting the literate, semi-literate, and illiterate employable population from rural areas and suburbs through small and medium-sized enterprises, self-employment initiatives, and public employment guarantee schemes.

However, the government's only initiatives for coping with these challenges are the provisions for creating a basic infrastructure for skill development in the eleventh (2007–12) and twelfth (2012–17) five-year plans, and the policy formulation and implementation mechanisms in the National Policy on Skills (2009). These seem quite inadequate to meet the target of skilling up about 150 million people by 2022 across 21 areas (including the unorganised sector, 10 manufacturing industries, and 10 services) that have been identified by the government as areas with a high potential for employment opportunities. Besides, literacy and social inclusion continue to be the primary focus of government education policy and initiatives, along with resource allocation in education (Census of India 2011).

Despite the efforts of private actors like TATA, Wipro, and HCL, NGOs and research institutions that have come up in rural and backward areas with the help of development projects funded internationally and globally by various state and non-state actors, and skill development initiatives by public fund and self-help groups, India is unable to bridge the demand-supply gap even in its own market. While most private-sector initiatives stay confined to conditioning and skill enhancement for particular services, especially BPOs, KPOs, and software development, the primary output of NGOs, research initiatives, and international collaborations winds up in reports and data. Multinationals like Bosch (a German company), which have initiated the process of skill development through partnerships with the government, some universities, and other players from the international market, are welcome in the Indian market to provide education and skills that they would need in their prospective employees. This huge Indian population can be developed into a world-class human resource via collaborations at the international level.

An efficient innovation system: Although it boasts more than one-sixth of the world's total population, India's share of the global gross expenditure on research and development is only 3 per cent. Its expenditure in this area is about five times lower than that of one of its major competitors, China. It spends about 1.9 per cent of its GDP in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (Economic Survey of India 2014–15). Except Russia, India lags behind all BRICS nations in its capacity for innovation. In terms of innovation in business services, it also lags behind the required criteria. Although India scores better than other BRICS nations in terms of the availability of engineers and scientists owing to its large population, research remains exclusive, limited to labs, reports, and the premises of research institutions (Economic Survey of India 2014–15). Millions are deprived of the boons of technology due to the widening gulf between lab and life. The application of technology and its productive use has remained absent from the list of priorities at the policy implementation level. Private players abstain from investment because of a weak patent regime, whereas the government machinery is devoid of both funds and motivation. The 2014 Global Innovation Index (Cornell University/INSEAD/WIPO, 2014)<sup>18</sup> ranked India at 76, whereas all other BRICS countries scored ahead of India with China at 29, Russia at 49, South Africa at 53, and Brazil at 61. While

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18 The Global Innovation Index is a collaborative effort of Cornell University, INSEAD Business School, and the World Intellectual Property Organisation to measure the innovation capacity of countries.

all other BRICS countries are climbing up the ladder of innovation capabilities, India has been going down every year for the last three years.

India can benefit a lot from technology transfer at the global level, and international firms can take advantage of the Indian market to sell their technology and their technologically sophisticated products. The Maruti-Suzuki collaboration in the automobile sector is one of the best success stories of such a partnership. Because India might not be able to buy very good technology or develop its own innovation setup, global players can do this for India in return for an open Indian market. This will benefit the average citizen in terms of reduced inflation, better options in the product market, increased productivity, and an overall enhancement in the quality of life.

**Information and communication technology:** According to the Census of India (2011), 68.84 per cent of India's population (i.e. 83.3 million people) live in villages (Census of India 2011). As a large number of Indian villages are poorly equipped with basic infrastructure like roads and electricity, getting integrated with the mainstream information and communication technology network remains a dream. India ranks at 89 in the Network Readiness Index, (World Economic Forum, 2014) prepared by the World Economic Forum to measure the capability of a country to use and benefit from information and communication technology. Despite being the second-largest country in the world in terms of the number of Internet users due to its huge population, only 19.10 per cent of people in India use the Internet, putting the country at 145<sup>th</sup> position for 2014–15 (Wikipedia 2015). Likewise, in terms of broadband Internet subscription and mobile cellular subscriptions, India is much behind China, ranking at 137 and 110, respectively for 2014–15 (Wikipedia 2015).

The Digital India programme, launched recently by the government, is an initiative to transform India into a knowledge economy by extending the broadband network across 250,000 villages, including universal phone connectivity and net zero imports, by 2020. This drive is expected to integrate the whole country digitally, and the complete transformation of the government machinery to an electronic setup would create about 17 million jobs directly and 85 million jobs indirectly, making India a digitally empowered nation. However, India needs better trainers, funds, and advanced technology, which can be provided by international players through channels that have equally promising opportunities for them as well.

## Conclusion

India's transition to a knowledge economy may not be smooth. Although it has tremendous resources and opportunities as per World Bank standards, India has

a lot more work to do in all dimensions of the knowledge economy. Countries from the West, especially from Europe, can collaborate with India to find viable solutions for their approaching demographic challenge. India, on the other hand, will have effective solutions for problems that now impede its evolution into a complete knowledge economy. Moreover, in the context of India, the narrow notion of using knowledge for production, consumption, and capital formation is strictly inadequate. There is a need to focus on delivering the fruits of the knowledge economy in an egalitarian and inclusive manner along with a balanced development. Waiting for wealth to 'trickle down' from islands of wealth to the country's emaciated masses may take longer than bearable. Reallocations made for the most productive alternatives may render some millions homeless and hopeless. Replacing knowledge as the primary factor in all economic activities may force thousands more to go to sleep hungry. Imposing concepts of capitalism that work smoothly in advanced societies might tear the country apart into fragmented markets for the huge economic giants to enjoy.

Thus, it must be kept in mind that the transition to a knowledge society should not be made faster and smoother at the cost of human lives. After all, it is their development about which we are concerned. Forcing society into a never-ending commodity-producing race may lead us nowhere. Instead of a pure value-free concept of knowledge guiding the process of endless production-consumption and capital formation, there is a need for a whole system supported by value-based knowledge that may not become inhumane with the passion of converting human beings from liabilities to assets and measuring them in terms of work units per hours, scorecards, and production/output instead emotions and human values. In a true sense, that would suffice to be a knowledge economy!

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Kapil Dev Regmi

# The status of adult literacy and lifelong learning in Nepal

## Abstract

The concepts of adult education, adult literacy, and lifelong learning—about which several books and journal articles are written—have been interpreted in several ways. Educational policy documents produced by supranational organisations such as the European Union and the World Bank use these terms, especially lifelong learning, to suit their own political and economic interests. Those terms are then used in policy documents produced at national levels because nation states are highly interconnected with those organisations. Nepal makes a special case because of its overreliance on external donors such as the World Bank for financing several developmental programmes, including educational ones. This paper explores how the terms *adult literacy* and *lifelong learning* are interpreted in Nepalese educational policy documents. By analysing Nepal's key educational policy documents, the paper examines how the term *adult education* is narrowly understood as literacy. In the second section, the paper examines how the notion of lifelong learning is vaguely used in Nepalese educational policy documents as an alternative term for adult literacy.

## Socioeconomic Status

Nepal is one of the least developed countries, situated between two advanced developing countries, India and China. Its economy largely depends on financial assistance from bilateral and multilateral agencies. With a per capita income of about US\$ 730 (2014) and more than half of its 27.8 million people living on less than US\$ 2 per day, Nepal faces several challenges. A decade-long armed conflict (1996–2006), protracted political instability, and a massive earthquake that hit central Nepal on 25 April 2015 have made Nepal a vulnerable country. More than 50 bilateral and multilateral donor agencies have been active in Nepal for the last four decades; however, its major problems such as poverty, illiteracy, economic vulnerability, conflict, and political instability have not been solved. About 43 per cent of Nepalese adults (age 15+) lack basic skills to read and write in the Nepali language (UNDP, 2014).

Nepal became a democratic nation in 1950 with a king as a ceremonial head. A quasi-democratic system, called *Panchayat*, was in practice from 1962 until democracy was restored in 1990. Nepal is divided into five development regions

to carry out administrative activities. These development regions are further divided into 14 administrative zones, and each zone is divided into four to eight local bodies called districts. There are 75 districts in Nepal. Districts are further divided into village development committees and municipalities. About 82 per cent of the population live in rural areas in Nepal (UNDP, 2014). The National Planning Commission is a central body to devise developmental plans every five years. The Ministry of Education and the Department of Education are central governing agencies for Nepal's educational development. However, as I elaborate below, a critical analysis of Nepal's educational history reveals that Nepal's educational development, including adult education, is mostly guided by exogenous forces: mainly the US during the 1950s and the World Bank after the 1980s (Rapple, 2009).

## Historical Trajectory of Adult Literacy

### Before the 1950s

In the past, Nepal's education was dominated by a Hindu education system known as *gurukul*: This is a religious educational practice based on Hindu educational philosophy. There was a strong emphasis on the relationship between *guru* (teacher) and *shishya* (student), where the teacher played the role of a father and the student that of the son. Major components of the *gurukul* educational system are ritual prayers, the development of priesthood, and readings of religious texts. Often students used to leave their homes and stay at a guru's residence, which are known as *ashrams*. The *gurukul* system is appreciated mainly in Hindu mythological texts such as Mahabharata; however, the flipside of this system, at least in the case of Nepal, is that to be educated in *gurukul* system, 'one had to be born into a caste where such an education was appropriate' (Bista, 1991, p. 117).

Starting from its unification period (during the 1760s) until 2008, Nepal was ruled by *Shah* kings. But from 1846 to 1951, an upper-caste Hindu family called Ranas controlled the country's entire governance structure, which is known as the Rana dynasty. In the Rana dynasty, the 'premiership was passed on by agnate succession' (Whelpton, 2005, p. 47), going in turn to each male member of the Rana family. During the Rana dynasty (1846–1951), *pathsalas*—the schooling system where Sanskrit was taken as the medium of instruction and Hindu scriptures were taught as course contents—were established in Nepal. The *pathsalas* manifest an advanced form of the Hindu *gurukul* education system, but they were attended only by male students from high-caste families after having certain level of linguistic skills in Sanskrit. Some students from upper-class families who graduated

from *pathsalas* used to go to Varanasi in India for higher education (Bista, 1991). Gradually, the *gurukul* education system, which focused on religious rituals, became less relevant for the majority of the people, especially for those who had to work hard for survival.

Jung Bahadur Rana (1817–1877), the first prime minister of the Rana dynasty, who visited France and Britain during the early 1850s, was highly influenced by the achievements of European nations, especially Britain (Whelpton, 2005). He set up an English school, Durbar High School, in the vicinity of his palace in 1853. Only members of the Rana family were allowed to study at Durbar High School. There was almost no provision for adult education during the Rana period. However, for providing higher education opportunities to the graduates of Durbar High School, Tri-Chandra College, the first higher education institution of Nepal, was founded in 1918. Tri-Chandra College followed the curricula developed by the University of Patna, an Indian university established by the British, who ruled India at that time. The curricula and courses adopted at Tri-Chandra College followed the British model of education and hence had almost no connections to the contextual realities of Nepal. Final examinations of the college and certification of its graduates were undertaken by Patna University. Some graduates of Tri-Chandra College were sent abroad not only to India but also to Japan and Europe for further education and training and enjoyed key government positions after their return (Rapple, 2009).

### **From the 1950s to the 1960s**

During the late 1940s, several basic schools were founded following Mahatma Gandhi's principles of making individuals 'self-sufficient' through a strong emphasis on 'rural vocational training' (National Education Planning Commission [NEPC], 1956, p. 26). Students of basic schools used to learn vocational skills such as spinning, weaving, woodworking, and agriculture as their basic skills. Other components of basic school curricula included history and civics, health and physical training, cultural and recreational programmes, and village improvement projects (NEPC, 1956). However, the education based on Gandhian principles did not continue, mainly because Nepal's new policy, recommended by the National Education Planning Commission (NEPC, 1956), did not prioritise indigenous and vocational skills such as spinning, weaving, and woodworking.

The report of the National Education Planning Commission (NEPC, 1956), Nepal's first educational policy, appears to have introduced the concept of 'adult education' for the first time in Nepal. The NEPC reflects a desire of Nepalese political leaders and their US advisor Dr Hug B. Wood to create a modern Nepal.

The NEPC introduced some new provisions for adult education, including an agricultural extension programme, a school-community library, and adult education programmes through cinema and radio. Teaching adults through pamphlets, bulletins, newspapers, and magazines were some of the techniques that aimed at including agriculture-related contents. The NEPC took adult education as a strategy to strengthen democracy, especially for the development and implementation of a new constitution that replaced the oligarchic Rana regime. However, adult education was understood as mere literacy, limited to teaching people how to read and write: 'democracy cannot flourish in a country where 98 per cent of the people are illiterate' (NEPC, 1956, p. 151).

The National Education Planning Commission (NEPC) believed that the lack of literacy was an impediment to instilling democratic values. It did not recognise the ability and potential of Nepalese adults' skills and experiences to make their living in hardships and abject poverty; rather, the commission characterised them as ignorant: 'All attempts to make a show of democracy will bear no fruit in our society unless the vast majority of adults, now steeped in total ignorance, are made to feel their duties and responsibilities in a democratic nation' (p. 152). Further, the NEPC report reveals that the commission members did not recognise the intrinsic value of adult education: an understanding that adults should be educated for the betterment of their society and the nation. Rather, the report took adult education as an instrument to complement primary school education: 'Only literate adults can fully know the value of education for their children ... as adults become literate they will want even more education for their children' (NEPC, 1956, p. 151).

New schools and colleges were set up but the focus was not on preparing students to fulfil the need of rural communities; rather, these institutions were established just to provide formal degrees. According to Bista (1991), during the 1950s, formal qualifications, and especially a graduation certificate, became the significant factor for acquiring jobs, hence promoting the tendency of 'certificate orientation at the cost of the quality of education' (p. 122). Once they had earned a certificate, students mainly from upper-class families expected that jobs would be available for them. Few graduates from upper-class families, by virtue of their social capital, got government jobs, but for the majority of the people, mainly from underprivileged class, white-collar jobs did not become the reality. In this sense, though the notion of a *knowledge economy* (Powell & Snellman, 2004) was transferred to Nepal, it did not match the contextual realities of the country.

This certificate-oriented type of education kept young generations far from continuing their traditional and familial occupations, such as agriculture. As observed by Coombs (1985), there was an educational crisis in the Nepalese



education system, mainly because Nepalese schools operated under imported models, especially from Britain and the US, models that did not support the contextual realities of Nepal. The education model based on human capital principles 'had helped create elite cadres to run government ministries and to work in the small urban/modern sector of the economy, but they were ill-suited to develop the vast human and other resources of the traditional rural sector' (Coombs, 1985, p. 7), where about 90 per cent of Nepalese people lived.

### From the 1960s to the 1990s

With regard to educational development during the *Panchayat* period (1962–1990), the Government of Nepal had appointed the All Round National Education Committee in 1961 to provide recommendations for the second five-year plan (1961–1956). The government also set up the National Education Advisory Board in 1968. However, those two policy initiatives are negligent in comparison to the New Education System Plan (NESP) that 'brought schools and education institutions under much tighter central control' and in line with the spirit of the *Panchayat* regime (Rappleye, 2011, p. 28).

As compared to the National Education Planning Commission (1956), which was influenced by Dr Wood and his Nepalese associates, the NESP was formed with the involvement and leadership of more Nepalese educationists. According to Bista, unlike the former policy, the NESP opened avenues to devise educational plans and programmes 'based on the perceived needs of the common people' (Bista, 1991, p. 125). The NESP took adult education as 'a vital factor in promoting all-round development of illiterate adults in the context of national development' (Belbase, 1981, p. 167). The NESP aimed at launching adult education programmes in two forms: (a) a literacy extension programme and (b) a functional adult education programme (UNESCO, 2006). The objectives of the functional literacy programme were 'to enable illiterate adults to master simple numerical skills along with reading and writing; to train adults in the vocation they are involved in and thereby increase their efficiency; to teach them about agricultural practises, cleanliness, sanitation, health care, and the political system' (Belbase, 1981, p. 188).

The NESP also contained a provision to send 'college students out to teach in rural communities' as a part of the National Development Service (Rappleye, 2009, p. 283). Spending a year in rural areas working with rural people—mainly participating in development activities including teaching in local schools—was a compulsory course requirement for obtaining a post-graduate degree from Tribhuvan University. However, along with the dwindling support for the *Panchayat* regime, the NESP collapsed by the end of 1979. 'What replaced the NESP was

not the product of policy or of any commission' (Bista, 1991, p. 127) at national level but merely some short-term educational projects. One of the projects that focused on adult education was the Education for Rural Development Project (1981–1985), also called Seti project. It was a part of the United Nation's initiative towards rural development: a key theme of the UN's Second Development Decade (1970–1980).

One of the major objectives of Seti project was to develop a system of basic education that would serve to promote rural development by reducing the existing gap between the school and the community. The project focused on making education more relevant to the future life of the student. Education was perceived as 'a positive force for the development of the area in which the school was located' (UNESCO-UNDP, 1985, p. 4). A major part of the project was the provision of functional literacy, creating awareness among adults about 'new ideas, skills, and knowledge that will enable them to take direct action to improve the quality of their lives' (ibid). The project aimed at producing trained adult educators by providing practical training in 'agriculture, irrigation, or primary health care' (UNESCO-UNDP, 1985, p. 6). But the project did not continue after 1985 because of funding problems.

### **After the 1990s**

The political transformation of 1990—from Panchayat to democracy—ended the centralised education system and 'facilitated a more multicultural and inclusive view of education' (Bhatta, 2011, p. 16). The Government formed the National Education Commission (NEC, 1992) to 'lay down the goals of national education and formulate policies to achieve them in a manner consistent with the human rights' (Bhatta, 2011, p. 16) and to enshrine those goals in the new constitution. The commission aimed to strengthen the nonformal education sector; hence the National Non-Formal Education Centre was established in 1999.

Some of the major non-formal and literacy programmes launched during the 2000s were the Adult Post-Literacy Programme, the Flexible Schooling Programme, the Women's Literacy Programme, the School Outreach Programme, the Income Generating Programme, and the Community Learning Centres. Those programmes were provided by national and international non-governmental organisations. Nepal did not have a national education policy to unite those programmes under a single national policy framework. Therefore, a '10-Year Literacy/ Non-formal Education Policy Framework' was prepared in 2006 under the leadership of the UNESCO Office in Kathmandu. It was prepared in consultation with major educational stakeholders such as the Non-Formal Education Centre, the

National Planning Commission, and other governmental and non-governmental organisations (UNESCO, 2006). The vision of the framework was to 'to create a fully literate learning society whose citizens possess the skills and competences that enable them to contribute continuously towards harmonious national development by raising the quality of life of every citizen' (p. 17). The 'Education for All' global programme (2000–2015) was a major motivational factor behind the creation of this framework. In a sense, this framework was a part of UNESCO's global Literacy Initiative for Empowerment programme within the framework of the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003–2012) (UNESCO, 2006).

The literacy/non-formal education policy framework (UNESCO, 2006) conceived of literacy in a rather wider sense: 'simply being able to read, write, and calculate may not always be sufficient for living in the more complex world of today' (UNESCO, 2006, p. 18). Some of the issues mentioned in the framework include: extending and expanding access to raise the literacy rate basically for meeting Education for All goals (i.e. to reduce illiteracy by 50 per cent by 2015); mainstreaming out-of-school children's education programmes; managing and monitoring literacy and non-formal education programmes; and forming linkages between non-formal education and grassroots-based development programmes.

The Non-Formal Education Centre is a major authority to make and implement policies related to adult education and learning in Nepal (CONFINTEA Nepal, 2008). The Centre formulated a Non-Formal Education Policy in 2007 (GON, 2007). There is a list of 16 policies featuring a number of strategies to implement those policies to guide 'government as well as non-government agencies involved in conducting nonformal education programs' in Nepal (p. 1). Some of the non-formal education policies (GON, 2007) include: providing non-formal educational opportunities to those who are deprived of formal education; recognising non-formal education as equivalent to formal education; decentralising the governance and management of non-formal education to local bodies; increasing the female literacy rate; synchronising non-formal education curricula with the curricula of formal education at all levels (from primary school to university); developing community learning centres; and strengthening partnerships among government, private sectors, and I/NGOs to strengthen non-formal education provisions.

## Lifelong learning

The non-formal education policy (GON 2007) also talks about implementing 'programmes related to lifelong and continuous education, skill development and income generation' (p. 1), but the policy is not explicit about the nature of *lifelong learning* and its relevance in the context of Nepal. Overall, the policy appears as a

vague and highly ambitious document having little significance to its implementation in Nepal. A number of bullet points mentioned as strategies are not clearly articulated and make almost no connection with existing problems, especially some of the institutional barriers to increasing adults' participation in learning. Rather, adult education is conceived in a narrow term, basically literacy: 'the ability to read and write with understanding and to perform simple arithmetic calculations' (CONFINTEA Nepal, 2008, p. 18).

According to the International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA) country report (2008), a common goal of adult education and learning for Nepal is

*to raise the level of adult literacy, particularly amongst women and people belonging to marginalized groups such as dalits and disadvantaged ethnic groups, through the provision of appropriate learning and life skills programmes for all young people and adults, thus contributing to achieving poverty reduction and equitable socioeconomic and human development. (CONFINTEA Nepal, 2008, p. 7)*

The institutional framework for non-formal education extends from national to local levels. There is a Non-Formal Education Council headed by the Minister of Education. The Non-Formal Education Centre is a national executive body working under the council. At the local level, there is a provision of having District-Level Non-formal Education Committees in each of the country's 75 districts and similar committees in each village development committees and municipalities (CONFINTEA Nepal, 2008).

Some major educational projects launched in Nepal after the 1990s include: the Basic and Primary Education Project (1992–2003), the Secondary Education Support Project (1992–2000), the Community School Support Project (2003–2008), and the Education for All Programme (2004–2009). These projects, launched with active involvement of international organisations such as the World Bank, focused mainly on primary and secondary education. The core document (GON, 2009) of the current educational programme, known as the School Sector Reform Programme (SSRP, 2009–2016), mentions lifelong learning a number of times. In Chapter 4 of the document (GON, 2009), the term *lifelong learning* appears in association with literacy: 'literacy enables them to engage in lifelong learning and helps develop capabilities to sustain their livelihoods and participate fully in society' (GON, 2009, p. lviii). The programme aims at linking lifelong learning with income generation as well as with occupational and vocational skills. It also aims at 'developing partnerships for collaboration with UN agencies and I/NGOs to implement lifelong learning programmes in selected districts' (GON, 2014, p. 21).

Even though the term *lifelong learning* is mentioned in some of the major policy documents (GON, 2009, 2014) it does not reflect how lifelong learning has been

conceived as a new educational policy at the international level, including the European Union (European Commission, 2000), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1996), and even UNESCO (Delors et al., 1996; Faure et al., 1972). Thus as far as the case of Nepal is concerned, there is no explicit provision for lifelong learning, and there are no policy documents to reflect a nuanced understanding on lifelong learning in the way it has been debated in international policy documents and some scholarly publications (Griffin, 2009; Rubenson, 2011). Rather, lifelong learning is conceived of vaguely as a strategy of ‘improving literacy’ (GON, 2014, p. 21).

Some international organisations, mainly the World Bank, have argued that one of the causes of Nepal’s educational problems is the centralised governance of education, controlled by the Ministry of Education (World Bank, 2001). The World Bank strongly recommended to the Government of Nepal that the Ministry of Education should provide more authority and power to local communities (World Bank, 2001). As a consequence, *educational decentralisation*—meaning ‘the devolution of power and budgetary control to Nepal’s 75 districts and the communities below them’ (Rappleye, 2009, p. 38)—has become a major policy shift after the late 1990s. Following the recommendations of the World Bank, the Government of Nepal implemented the Local Self-Government Act in 1999 (GON, 1999). The act gave local bodies more authority to plan and organise literacy and adult learning activities. However, the policy could not be fully implemented because of a lack of ‘functional linkage between village education plan, school improvement plan, and the plans of other adult education providers’ (CONFINTEA Nepal, 2008, p. 11).

## Conclusion

In this paper, I discussed that: (a) educational practices in Nepal before the 1950s were dominated by Hindu philosophical traditions and beliefs that benefited few male members of the upper-class families; (b) after the advent of democracy in 1950, Nepal’s education was guided by the US, which aimed at institutionalising Western democratic values but neglected indigenous knowledge and skills; (c) during the early 1960s to the early 1980s, Nepal’s education was geared towards strengthening the monarchy and perpetuating the status quo; and (d) after the 1980s, Nepal’s education has been mostly guided by the World Bank as a major international donor. This historical trajectory of Nepalese education shows that adult education has never been a major focus in Nepal’s educational development.

One of the major challenges of launching adult education programmes—or literacy programmes, as Nepalese educational policy documents would have it—is the lack of domestic funding. As noted above, for the last couple of decades

the Government of Nepal has relied almost entirely on external funding, mainly from the World Bank and other donor agencies such as the Asian Development Bank. Very often donors do not prioritise adult education, and sometimes their priority changes even if they initially start funding adult education programmes (CONFINTEA Nepal, 2008). For example, the Education for Rural Development Project (1981–1985) was one of Nepal's most successful adult education projects (UNESCO-UNDP, 1985). But it was completely replaced by a project funded by the World Bank: the Primary Education Project (1984–1992). As the focus of the project was primary education, the bank did not include adult education as a separate component of the project (World Bank, 1984). In recent educational policy documents, the term *lifelong learning* is used as an alternative to adult literacy. Lifelong learning appears as a new policy catchphrase borrowed from donors such as the World Bank, but my analysis shows that the use of the term does not reflect the broader scholarly discourse debated at the international level. Hence, it is vaguely interpreted as an alternative word for adult literacy.

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