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## **Financing youth and adult literacy learning in Zambia: Determinant for the 7<sup>th</sup> National Development Plan target on youth and adult literacy**

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### **Abstract**

Youth and adult literacy is a key determinant for the human development index on knowledge and education in Zambia. However, the widening literacy gaps remain a source of concern for the Zambian government and development agencies. This theoretical paper engages in a systematic analysis of the historical and current financing of youth and adult literacy learning in Zambia. The purpose is to conceptualise the funding practices and how they have affected literacy provision and determine Zambia's chance of meeting its youth and adult literacy targets of the 7<sup>th</sup> National Development Plan. This was a desk review that included analysing education financing reports, curriculum policy documents and scholarly literature. The analysed documents included Zambia's 6<sup>th</sup> National Development Plan, the 7<sup>th</sup> National Development Plans, Curriculum Review Framework for 2013, Ministry of Finance budget estimates on education and Ministry of Education reports of 2010 to 2020. The review established that the financing of youth and adult literacy learning in Zambia has been a historical challenge. Past efforts to improve funding have been met with a lack of commitment by stakeholders. The budgetary allocation to this sub-sector has been consistently the lowest in the Zambian education sector especially the period 2015 to 2020. The result has been challenges including the lack of trained facilitators, inadequate literacy learning facilities and teaching material. The literacy efforts have been characterised by failure to achieve their objectives. Youth and adult literacy continue to be a financially neglected sub-subsector of the education system in Zambia, despite its important place in the country's human development index on knowledge. Thus, if Zambia continues on this funding trajectory, it risks missing the 7<sup>th</sup> National Development Plan targets of expanding youth and adult literacy, and skills for industrialisation. The paper recommends that the Zambian government consider a paradigm shift in financing strategies to include: a coordinated financing approach, the utilisation of an integrated literacy constituency development fund, creation of the youth and adult literacy fund incorporated with a literacy tax, and remodelling literacy programmes.

**Keywords:** Adult literacy • Education • Financing • Industrialisation • National Development Plan • Youth.

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## **Introduction**

The 1975 declaration that literacy is not an end in itself, but a fundamental human right and a foundation for lifelong learning is a clear demonstration that literacy is crucial to human life. In Zambia, youth and adult literacy (YAL) learning is crucial for achieving the education targets of skills development for industrialisation as planned in Zambia's 7<sup>th</sup> National Development Plan (7<sup>th</sup> NDP). This education agenda is significant particularly to the youth and adults who are out of school and ravaged by the challenge of unemployment. It is also an important focus towards the attainment of the 2030 vision on education whose objective is to develop individuals who are knowledgeable, with valuable progressive attitudes, values and skills through diversified education curricula that are responsive to the practical skills needs of the society at large (Ministry of National Development and Planning, 2017). The other motivation of this paper was that Zambia's population is largely composed of the youth, the majority being below the age of 35 years (Central Statistical Office & Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2019). Much of this population lack the necessary skills to drive Zambia towards the attainment of the 7<sup>th</sup> NDP on industrialisation and the 2030 vision of becoming a prosperous middle-income country. Considering the prevailing skills gap among the majority of the population, the paper argues that if Zambia continues on this trajectory of neglecting investment in youth and adult literacy education, there is a likelihood that the targets of the 7<sup>th</sup> NDP and that of the 2030 Vision are at risk of being missed.

Zambia's development agenda is guided by the 7<sup>th</sup> NDP (2017-2021) and Vision 2030 of becoming a prosperous middle-income country. Achieving the socioeconomic targets of both the 7<sup>th</sup> NDP and the 2030 vision calls for considerable investment in all forms of education at all levels. Central to this is the improvement of the literacies among all categories of the population. More importantly, the youth and adults who are the key players in driving the nation towards the attainment of the desired national development. This paper attempts to engage in a systematic analysis of financing YAL programmes. The reality is that YAL is a key indicator used to measure human development on knowledge and education in Zambia (Ministry of National Development and Planning, 2017), and yet the sector remains the least and irregularly funded of the education subsector (Ministry of Finance and National Planning, 2019). This analysis is framed within the context of Zambia's 7<sup>th</sup> NDP on education because it is an important tool on the road towards the attainment of the 2030 vision of a prosperous middle-income country.

The paper adopts Zambia's legal definition of a youth and an adult for the reason that while the subject at hand may attract international interest, it is more suited and relevant to Zambia. *Youth* is any person aged between 15 and 35 years old (Ministry of Youth and Sport, 2015). While an *adult* is any person aged 18 years and above (Central Statistical Office, 2015). The adult population projects a role model figure of wisdom, inspirational leadership, and an epitome of national identity that defines the character of the nation of Zambia. This symbiotic relationship is much acknowledged and eminent in the fabric of the Zambian society. These population categories are considered important to the extent that the Zambian government has given due priority for development and empowerment, demonstrating the significance of youth participation and involvement in National Development (Ministry of Youth and Sport, 2015). This position rests on the realisation that Zambia's renaissance cannot be realized if adequate investment in literacy for the youth is not made as the youth constitutes the majority of the country's population.

For *literacy*, there are two dominant views in the literature and in practice: (i) a discrete set of technical skills of reading and writing (Street, 2014), also called the autonomous model of literacy (Street, 2006); and (ii) the everyday social practices of how people use reading and writing in situated contexts, also referred to as the ideological model of literacy (Rogers &

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Street, 2012). In the context of UNESCO (2003a) literacy is about how we communicate in society through social practices and relationships, about language and culture. The use of written communication also finds its place in our lives alongside other ways of communicating. This speaks to the different forms of literacy including print and digital literacies (UNESCO, 2013b). Consolidating these views, literacy is more than mere reading and writing. It is about how people communicate with others in society. It is a tool for communication through reading, writing and speech and can take multiple forms of everyday uses. In practice, Zambia regards literacy in a very narrow sense of skills of reading and writing (Ministry of Education, 2015; Sichula, 2018).

### **Zambia's 7<sup>th</sup> National Development Plan**

The 7<sup>th</sup> NDP on education aims at improving education and skills development as a panacea to industrialisation. Five strategies have been identified as key to the attainment of this objective including enhancing (1) access to quality, equitable and inclusive education, (2) access to skills training, (3) private sector participation, (4) continuous review of curriculum, and the (5) the role of science, technology and innovation (Ministry of National Development and Planning, 2017). Additionally, the 2030 vision on education and Skills Development envisions innovative and productive lifelong education and training for all by 2030 (Ministry of Finance and National Planning, 2011; Mwanawasa, 2006). The enhancement strategy will involve putting in place comprehensive and diversified curricula that are responsive to the social and economic needs of the individual and the community by 2030 (Mwanawasa, 2006).

While all this sounds good, it is important to remember that as a country we have been at this stage in the education sector before. Not long ago, Zambia was among countries that did not meet its 2015 literacy targets of 80 per cent, and the Education for All goals including the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2017; United Nations General Assembly, 2015). This experience can be avoided if the right decisions are made, accompanied by the appropriate actions devoid of compromise. This is not going to be easy considering the socioeconomic effects of the Novel Corona Virus (Covid- 19) pandemic which resonates fears of reduced economic growth in Zambia's economy by 2.5% in 2020 (Bank of Zambia, 2020). Nonetheless, Zambia remains on a path to the attainment of the 2030 vision on education of eliminating school illiteracy, and increasing skills training output by 2 per cent per annum, and increasing equity of access while maintaining internationally recognised and locally validated standards of quality education (Ministry of National Development and Planning, 2017).

### **Methodological approach**

This review was underpinned and framed within the documentarist theoretical perspective (Nkhata et al., 2019) as it facilitated an in-depth content analysis of documents and generated a rich understanding of the financing of YAL in Zambia. It took a desk review of education financing reports, curriculum policy documents and related scholarly literature. Online-based literature was searched including databases: EbscoHost, ERIC, and Google Scholar through the University of Zambia Library website. Additionally, Zambia's government Ministries of Finance, Education, Community Development and Social Welfare websites; and government institutions specifically the Bank of Zambia, and National Assembly websites. Among the key documents reviewed included Zambia's 6<sup>th</sup> NDP, the 7<sup>th</sup> NDP, and Curriculum Review Framework for 2013, Ministry of Finance budget estimates on education and Ministry of Education reports of 2010 to 2020. Through content analysis, the documents were examined and analysed on what they say about financing YAL. Key themes that emerged from the data analysis include the importance of YAL, the past and present efforts in financing YAL, the

21<sup>st</sup>-century financing reality of YAL, the Zambian case of YAL, the rationale for investing in YAL and the financing options that could work for Zambia.

### **Importance of youth and adult literacy**

Literacy has always been central to human existence especially in today's global environment characterised by rapid changes in which multiple forms of literacy have become more eminent and relevant than before (Blunch, 2017; Rogers & Street, 2012). Literacy among others holds an important space in facilitating people's access to and engaging with sustainable development issues at different levels of human development. It improves people and enables individuals and communities to interact over time and space (Benavot, 2015; Rogers, 1999). Literacy is linked to the general well-being of the people (Aitchison, 2005), improved health and livelihoods especially among the poor and low-income communities (Robinson-Pant, 2016). Literacy skills facilitate a firm foundation for the development of other advanced skills which are required for the growth of the socioeconomic infrastructure through manufacturing. All these are key to the development of humanity (Blunch, 2017).

The improvement of one's literacy skills has the potential to increase the socio-economic benefits that translate into an improved life for individuals and their families (UNESCO, 2017; World Bank, 2001). The Government of the Republic of Zambia acknowledges this connection between 'illiteracy' and underdevelopment. Evidence from the national education assessment report of 2015 reveals that regions of the country that were found to be high in illiteracy [absence of schooling and unable to read and write] were correspondingly low in income and participation in education (Ministry of Education, 2015). Literacy is at the core of Zambia's development to equip and enhance people's capacity for life and further learning. When the parents are literate they are likely to send their children to school, thereby creating a literate society that can meet the pressing development challenges that surround them. The historical persistent literacy gaps and effects on the population gives impetus for the government and other stakeholders to provide literacy learning programmes.

### **Past and present efforts in financing YAL**

The initial efforts towards YAL in Zambia is traced back to a time when Zambia was known as Northern Rhodesia. Beside the missionary involvement in literacy work in the early 1800s, other distinguishable efforts include the work on Hope Hay. In 1945 Hope Hay an American Philanthropist began to organise literacy learning programmes among the miners in Mindolo Township of Kitwe. The literacy programmes scored some success. In nine months 752 people had participated in the programme and by 1946, a total of 10,837 participants improved their reading and writing (Mutava, 1988). After independence, the government of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) launched many adult literacy programmes including the 1965 Basic Literacy Programme (BLP), the 1975 Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) programme and the 1990 National Literacy campaign. Not much was achieved from these efforts. As a result, YAL programmes remained as functional skills-oriented programmes.

To date, the programmes do not seem to produce the desired results in many communities where they are provided and follow-ups are almost non-existent. Historically, the plea for both global and national commitment towards YAL has been around us since the 1960s. Several international congregations, assemblies, conferences, seminars, workshops and meetings have been held since the 1960s to discuss and deliberate the number of issues not limited to policy, programmes and financing (UNESCO, 1976, 2017). The bearing of these efforts on the financing of youth and adult literacy learning in Zambia abound as seen through mobilising commitments, global resistance, and a new integrated literacy approach. These are described briefly in the following section.

(i) *Mobilising commitments towards the support for literacy*

The international gatherings continued to reflect and reemphasise the need for concerted efforts and renewed commitments by all stakeholders to support youth and adult literacy learning. For example, around 1965 there was a budding global consensus on the notion of illiteracy that it was a problem and a hindrance to human progress (UNESCO, 2003a). If economic development was to be attained by many developing countries illiteracy needed to be eliminated. Subsequently, a World Congress of Ministers of Education on the eradication of illiteracy gathered in Teheran in 1965 to discuss and share ideas on how to tackle the problem of illiteracy (UNESCO, 1976). It was around this time that the notion of eradicating illiteracy was beginning to be prominent.

The congress deliberated on how national literacy plans for the eradication of illiteracy can more effectively contribute to economic development (UNESCO, 1976). It was emphasised that literacy is a fundamental aspect for acquiring skills for work and production and ultimately for economic growth (Aitchinson & Alidou, 2009; UNESCO, 2003a). Therefore, the congress of ministers resolved that literacy learning is not an end in itself but a way of preparing people for social, civic and economic roles that go far beyond the limits of simply teaching reading and writing (UNESCO, 1976, 2003a). This was a realisation that the process of learning to read and write is an opportunity for acquiring information that can be used immediately to improve the living standards by training for work. Thereby, increasing productivity, participation in civic activities and developing a better understanding of the surrounding environment and broader sociocultural context. The conference concluded that adult education and literacy learning should not be confined to rudimentary teaching of reading, writing and numeracy only, but should include general subjects and vocational education for preparation for employment (UNESCO, 1976). It is unclear how countries including Zambia implemented this resolution. However, the eradication of illiteracy has remained elusive up to today. Hence, a renewed focus on progressive aspects of embracing social and multiple literacies than the ambiguity of illiteracy.

(ii) *Global resistance to financing literacy programmes*

As early as the 1960s, youth and adult literacy programmes received only a small percentage of the national education budget in many developing countries (Mutava, 1988); a phenomenon that has been perpetuated even today. This entails a relatively minor commitment of resources by international funding agencies (UNESCO, 1976). Suggesting that if illiteracy was to be overcome there was a need to devote considerable resources by both national governments and the international agencies to adult education through non-formal education and literacy learning. Furthermore, this implies that the motivation and discussions on the eradication of illiteracy among stakeholders were not seen to be purely genuine. UNESCO (1976) observes that the desire to make people literate was not necessarily based on the honest desire to eradicate illiteracy but to be seen doing something. For example, it was realised that the escalation of public concern through public speeches condemning illiteracy was merely a superficial act. This was evidence of a profound fortitude to maintain the illiteracy status quo as opposed to changing it.

In some countries, resistance by home governments to fund literacy programmes was quite phenomenal. Excuses of lack of funds were given but the truth is that this was a scapegoat that aimed at safeguarding the existence of certain interest groups that use illiteracy as a means for survival. UNESCO (1976) records that some groups were more concerned about their survival and saw literacy action as a means for overcoming dysfunctions in societies to their advantage. Even in today's world, it is a known fact that literacy action means two things:

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liberating or oppressing the people to maintain power as a means for sustaining the existence of the powerful in society. This is not new; it is known that literacy is ingrained with power and those who have literacy have used it to oppress others by taking advantage of systems and processes to the benefit of few individuals in society (Freire, 2014; Weninger, 2016).

(iii) *A new integrated approach to literacy*

The resolutions of the Congress of Ministers of Education reflected a universal stance to fully integrate literacy into economic development programmes. This move was supported by the evidence from the Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP) which was established and launched in 11 countries including Algeria, Ecuador, Ethiopia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Republic of Tanzania, Guinea, Iran, India, Madagascar, Mali and Sudan (UNESCO, 1976). The EWLP focused on testing and demonstrating the economic and social returns of literacy and more generally to study the mutual relations and influences which exist or may be established or strengthened between literacy training, particularly among the working population and development (UNESCO, 1976). Similarly, since this programme was initiated at a global level there was no financial input that came from home governments, instead, UNESCO and UNDP financed the programme. Zambia benefited from this programme through the implementation of a work-oriented functional literacy project in 1971 with the international assistance financed from Education Funds-in-Trusts (Mutava, 1988).

A build-up on literacy, discussions were held at the international symposium on literacy in 1975 in Persepolis. It was declared that literacy is not just about teaching and learning the skills of reading, writing and numeracy, but a process of liberation and full development of individuals and their communities (UNESCO, 2003a). The symposium reflected on the lessons learned from the EWLP and the emerging views on the notion and approaches to literacy. It was maintained that literacy is a human right that should be linked to economic development and should be reflected in all spheres of the social, political and economic dimensions. This symposium reoriented the international discourse on literacy that saw the year 1990 being declared as the International Year of Literacy (IYL). The aim was to stimulate advocacy and mobilise partners towards a fully literate society. Synergies with UN agencies, NGOs and national governments were developed. In the same year, the World Conference on Education For All (WCEFA) was held in Jomtien (UNESCO, 2006).

Although this conference focused on basic education, non-formal education for youth and adults was crucial. Literacy and numeracy were regarded as essential tools for providing education opportunities to meet every person's learning needs. Furthermore, in 1997 a Fifth International Conference on Adult Education was held in Hamburg Germany. At this conference, Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were fully incorporated in adult literacy learning programmes as key players in the sector (UNESCO, 2003b). This involvement resulted in the broad redefinition of literacy to include basic knowledge and skills needed by every person in a dynamic global environment. It was further emphasised that literacy should be seen as a fundamental human right that is necessary for laying a foundation for other life skills (UNESCO, 2013a). This view overlooked the fact that in real-life contexts people acquire several other life skills without or even before acquiring the basic literacy skills of reading and writing. However, during this conference literacy was contextualised to adult education, learning society and lifelong learning. The linking of literacy to the social, economic, cultural, environment and knowledge production for use in the global knowledge society was emphasised. This was followed by the World Education Forum (WEF) that was held in 2000 in Dakar Senegal. Realising that the Jomtien target was not met, its vision for basic education was expanded and adult literacy levels were projected to increase by 50 per cent by 2015 (UNESCO, 2003a). Unfortunately, just like other previous literacy targets, this target was equally missed (UNESCO, 2017), partly due to inadequate investment in literacy programmes.

## **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century financing reality of YAL programmes**

The reality is that the financing and implementation of literacy programmes arising from these international gatherings, in particular, the Education For All (UNESCO, 2006) remains a challenge. Sometimes resources are mobilised in the name of YAL learning programmes but they are misdirected because the priority is given to schooling for early childhood literacy programmes, while youth and adult literacy remain either underfunded or unfunded at all. Thus, the commitment to literacy has been characterised by rhetoric. UNESCO (2017) observes that the concern for improving literacy has not been accompanied by a substantial increase in funding and literacy targets have always been missed. Currently, there are no indications that countries, especially in the sub-Saharan region are making considerable efforts to allocate adequate resources consistently to youth and adult literacy programmes.

This is exacerbated by the apparent opposing opinions on the financing of youth and adult literacy learning programmes. Specifically, one school of thought argues against financing literacy programmes for the youth and adults premised on the idea that financing literacies for this age group are a mere consumption and worst of resources (Blunch, 2017; UNESCO, 2017). Instead, support should be an investment in the country's mainstream education system and not out-of-school education programmes. The contrary opinion is that financing literacy learning of any age group is an investment (Carr-Hill Roy, Fiona Roberts, & Currie Elizabeth, 2010). However, even within this school of thought that believes in financing literacy learning, there is a group that is only in favour of financing youth literacy learning and not adult literacy learning.

The reasoning behind is that the increase in literacy skills is more likely to be seen among the youth than the adults (Unesco Institute for Statistics, 2013). They assert that most improvements in literacy skills occur in formal education during young age and not in adulthood (UNESCO, 2017). This is contrary to the evidence that learning is a lifelong process (Benavot, 2015; Zukas & Janice, 2000) and that skills can be taught and acquired at any stage in life as long as the learner has the interest (Black & Yasukawa, 2014; Knowles, 1973; Zukas & Janice, 2000). There is also an opinion that although participation in adult literacy programmes makes noticeable contributions to the improvement of adult literacy rates, literacy programmes rarely reach the illiterate population of all adults in many countries and have had narrow effects on the literacy national figures (UNESCO, 2017). This cannot be taken to be wholly true because other factors explain the failure of literacy programmes in many countries including lack of financing, poor management and implementation.

## **The Zambian Case of YAL**

In Zambia, much of youth and adult literacy learning programmes are provided in the context of lifelong learning as both formal and non-formal education programmes. Equally a pluralistic perspective of literacy has been slowly settling in in the adult literacy environment. A steady shift from a long history of a monolithic view. Putting this into perspective, the Zambian government remains the major provider of youth and adult literacy programmes through the Ministry of General Education (MOGE) under the Directorate of Open and Distance Education (DODE) and the Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare (MCDSW) through non-formal education (Ministry of Education, 2008). The efforts are supplemented by other stakeholders including Civil Society and Non-governmental organisations. The Ministry of General Education focuses on skills development including entrepreneurship. The MCDSW provides non-formal youth and adult literacy learning programmes framed within functional literacy programmes. The provision is further separated based on urban and rural areas. In the urban setting, the provision focuses on schooling and skills for vocational purposes, trading and entrepreneurship, while in the rural areas agricultural-based literacy takes centre stage

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because agriculture is the main economic stay of the rural population (Ministry of Community Development Mother and Child Health, 2014). However, the provision of youth and adult literacy programmes was said to have been characterised by fragmentations and lack of coordination among the providers.

In 2013 the government developed a standard curriculum for adult literacy meant to be followed by all literacy providers in the country. Emphasis was on formal learning progression of the youth and adult learners in the school system from lower levels to higher levels of the education ladder. The recommended literacies included literacy skills [reading, and writing] either in English or any local language or both, including numeracy and entrepreneurial skills (Ministry of Education Science Vocational Training and Early Education, 2012). This focus ignored the needs of the youth and the adults who may not have the interest to go back to school but would wish to learn skills for everyday survival. However, the reality of this curriculum remains farfetched. There is currently no comprehensive data on how this curriculum has been implemented and the results thereof. In practice, literacy is still narrowly conceived and taught as skills of reading and writing. Literacy classes organised often in the evening at the convenience of the learners when daily economic activities have been completed.

Unlike, the formal setting where teachers on the government payroll take up the teaching of literacy and remunerated for additional teaching responsibility; the literacy instructors or facilitators in non-formal literacy classes are often volunteers who are irregularly remunerated. This points to the financing challenge of the literacy programmes in the country. The results of this have been that youth and adult literacy learning programmes have been hampered with a challenge of untrained literacy instructors. Although the University of Zambia trains adult educators at different levels from undergraduate to doctoral level, the rate of employing these graduates to manage and teach in the adult literacy classes both under the ministry of general education and community development has been slow. Meanwhile, the national education annual reports has continued to report on the lack of trained facilitators for youth and adult literacy programmes. The problem of untrained literacy personnel has potentially resulted in failing to sustain YAL programmes since independence.

The Zambian experience of financing YAL begins with a policy change. Although attempts at policy formulation and improving the funding have been made in the past, the full realisation of these efforts remain elusive and are still a source of concern even today. There is still no independent policy to guide the provision of youth and adult literacy learning in the country (Ministry of Education, 2015). The policy has remained in draft form since 2008. Instead different policies including General Education, Community Development, Youth and Sport, as well as Agriculture have continued to inform the provision of youth and adult literacy programmes in their respective ministries. This has resulted in a situation where there has been a challenge of coordination among these literacy providers. Each ministry provides small scale to medium literacy learning programmes in their contexts and focus. This approach may not be the best practice in addressing the real literacy needs of youth and adults especially in the global context of evolving literacies.

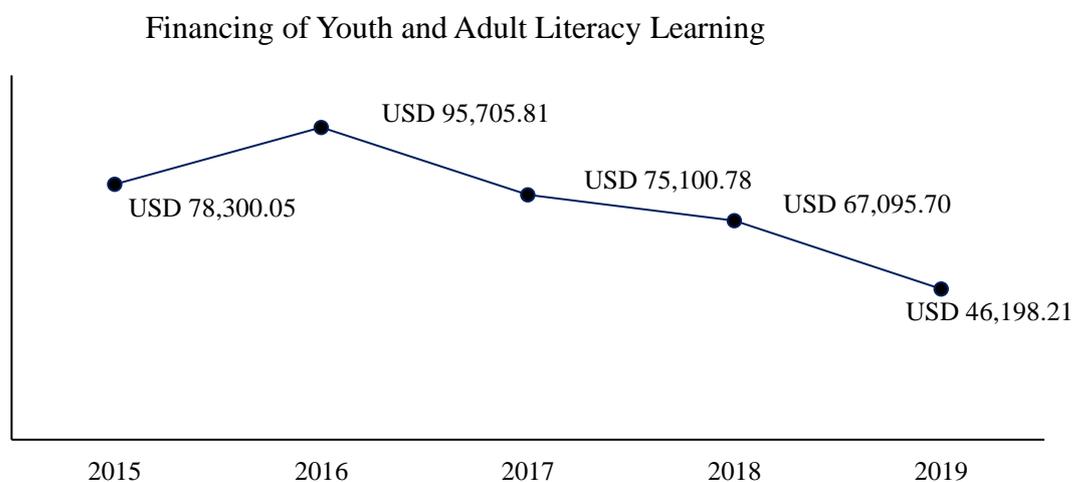
Literacy programmes are funded as part of the entire budgetary allocation for each of the two ministries and often receive a meagre allocation of resources. This has negatively affected research on adult literacy in the nation, the training of literacy instructors and the production of teaching and learning materials to be specific. This scenario has been historical and does not seem to improve. As early as the 1970s youth and adult literacy learning in Zambia were confronted with the challenge of inadequate funding (Mwansa & Mulenga, 1985). During the same period, Zambia experienced an economic recession that resulted in failing to finance the budgetary allocation for among others education. Subsequently, youth and adult literacy was the immediate sector to be hit by the failing economy. The sector suffered a reduction in funding and the incentives provided to the participants were removed. The budgetary allocation

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was meagre and considerably reduced each year and over time. The amount reduced from ZMK642, 000 in 1970 to ZMK 126,000 in 1989. By 1974 the allocation reduced from ZMK250, 000 to ZMK35, 000 in 1985 (Mulenga, 2000). This trend continued until around 1990 when UNESCO declared 1990 as the International Year of Literacy. The proclamation resulted in Zambia coming up with other programmes and activities towards the provision and financing of youth and adult literacy.

Through the Ministry of Community Development with help from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the adult literacy survey was conducted in 1990, which was followed by a national literacy campaign in the same year (Mulenga, 2000). But the funding was short leaved, the situation returned to erratic funding. This meant that literacy activities had to be reduced in scope, thereby causing many participants to withdraw particularly because the finances could not meet the needed resources and to pay the facilitators and instructors who were engaged. Two years later the government established the Zambia National Alliance for the Advancement of Literacy (ZAALIT). This initiative was aimed at supplementing the efforts of the 1990 literacy campaign. ZAALIT was given a target of reducing adult illiteracy at the annual rate of 12 per cent (Mwansa & Mulenga, 1985). However, all these efforts were compounded with the lack of adequate finances. For example, ZAALIT was only funded with ZMK130 million for the project that was going to run from 1992 to 2000 covering the entire country of Zambia (Mulenga, 2000). Since then, the youth and adult literacy education subsector remains the least funded subsector of education as evidenced by the recent data shown in graph 1 below.

**Graph 1: The financing trend of YAL programmes from 2015-2019**



Source: Ministry of Finance, budgets estimates and expenditure 2015 -2019

From this graph, the 2019 budgetary allocation for youth and adult literacy in Zambia is low for an average literacy programme. A review of the cost of most youth and adult literacy learning programmes in developing countries reveals a range from as low as US\$12 to US\$70 per participant (Blunch, 2017). This is equally insignificant because the international benchmark of the annual cost of youth and adult literacy programmes is estimated between US\$ 50 and US\$100 per participant (Archer, 2008). This also suggests that if Zambia is to effectively provide quality youth and adult literacy programmes currently, the minimum budget should not be lower than US\$50 per participant. Furthermore, it is suggested that governments

<sup>1</sup> Computed at exchange rate: USD1 = 17.91 Zambian Kwacha

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in developing countries should dedicate a minimum of 3% of the budgetary allocation to education for youth and adult literacy if these programmes have to achieve the goals for which they are designed (Archer, 2014).

### **The rationale for investing in YAL**

The need for adequate financing of youth and adult literacy learning cannot be overemphasised in the context of Zambia's 7<sup>th</sup> National Development and the 2030 Vision. Moreover, since time immemorial literacy has been an important aspect of communication and socialisation among the people. In terms of education, it has been regarded as an important tool for learning and increasing the power to people as it gives a voice to the voiceless in society (UNESCO, 2003b). This importance earned it a position on the international development agenda since the 1940s and continues to be reflected in many of Zambia's national development policies and programmes. For Zambia to attain industrialisation and middle-income status, investing in youth and adult literacy is not an option, but a must to facilitate a foundation for learning other skills (Hanemann, 2015). Its benefits are connected to the social, economic and political lives of the people. Literacy is linked to health and poverty. It improves the health and livelihoods of the people (Robinson-Pant, 2016). Literacy increases the sense of empowerment for personal decisions and engagement in civic activities (Benavot, 2008). At the household level, this means that access to education whether schooling or non-formal adult learning programmes can be improved when the parents and guardians are literate. They are more likely to encourage their children to improve their literacies by sending them to school and other literacy learning opportunities.

It is also clear that while the economic returns for formal schooling are well known, that of adult literacy learning are less studied. This could partly explain the negation of financing adult learning programmes. However, the minimal data that is available from the literature indicate that the returns on investment in YAL compare considerably with those at the level of primary education. Zambia's 7<sup>th</sup> National Development Plan agrees to the importance of literacy through the vision for a literate world for all (Ministry of National Development and Planning, 2017; UNESCO, 2017). To enhance this vision it has been realised that the acquisition and improvement of literacy skills and practices for any community or person throughout life is a fundamental human right. That literacy is an essential tool for attaining a middle-income status and sustainable society, and failure to invest in it would imply nonattainment of both a middle-income status and a sustainable developed Zambia. It may also have a bearing on Zambia's space in the non-negotiable reality of the Fourth Industrial Revolution which is characterised by challenging what it means to be human. It consists of a range of new technologies fusing the physical, digital and biological worlds and has impacted all disciplines including human life (Bloem, Van Doorn, Duivestein, Excoffier, Maas, & Van Ommeren, 2014).

### **Financing options that could work for Zambia**

There are several financing mechanisms for literacy but a dearth of funds to achieve Zambia's literacy goals. There is also excessive oratory about Zambia's commitment to improving YAL but reality contradicts this rhetoric. The financing of YAL at the national level is the responsibility of the national government. Resources can be mobilised through donor agencies and other cooperating partners but national governments should not rely on the international community to finance their literacy programmes. Different countries have used different approaches for YAL. Thus, an approach that can work for Zambia can only be determined through localised initiatives and innovations. Tackling YAL would need more than rhetoric that belies reality. The current efforts are inadequate to meet the literacy needs of the youth and

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adults later on the national demands for literacies. The following financing options are worth considering: a need for a coordinated financing approach, a literacy integrated constituency development fund, the introduction of a youth and adult literacy fund, and the remodelling of the literacy programme.

(i) *Coordinated financing approach*

This approach involves a collaborative effort, unity of purpose and mutual determination of literacy funding goals. A coordinated body would help to avoid duplication of literacy work and activities, and avoid the splitting of the resources. The literacy agencies and organizations should supplement and complement one another to strengthen skill acquisition and the active utilization of their services and resources. This should be extended to collaboration between formal and non-formal education systems (Hasaba, 2013). When this is executed wisely and no mistakes are made on both planning and funding priorities, much is likely to be accomplished. Thus, a coordinating council for YAL is proposed to spearhead and harmonise YAL while collaborating with government Ministries. A coordinated approach to financing literacy is largely embedded in the self-help ideology of collaborating with the communities and other stakeholders [NGOs, and the private sector] to mobilise funds for literacy. This requires a genuine and honest approach to fundraising for YAL. It should be mentioned that the approach addresses literacy participants and organisers to be wholly incorporated in resource mobilisations through the available means. It is acknowledged that the socioeconomic advantages and privileges of communities differ, hence, different home-made strategies for resource mobilisation suited for respective communities may have to apply.

This financing approach would require a genuine commitment on the part of the central government in which the budgetary allocations for literary should be increased and never omitted. Both early childhood literacy education and YAL in Zambia are facing funding challenges (Chileshe, Mkandawire & Tambulukani, 2018; Masaiti, 2018). But in reality, there is more attention given to early childhood literacy education compared with YAL. Thus, focusing on early childhood literacy education, while ignoring YAL programmes will not help much to address the country's immediate literacy needs, but will simply widen the literacy gaps. Thus, a coordinated approach provides a comprehensive investment that contributes to the creation of a literate environment which is crucial for sustaining literacy skills.

(ii) *Literacy integrated constituency development fund*

Constituency Development Fund refers to monies allocated [in the case of Zambia] by the National Assembly of Zambia for funding community-based projects for the development of the constituencies (Constituency Development Fund Act No.11 of 2018). Therefore, owing to the importance of literacy at all levels of human development, incorporating the financing of YAL through the constituency development fund (CDF) is invertible. There is not much that can be achieved to sustain community development by spending CDF on infrastructural development and funding selected projects purported to benefit the constituency without investing in the literacies of the people. Research evidence (Benavot, 2008; Blake & Blake, 2002; Blunch, 2017; UNESCO, 2015) points to the fact that communities with high levels of literacy tend to value and appreciate the community development in their communities and practice sustainable livelihoods than those with low levels of literacies. Thus, considering to allocate a considerable amount of resources towards YAL including entrepreneurship skills would be a valuable investment in youth empowerment at the constituency level. In this regard literacy providers and organisers including learners and instructors, can develop a common voice and lobby their civic leaders for services to raise funds for literacy including developing proposals for funding literacy programmes at constituency level.

*(iii) Youth and Adult literacy fund*

Literacy cuts across all aspects of human life; social, religious, economic and political. In terms of programmes, it involves several players from government, NGO's to international development agencies. Therefore, a pool of fund should be established where all resources should be deposited for YAL. Besides, instead of Zambia being known as a television watching nation through TV taxation, it is possible to change this image to that of a literate nation by supporting literacy activities through the introduction of a literacy Tax. This will supplement other resource mobilisation ventures. The YAL fund should be totally and specifically devoted to literacy learning needs of the country whose target group should be the youth and adults who are out of school with limited literacy skills to engage in meaningful socio-economic activities. The assumption here is that the other groups of the population who are in the formal education system should have their literacy needs to be met through the formal system. Undoubtedly, this fund has the potential to bridge the skills gap among this category of the population.

*(iv) Remodelling literacy programmes*

The financing of YAL would require a reorganisation of the government non-formal literacy programme from the current basic and functional literacy skills programmes to Vocational Education and Training. This is crucial for developing and equipping youths and adults with in-demand skills for self-employment and the job market. Zambia faces a challenge of the majority of its population being young (Central Statistical Office & Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2019) and lack the necessary skills, knowledge and sometimes opportunities to engage in quality national socioeconomic activities (World Bank, 2013; Zambia National Education Coalition, 2012). This situation points to the existing inadequacies in the education sector including functional literacy programmes' failure to build capacity among the youth and adults to enable them to improve their access to good quality engagement in national development (Kasonde & Changala, 2019; Sichula, 2018). The immediate intervention requires a remodelled literacy tailor-made programme that is shaped by both in-demand literacy skills and the real-life literacy needs of individuals and communities.

The connection of literacy to real-life, work and industry has the potential to attract funding for literacy programmes. There is a truism that people who spend even small amounts for a service such as learning tend to value and appreciate those services highly compared to those who anonymously receive them at apparently no cost. Currently, Zambia is faced with the challenge to address the financial literacy knowledge gap among its population especially for the population with minimal or no formal education at all. Thus, incorporating financial literacy in the Vocational Education and Training programme could be another avenue that could bring in funding from financial-based and interested funding agencies. Additionally, development agencies and advocacy groups should also impress upon the government to allocate adequate resources towards financial literacy learning. Functional literacy learning programmes in their current form are not able to provide different choices for the learners, because they concentrate on basic reading and writing with little or no connection to the everyday real-life experiences of the learners. Thus, the remodelling should involve creating post-literacy opportunities for graduates to broaden their choices and chances for those who may wish to progress further. They can enrol for other programmes of interest to build on their literacy skills for personal development and aid them to sustain their livelihoods.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated that YAL is crucial to Zambia's development, but has remained a neglected sub-sector of the education sector. This neglect is deep-rooted in the country's development and the education sector in particular. Therefore, the persistent challenges faced

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by Zambia today among the youth and adults point to negating a meaningful investment in youth-related programmes. Many youths have graduated into adulthood with minimal or without adequately being prepared for important socioeconomic adults roles. This is particularly real for the out-of-school youth and adults who find themselves in a situation where they cannot engage in constructive economic activities for personal and national development. Genuine action is needed to mitigate perpetual excessive political rhetoric on the potential of YAL to transform the socio-economic landscape of Zambia. The reality of YAL is that the sector lacks the necessary support both in policy and funding to spar Zambia towards its development heights. This can only change with a genuine desire that is supported by both political and national wills of all stakeholders to change the YAL landscape. The YAL foothold in Zambia's development should be realised and meaningfully emphasised in all efforts of national development. The practice of having different providers of literacy programmes has for a long time duplicated efforts and divided the resources. This can change with the introduction of a coordinating body. It is also evident that there are several funding mechanisms for YAL, including tapping into the constituency development fund; establishment of the YAL fund; remodelling of the literacy programmes to speak to the real-life needs, work and industry to attract funding through in-demand literacy skills. However, the current reality of inadequate funding for youth and adult literacy has implications for the general provision of literacy in the country and specifically affecting the training of literacy instructors, production of teaching and learning materials and literacy learning venues. This paper projects that if Zambia continues on this financing trajectory of YAL, it risks missing the skills targets for industrialisations outlined in the 7<sup>th</sup> NDP which are crucial for the attainment of the 2030 vision of middle-income status.

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