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Sidelining Literacy:
A Comparative Study on the UNESCO LIFE (Literacy Initiative for Empowerment)

배제된 문해율:
UNESCO LIFE에 대한 비교 연구

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국제학과 국제협력전공
염 수 언
Sideling Literacy:
A Comparative Study on the UNESCO LIFE (Literacy Initiative for Empowerment)

A thesis presented by

Sooyun Yum

Graduate Program in International Cooperation
for the degree of Masters of International Studies

Graduate School of International Studies
Seoul National University
Seoul, Korea
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Abstract

Sidelining Literacy: 
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Sooyun Yum
International Cooperation Major
Graduate School of International Studies
Seoul National University

Literacy, the ability to read or write in one's mother tongue, is considered as the basis for education and as a strong factor in discerning the degree of development in developing countries. Literacy provision, however, has been sidelined by other educational priorities and therefore, low literacy rates remains to be a chronic problem in many countries worldwide.

This paper examines one of the most recent international initiatives to counter illiteracy: the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) framework. Launched by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2006, LIFE was implemented in 35 countries with mixed results. By conducting a comparative case study on three LIFE countries in South Asia - Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, this research identifies the
factors that contributed to the progress or the lack of progress in adult literacy provision in the three countries. Concepts from sociological institutionalism, including isomorphism and decoupling, are used to better understand how UNESCO has affected the national literacy policies in each country.

Through this comparative analysis, this paper identifies two key factors that positively affects literacy rates in LIFE countries: additional external assistance from UNESCO and the bottom-up participation from the community level.

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**Keywords:** adult literacy, Education for All, UNESCO, sociological institutionalism

**Student Number:** 2012-22101
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABE</td>
<td>Adult Basic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEC</td>
<td>Adult Education Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>BNFE</td>
<td>Bureau of Non-Formal Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRAC</td>
<td>Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAMPE</td>
<td>Campaign for Popular Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>CapEFA</td>
<td>Capacity-building for EFA</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBOs</td>
<td>Caste Based Organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLC</td>
<td>Community Learning Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAM</td>
<td>Dhaka Ahsania Mission</td>
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<tr>
<td>DNFE</td>
<td>Directorate of Non-Formal Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<tr>
<td>EWLP</td>
<td>Experimental World Literacy Program</td>
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<td>FTI</td>
<td>Fast Track Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>GPI</td>
<td>Gender Parity Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>LIFE</td>
<td>Literacy Initiative for Empowerment</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFE</td>
<td>Non-Formal Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>NLM</td>
<td>National Literacy Mission</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>PACADE</td>
<td>Pakistani Association for Continuing and Adult Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCLP</td>
<td>Parliamentarian Caucus on Literacy in Pakistan</td>
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<td>SLMA</td>
<td>State Literacy Mission Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>TLCs</td>
<td>Total Literacy Campaigns</td>
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<tr>
<td>UIL</td>
<td>UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning</td>
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<td>UIS</td>
<td>UNESCO Institute of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>UNLD</td>
<td>United Nations Literacy Decade</td>
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<td>UPE</td>
<td>Universal Primary Education</td>
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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Objective

To those who are directly or indirectly involved in the international aid regime, the year 2015 is a monumental one. 2015 is the deadline of the one of the most ambitious goals set by the international community: the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which was embarked in 2000. The year 2015 also serves as a deadline for yet another goal; the Education for All (EFA), the educational equivalent of the MDGs. The EFA goals, quite like the MDGs, have been ambitiously and proactively launched by international organizations, bilateral donors, member states, as well as the civil society. But now as the deadline looms ever closer, it is hard to say that the world has had a good record on keeping its long-held promises. Progress was significant in some sectors, but once again, the international community has to grant itself yet another extension on its “goals” to eradicate poverty and to provide education for all. As the deadline to the EFA goals approaches, the international community is about to accept the hard truth that once again, the ambitious goals have not been met.

Among the six EFA goals, Goal 4 concerns the challenge towards adult literacy. Goal 4, like all the EFA goals, is not expected to be met by 2015 despite multi-level efforts from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), national governments, and the civil society. By studying the initiatives taken by international actors to achieve the EFA Goal
4, this research focuses on identifying the factors that contributed to the trends in literacy in the twenty-first century. This research analyzes the policy formation and implementation of the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), an initiative launched by UNESCO in 2006. More specifically, this research concerns the implementation of LIFE in three of the 36 LIFE participant member states located in the South Asian region: Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

1.2. Background Research

1.2.1. The Education for All Goals

The history of the Education for All goals can be traced back to 1990, when international actors including international organizations, ranging from the World Bank, UNESCO, and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), national governments and participants from the civil society attended the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand.¹ The conference produced a document named “the World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting the Basic Learning Needs.” The declaration reaffirmed the basic learning needs for humanity as a right, with an emphasis on basic education.² Among many goals, a deadline on universal primary education was set; the

² Ibid. pp. 155-164.
international community was to provide primary education to all children by the year 2000.³

The Jomtien Declaration on EFA was a bold and seminal step for the international community. The deadline, however, was not met. Having failed to achieve the commitment, the leading international organizations in education, spearheaded by UNESCO, held another conference on Education for All. The World Education Forum was held ten years after the Jomtien Declaration at Dakar, Senegal, in 2000. The outcome of the forum is the ongoing Dakar Framework for Action. In accordance with the ideals of its predecessor, the Jomtien Declaration, the Dakar Framework well acknowledged “education as a fundamental human right.”⁴ In addition, the Framework went a step further to set six specific goals to achieve the ultimate goal of education for all. While the goals have been more specific and targeted, the scope of the Framework has broadened.

Goal 1 and Goal 2 of the EFA goals are targeting early childhood and childhood education, continuing the previous international commitments towards universal primary education. Goal 3 and Goal 4 concerns youth and adult education; Goal 3 called for the “access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes” while Goal 4 specifically targets adult illiteracy. Compared to the other goals, Goal 4 is relatively modest in that it aims to accomplish “a

50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy,” rather than steering for “all” children or aspects.\(^5\) Goal 5 and Goal 6 is centered on gender parity and quality in education respectively. The participants of the World Education Forum conceded on setting the year 2015 as the deadline of the second commitment to Education for All. Even the deadline of 2015, however, seems to have been too early for the world. Despite efforts from all levels, the EFA Global Monitoring Report of 2013 and 2014 came to a conclusion that “not a single goal will be achieved globally by 2015.”\(^6\)

1.2.2. What is Literacy?

Among the six EFA goals, this research focuses on Goal 4, which concerns the issue of global literacy. Defining what exactly literacy means is a challenge; as the context in which the term “literacy” is used varies, so does the meaning of the term itself. Indeed, the definition on literacy proposed by UNESCO, the leading organization concerning literacy in the field of international education, has changed and evolved throughout UNESCO’s long-held interest and action in the field of global literacy. The evolution of the term and its meanings is especially important, as it directly reflects UNESCO’s approach towards literacy during a certain time period. Further, it serves as a

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guideline to UNESCO’s ever changing strategies of accomplishing its initial goal of universal literacy.

*Illiteracy as a Scourge*

Literacy was one of the main priority of UNESCO ever since the organization was created in 1945. In the early days, the idea of “fundamental education” was at the center of the organization.\(^7\) Literacy was considered as an “autonomous set of skills.”\(^8\) Accordingly, the distinction between literacy and illiteracy was dichotomous. While literacy, the ability to read and write was something to promote to the third world, illiteracy was a scourge to eradicate.

*Functional Literacy*

The fundamental education approach soon led way to the notion of “functional literacy” in the 1960s and 1970s. The UNESCO (1978) definition of functional literacy: “A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his and the community's development”\(^9\) is a

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8 Ibid. p. 148.
definition which still rings true to this day. The functional approach to literacy emphasized literacy’s practical role in economic and social development. During this period, the international community viewed literacy as “an autonomous set of skills.”¹⁰ This new definition incurred UNESCO, along with the leadership and funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to embark upon the Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP). The EWLP, which lasted from 1966 till 1973, focused on teaching literacy via a work-oriented approach.¹¹ As the name of the program suggests, this program was experimental and ended as an experiment. It was unsuccessful in enhancing global literacy rates and was countered by an entirely different approach and notion stemming from Paulo Freire’s theory on critical literacy.

**Critical Literacy**

Lind (2008) explains that the evolution of the concept of literacy within UNESCO has gone through as many as six phases. Initially, during 1945 to 1964, UNESCO’s definition of literacy was “reading and writing in the mother tongue” but this approach soon led the way to the notion of “functional literacy” which emphasizes literacy’s practical role within the society.¹² This notion was counteracted by the Brazilian scholar Paulo Freire who argued that

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literacy, far from being autonomous, is intricately relevant with political, social, and cultural context of the learner.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{The Current Definition of Literacy}

The current definition in use by UNESCO is that literacy is “the ability to read and write, with understanding, a short simple statement about one’s everyday life.”\textsuperscript{14} UNESCO identifies literacy as a right in itself, but does not dismiss its use as a means to achieve the EFA goals and its significance in a country’s development. UNESCO’s current approach to literacy is a combination of the previous definitions of functional literacy, critical literacy, and the literacy as a human right.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sidelining of Literacy

Many authors researching on literacy within the international education arena agree to the importance of literacy as an international issue. Reasons as to why literacy is so important is drawn from various fields of study. Cameron and Cameron (2006) examines the benefits of literacy, especially adult literacy, in economic terms. By utilizing four “economic frameworks – livelihoods, a macroeconomics overview, microeconomics rates of return, and capabilities”\textsuperscript{15} to assess the economic gains of adult literacy programs. The authors find a number of arguments which identify benefits of adult literacy education, but are unsuccessful in reaching a definitive conclusion to its economic benefit accentuating that there is a lack of information and data on adult literacy programs.

The theoretical framework of the Capabilities Approach, on the other hand, displays the significance of literacy more clearly. Maddox (2008) points out that in the works of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, the two key scholars of the Capabilities Approach, literacy is considered as “a necessary condition of well-being and human development.”\textsuperscript{16} Literacy rates are a key


component of the United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Index (HDI) and according to the capability approach, the value of literacy and literacy education should not be based on its economic returns. Instead, Maddox (2008) notes that Sen’s and Nussbaum’s approach, although different in each of their scope and terminology, serves as a sound rationale to support the provision, or at least the necessity of, providing adult literacy programs in developing countries.

The importance of literacy for development is also acknowledged by the World Bank, which has been promulgating the definition of functional literacy since the 1960s and 1970s. A working paper on adult basic education in Sub-Saharan Africa, written by Jon Lauglo (2001), calls for increased support in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs, centered on literacy and numeracy and targeting reach out-of-school youths as well as adults.17 Lauglo (2001) further argues that ABE programs can function as “more than a valuable complement to primary schooling.”18

Lauglo (2001) also notes that adult education has been increasingly sidelined in favor of primary education. With tight budgets on education, even more constrained by structural adjustments, national governments of developing countries inevitably put more emphasis on basic primary education, rather than venturing on the relatively uncharted field of adult literacy and

18 Ibid. p. 4.
numeracy education. The failed attempts of functional literacy programs of the 1960s and 1970s add to the burdens of choosing to invest in ABE programs.\textsuperscript{19} Through qualitative analysis of countries which have experienced ABE programs in the past, Lauglo (2001) concludes that more assistance on the national- and international-level is necessary on the basis that the benefits of ABE, as a “complement” of universal public education (UPE) and a foundation for empowerment and good governance is evident.

The importance of adult literacy, including numeracy, is accepted as necessary to development by the two very different international organizations within the spectrum of global governance, the World Bank and UNESCO. However, the track record of adult literacy promotion during the recent decades has been discouraging. In fact, the issue of literacy, when separated from the notion of universal primary education, is neglected and marginalized in the agenda for international education aid. Many factors were involved in today’s sideling of literacy within the international educational arena. However, the primary factor would be in the inherent limitations of UNESCO, the leading organization on literacy. UNESCO’s budget of approximately $326 million, is definitely not enough to support the organization’s many causes in the educational, scientific, and cultural sector.\textsuperscript{20} Chabbott (1998) claims that after

the World War II, when many international organizations, including UNESCO, were being established, UNESCO ended up becoming “one of the big losers,” with its big ideals and little financial resources to support them.\footnote{21}{Colette Chabbott (1998). “Constructing Educational Consensus: International Development Professionals and the World Conference on Education for All.” \textit{International Journal for Educational Development}. 18:3. p. 210.}

Jones’ (1990) analysis on UNESCO and the politics of literacy is in accordance with Chabbott’s (1998) view. Jones (1990) further argues that the low level of funding to UNESCO has led the organization to take the current approach of providing technical assistance via low-cost “exchange of persons, information, and ideas, the collection of statistics, the mounting of a limited core of experimental pilot projects.”\footnote{22}{Phillip W. Jones (1990). “UNESCO and the Politics of Global Literacy.” \textit{Comparative Education Review}. 34:1. February. p. 50.} Jones (1990) points out that due to the lack of financial assistance to developing countries, educational initiatives led by UNESCO mainly rely on pressuring recipients on moral grounds to reach the goals. In turn, the World Bank is threatening to take over UNESCO as the leading organization in the field of education. The World Bank is “the largest source of external funding to education,”\footnote{23}{Clinton Robinson (2005). “Promoting Literacy: What is the Record of Education for All?” \textit{International Journal of Educational Development}. 25. p. 442.} and its functional and economic take on education, together with its emphasis in achieving universal primary education, has skewed the international educational regime. The Fast Track Initiative (FTA), led primarily by the World Bank, and which is now renamed as the “Global Partnership for Education,” is the biggest source of funding for
the EFA agenda. True to the World Bank’s considerable influence, the Global Partnership for Education is exclusively focused on primary education and targets children.24

2.2. The Role of UNESCO on Literacy

Since the World Bank and numerous bilateral organizations primarily concern themselves with the provision of worldwide primary education, the provision of adult literacy has mostly been led with UNESCO at the forefront. Despite its inherent financial constraints, the Background Research conducted in the first part of this study reveals that UNESCO has continuously implemented programs to counter illiteracy rife in numerous developing countries. But is the UNESCO-initiated approach towards illiteracy effective? Indeed, the methods in which UNESCO promotes and implements its educational initiatives are repeatedly questioned by many scholars specializing in international educational development.

UNESCO’s role in literacy can be better understood when considering the prevalent global isomorphism in national education systems today. Astiz, Wiseman, and Baker (2002) suggest that globalization affects national educational systems economically and institutionally. Institutional

globalization is more prominent in education; as the world becomes increasingly globalized, the world has witnessed “institutional convergence” among educational systems, leading to “isomorphic polities.”

According to the authors, there a convergence in educational systems is taking place due to the flow of decentralization induced by economic globalization. The neoliberal model of “withdrawal, privatization, and localization” was applied to the education sector. Moreover, both institutional and economic forces were strongly promoted by international organizations. The authors argue that consequently, national governments are constrained by the pressure to decentralize and to implement frameworks prescribed by international organizations.

The significant influence that international organizations have on national education systems is also pointed out in Chabbott (1998). As she analyzes the roles of each stakeholders which have attended the World Conference on Education for All, Chabbott (1998) finds that educational standardization, prevalent in today’s world is largely a product of “the organizational variables” that are in play during international conferences such as the World Conference on Education for All. For instance, the content

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26 Ibid. p. 69.
of the Jomtien Declaration, which was the outcome of the World Conference held in 1990, is an amalgam of what the major international organizations, such as the World Bank, UNESCO, UNDP and UNICEF aimed for. The emphasis of each organization, however, was different; Chabbott (1998) argues that while the World Bank sought to achieve “Education” for All, and focus on the formal primary education system in developing countries, UNESCO aimed for Education for “All” and accordingly, expanded its EFA mandate to include the otherwise neglected adults and out-of-school children. The progression of the EFA goals indicate that the World Bank’s view is better publicized and implemented; indicating that with added resources, the organizational impact can become even more significant.

Even so, UNESCO is striving to advocate adult literacy. UNESCO’s role in this field becomes more pronounced, as adult literacy has been sidelined by other organizations. UNESCO is the single most authoritative organization on adult literacy. Therefore, despite the lack of financial resources, UNESCO’s actions can have a large repercussion on the adult literacy situation of developing countries. Jallade, Radi and Cuenin (2001) gives a detailed account on how UNESCO affects, or intends to influence, national education policies. UNESCO’s role can be summed up as “analysis, policy dialogue, and steering.” UNESCO, according to the authors, mainly contact with national


30 Lucilia Jallade, Mohamed Radi and Serge Cuenin (2001). “National Education
governments and support each government by “strengthen[ing] their technical capacity.”\textsuperscript{31} The professional advices provided by UNESCO are based on a “synthetic knowledge” grounded on UNESCO’s extensive international experience around the world,\textsuperscript{32} which according to McNeely (1995) can be classified as a “standard-setting” behavior.\textsuperscript{33} McNeely (1995) further expounds that international organizations, such as UNESCO, provides technical as well as financial resources so as to prescribe “proper”\textsuperscript{34} models of educational organizations to national governments, the provision of which leads to institutionalization in the international education arena.

The prescriptive role played by UNESCO may lead to positive results; education can be advocated in developing countries and thereby getting the world one step closer to its goal of education for all. The increased influence of international organizations, however, may add to “the illusion of ownership,” warns Bhatta (2011). Focusing on the case of Nepal, Bhatta (2001) argues that in today’s educational sphere, ownership of national education policies is untenable. The “worldwide educational isomorphism,” promulgated by international organizations, limits the roles of national governments, forcing them to merely manage and to implement what aid agencies have devised or

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid. p. 51.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid. p. 61.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. p. 502.
have approved in advance. Bhatta (2001) delineates that education policies in Nepal are formed mainly through “bi-annual joint government-donor review missions,” where representatives from aid agencies and high-level government officials are heavily involved. Consequently, voices from the civil society and from the district-level are sorely lacking in the policy-making stage.

Although research has been conducted on the impact of international organizations on educational systems as a whole (McNeely 1995, Mundy 2007, Smith 2005, Pritchett 2014, McNeely and Cha 1994), a majority studies on the effects of international organizations’ initiatives on literacy have been limited to specific ethnographic case studies of programs within a single country (Caddell 2005). A comparative analysis on UNESCO’s literacy initiatives, especially through the sociological institutionalist concepts of isomorphism could possibly deepen the understanding on UNESCO’s role and its repercussion on national and sub-national levels in terms of literacy. This research, by focusing on the performances of LIFE, a whole framework dedicated to adult literacy in targeted countries, aims to add to the understanding on UNESCO’s role in literacy promotion and its performance within national and sub-national context.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

3.1. Research Question

By looking into the process of implementation and governance in some of the cases among the LIFE countries, this research aims to find what factors contributed to the progress or lack of progress in literacy provision, with special emphasis on the role played by UNESCO. Through qualitative analysis of government reports and papers on literacy programs in LIFE participant countries, this paper aims to find explanations for two research questions:

1. What factors contributed to the progress or lack of progress in literacy provision?

2. Did UNESCO’s LIFE framework act as a force of institutional isomorphism in the field of adult literacy? If so, did isomorphism in literacy policies lead to an increase in literacy rates?

Although LIFE is an initiative still in progress, it is certainly an interesting case which can provide the answer to the research question of whether international push to achieve the EFA Goals on literacy is promising or not.
3.2. Theoretical Framework

This study uses concepts drawn from sociological institutionalism, introduced by the American sociologist John Meyer. Meyer theorizes that organizations adopt myths, that is, “institutionalized products, services, techniques, policies and programs,” in order to cement their legitimacy and ensure their survival. Meyer and Rowan (1977) define this process, during which “social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take a rule-like status in social thought and action,” as “institutionalization.” Such survival tactics, in turn, induce organizations to choose to become more isomorphic with myths, rather than transforming themselves to become more efficient. In reality, however, there are occasional conflicts or disagreements when the decisions and the overall efficiency of organizations are questioned by the public. In such context, argues Meyer and Rowan (1977), organizations strategically adopt “decoupling” measures. By decoupling certain elements from the original formal structure, organizations assuage the public concern while maintaining their formal structure.

The process of institutional isomorphism has been further discussed in DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Adopting the definition of institutionalization from Meyer, the two authors specify “three mechanisms of institutional isomorphic change”: coercive isomorphism, mimetic isomorphism and

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37 Ibid. p. 341.
38 Ibid. p. 356.
The three different mechanisms differ on the factors that induce organizations to become isomorphic. Coercive isomorphism, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) contend, occurs when organizations are pressured to resemble another organization by either formal or informal pressure whereas the process under which organizations decide to mimic other organizations out of “uncertainty” is classified as mimetic isomorphism. Normative isomorphism, on the other hand, arises from “professionalization,” through formal education systems and “filtering of personnel.” Pritchett (2014) gives a more detailed explanation on normative isomorphism by specifying that in normative isomorphic processes, “desirable norms … are internalized” into the organizational structure.

Isomorphism of any form is easily found in the international education arena. Convergence among national education systems has long been explained by sociological institutionalist concepts. Instead of studying the isomorphism of national education systems in general, this research narrows the scope and focuses on the national literacy policies. While using the concepts of institutional isomorphism proposed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), this research analyzes the role and influence of international organizations, which,

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40 Ibid. p. 150.
41 Ibid. p. 151.
in this case, is UNESCO. In order to understand the influence of international organizations, the classification of the main roles of such organizations presented in McNeely and Cha (1994) is also consulted. The two authors introduce four activities: “exchange of information,” the drafting of “charters and constitutions,” making use of “standard-setting instruments” and providing “technical and financial resources” to recipient countries. A detailed analysis of the activities conducted by UNESCO in the field of adult literacy is provided by using this classification.

3.3. Case Selection

To find an answer to the research question on identifying the decisive factor within the LIFE framework, this research conducts a comparative case study on three South Asian countries participating in LIFE. LIFE is a global initiative with participating countries from four regions, the Asia & the Pacific, Africa, Arab region, and Latin America.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arab States</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the seven regional categories, the South and West Asia region is the target of this research, due to the availability of data on national literacy. Along with the sub-Saharan African region, the South Asian region is one of the most worrying regions in terms of its literacy rates and its gender parity index. Table 1 shows that South and West Asia region, has a literacy rate of 63% the second lowest rate, after the literacy rate of 59% in Sub-Saharan Africa.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran, Islamic Republic Of</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of the nine countries that fits the LIFE criteria in the Asia and Pacific region, as shown in <Table 2>, this paper compares three in the South Asian region. The conflict-ridden Afghanistan has no data on literacy to date, and therefore is not analyzed in this paper. China and Indonesia are excluded in the study as they are outliers among the LIFE countries, with adult literacy rates above 90% even before the launch of the LIFE framework by UNESCO. Papua New Guinea, the only LIFE country was also excluded from the study. Bangladesh, India and Pakistan will be the cases for comparative analysis, due to its regional proximity as well as the historical background the three countries have in common.

3.4. Methodology

In order to assess the main factors contributing to the progress or lack of progress among LIFE countries, this research initially looks into the changes in each country’s literacy. For the progress in adult literacy, the data retrieved from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), the currently the most authoritative data used by other international organizations, including the World

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Bank were used. It, however, is important to note that the literacy rate collected by the UIS is based on reports from each individual country, numbers to which are collected via household surveys and national censuses. Because it changes slowly, literacy rates are measured once every decade by the UIS. Each country measures literacy rates in different years. This paper, as is the norm in papers published by UNESCO on literacy, uses the available data provided by the UIS, in spite of the varying years when the literacy rate was measured in each case.

A qualitative and comparative analysis is conducted to compare how LIFE is comprehended and its framework implemented in each case. By analyzing the contents of general, regional, and national reports on LIFE, regional workshop reports, and evaluation reports of UNESCO, the governance of the LIFE countries in terms of literacy is compared. This research also involves a comparative study of governance structures, processes, to gauge how each LIFE country government is committed to owning the LIFE program.

The comparative study is conducted on three dimensions. First, each country is analyzed by the main stakeholders involved in the process of literacy provision on the national and sub-national level. Secondly, the assistance from UNESCO and external donors, whether technical or financial, is identified and compared. Finally, each country’s structure of education is considered. While

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some countries have federal governments, some states are unitary. Moreover, whether the national education system is decentralized or not is verified. The main goal of this comparative study is to identify the key factors that determine the relative success of reaching the EFA Goal 4 on literacy. This study assesses which way of literacy provision and ownership has shown to be the most effective one.
4. UNLD and the UNESCO LIFE

4.1. The United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD)

Literacy, the ability to “read and write a short simple statement on his [or her] everyday life” 47 has been an agenda that has been promoted by UNESCO since the organization’s conception. Currently in the world, the most comprehensive work in the field of global literacy is being done by UNESCO. Global literacy is an issue that has been raised by UNESCO and the World Bank, another major organization in education aid, for decades. 48 The importance of literacy as a “fundamental human right” was reaffirmed by UNESCO repeatedly in many declarations, including the 1975 Persepolis Declaration, the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All. 49 Finally, in 2002, the UN General Assembly declared the decade starting from 2003 and lasting to 2012 as the United Nations Literacy Decade which led to the conception of a number of projects and programs connected to literacy. 50 Despite its importance, however, literacy, and furthermore, education, have been issues that have not received their due attention and support. Restating the central role that literacy

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plays in achieving the six goals of education for all, the Resolution called for more global attention toward the literacy goal of the EFA agenda.

4.2. Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE)

To achieve the goal to halve the global illiteracy rate, UNESCO launched the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) in 2006, as part of the initiatives for the UN Literacy Decade. LIFE is a decade-long initiative starting in 2006 and ending in 2015. It is a collaborative effort of UNESCO, donor states, partner states, and the civil society, with the purpose of enhancing global literacy rates in the short term, and to accomplish Goal 3 and Goal 4 of the six Education for All (EFA) goals of “achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults” in the long run.\textsuperscript{51} LIFE represents one side of the two-pronged approach taken by UNESCO in response to widespread global illiteracy. While UNESCO, like the World Bank, places significant emphasis in literacy acquisition via primary education, it also strives to advocate the importance of adult literacy. The LIFE framework, is centered on the latter of the two approaches.\textsuperscript{52}


With LIFE, UNESCO has targeted 35 countries for literacy provision for the first time. 85 per cent of the global illiterate population resides within LIFE countries scattered around the world, as shown in <Table 3>. The 35 countries qualify the two criteria set by UNESCO: countries with literacy rate lower than 50 per cent of their entire population and/or a population with more than 10 million illiterate people. The criteria led to a noticeable discrepancy in many aspects among the LIFE countries, including the varying levels of economic development, country size, and population. There currently are 18 states from Africa, six Arab states, nine states from Asia and the Pacific region

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and two countries from Latin America and the Caribbean. While some states, such as Brazil, China, Iran, and Indonesia, have the literacy rates of over 80% of the entire population, other states, mostly in the African region, have shown poor results, with their literacy rates being less than 50% of the entire population.

LIFE is a pivotal “operation mechanism” for the UNLD, but it is not a program nor is it a project.\(^4\) Instead, the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL), which presides over adult literacy-related projects and programs within UNESCO, defines LIFE as essentially a “global strategic framework.” Added to its classification as a “framework” is the concept of ownership. The “Literacy Initiative for Empowerment 2006-2015 Vision and Strategy Paper” stipulates that LIFE should be “country-led and country-specific, and embedded in national policies and processes.”\(^5\) Departments responsible for literacy policies within the national government act as LIFE focal points and are at the center of the LIFE framework. UNESCO aims to aid the 35 LIFE countries, primarily by providing technical and financial support to each national government.

To address the prevalent sidelining of adult literacy in the LIFE countries, UNESCO proposed four strategic objectives. Firstly, LIFE aims to

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“reinforce the national and international commitment to literacy through advocacy and communication.”\textsuperscript{56} The UIL points out the various inter-sectoral and intra-ministerial coordination made within each national governments to formulate literacy promoting policies. The most recent report on LIFE from the UIL (2012) further notes that the partnership between civil society organizations and education ministries have also been strengthened. \textsuperscript{57} Secondly, it is LIFE’s objective to “support the articulation of policies for sustainable literacy within sector-wide and national development frameworks.”\textsuperscript{58} The UIL introduces some of the cases in LIFE countries where literacy policies have been incorporated into National plans or in some cases, referred to in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.\textsuperscript{59} Another objective of LIFE is to assist in national capacity-building, so that each national government can devise and deliver necessary literacy programs with its own capacity.\textsuperscript{60} Finally, LIFE acts as an incubator of new ways of teaching literacy, creating literacy programs, and of sharing the new ideas with other countries.\textsuperscript{61}


\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. p. 43.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.


As can be seen in <Figure 1>, UNESCO’s role within this LIFE framework is in the analysis of the literacy situation in each country, as well as in coordinating the policy dialogue. UNESCO launched LIFE by selecting 35 countries and set the timetable for the framework. UNESCO’s Vision and Strategy Paper (2007) on LIFE indicates that UNESCO’s initial plan was to set three phases; the first phase beginning in 2006, the second in 2008, and the third to begin in 2010. The LIFE partner states were divided into three categories and at the beginning, were scheduled to partake in the LIFE framework by these different phases. This plan, however, was soon rectified and all the LIFE states started launching the LIFE framework by 2008.

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UNESCO also was the main actor during the second step of the LIFE implementation process. LIFE was planned to be coordinated by UIL at the global level, and UNESCO Regional Bureaus, situated in Bangkok, Thailand, Beirut, Lebanon, Dakar, Senegal, and in Santiago, Chile, as the regional LIFE focal points. UNESCO field offices, if situated in each LIFE country, were designated as UNESCO focal points.

The most important stakeholders, however, are national focal points, who usually are officials heading the departments related to adult literacy or adult education within the countries’ Ministries of Education or their equivalents. With consultation from each level, national LIFE focal points conducted needs assessment studies and situation analyses with the help of UNESCO. During the implementation of the LIFE framework, UNESCO continued to act as a coordinator by holding regional meetings in the Arab, Asia-Pacific and Africa regions so that LIFE focal points from all LIFE countries could congregate and discuss their current literacy status in their countries and good practices of literacy provision.

It is also UNESCO which conducts monitoring and evaluations of literacy-related actions done under the LIFE framework in each country. UNESCO and its regional branches have drafted mid-term and annual reports

67 Ibid. p. 18.
to track LIFE progress in each country. In each report, UNESCO provides situation analyses of literacy education and proposes action plans for the LIFE participants. Along with the documents, UNESCO also created websites for LIFE focal points as well as a database for effective literacy practices in LIFE countries.68

UNESCO LIFE provides guidelines, along with technical and, in some cases, financial assistance, to recipient countries which vary depending on the structures and governance of national education systems. While some national governments have centralized education systems others have experienced decentralization in the education sector. On the other hand, LIFE’s emphasis is on the participating countries’ ownership of the Framework. The “Vision and Strategy Paper” of LIFE clearly states that “while UNESCO will provide the overall framework of coordination, support and mobilization, LIFE operations will be country-led, respond to country-specific needs and priorities, strengthen national capacities and be embedded in national development frameworks.”69

Within the LIFE framework, UNESCO contends that it will not “lead” the program, but would instead, “assist.” To implement the LIFE program, therefore, active partnership among the national government, the civil society, the donors, and the international organization is a prerequisite. More importantly, the recipient government’s commitment to the LIFE goals is

pivotal.

The LIFE countries, however, have shown confusion to UNESCO’s stance in this initiative, expecting UNESCO to fund, coordinate, lead, and implement the policies in a top-down manner as usual. In *Looking Forward with LIFE: Global LIFE Mid-term Evaluation Report 2006-2011*, the “difficulty of creating a common understanding of the initiative,”⁷⁰ is pointed out as the biggest challenge faced by the UNESCO LIFE. While some countries have successfully increased its literacy rate by over 20 per cent, other countries have lagged behind. Some countries have even suffered a drop in their literacy rate, after the implementation of LIFE. The dramatically different outcomes in terms of literacy of the LIFE countries serves as an interesting topic of research on the international organization’s and the national, sub-national actors’ role in global-level initiatives, especially in today’s world of global governance.

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5. A Case Study: Analysis on the UNESCO LIFE in Asia

5.1. LIFE in Bangladesh

5.1.1. Literacy in Bangladesh

With the literacy rate well below 50% and the reported illiterate population exceeding 10 million, Bangladesh meets the criteria of a LIFE participant. In fact, Bangladesh was chosen to be one of the 11 countries who were invited to participate in the LIFE framework during its first phase in 2006.

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<Figure 2> illustrates the adult literacy rate in Bangladesh, which was 47.5% one year after the EFA Dakar Forum in 2000, and has increased by 10.2% to 57.7% after a decade in 2011. Among the three countries which are subject to analysis, Bangladesh has so far experienced the greatest increase in adult literacy rate. The most recent data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics also show that among the three countries in the South Asian region, the female adult population in Bangladesh have the highest rate of literacy at 53.4% in 2011. Bangladesh’s Gender Parity Index of 0.86 is also the highest, when compared with the results in neighboring India and Pakistan.

![Gender Parity Index in Bangladesh](image)

<Figure 3: Gender Parity Index in Bangladesh> \(^{72}\)

However, despite the progress accomplished within the LIFE framework, and in spite of the boost of advocacy after the introduction of LIFE,

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Bangladesh is expected to fail to reach the EFA goal 4 on literacy. Less than two years are left until the year 2015 ends, and it is increasingly evident that Bangladesh will fail to reach a 50 percent reduction in adult literacy rate “by more than 5 percentage.”

Although Bangladesh is faring relatively well in terms of its Gender Parity Index (GPI), when compared to other LIFE countries in South Asia, its GPI still falls short of the desired 1.0 proposed by EFA Goal 5: achieving gender equality in education in 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>GPI</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>40,252</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>43,809</td>
<td>54.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>44,137</td>
<td>54.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>43,876</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4: Adult Literacy Rates in Bangladesh, 1985-2015*

5.1.2. Literacy Policies

The Bangladeshi literacy experience can be characterized by its emphasis on “community ownership of the literacy and non-formal education programmes.” The participation of NGOs in the field of literacy and adult education is exceptionally strong in Bangladesh. Before the declaration of the

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UN Literacy Decade and the implementation of the LIFE framework, literacy and adult education was specialized mostly by NGOs.76 A report to UNESCO submitted by the Bureau of Non-Formal Education (BNFE) accentuated the pivotal role that non-governmental organizations have on the literacy provision in Bangladesh by recognizing the NGOs and civil society organizations as “the direct implementing partners of BNFE.”77 The launch of the LIFE framework in Bangladesh starting in 2006 led to a number of policy initiatives and literacy was mentioned in national plans including the Second EFA National Plan (2003-2015).78

5.1.3. Actors

The Government

At the heart of adult literacy and education in Bangladesh is the Bureau of Non-Formal Education. BNFE replaced its predecessor in 2005, Directorate of Non-Formal Education (DNFE), which was shut down in 2003. The BNFE receives annual budget from the government and according to

77 Ibid.
Tanvir (2009), has more autonomy than the DNFE. While, it plays a role in implementing programs by itself, the main role of the BNFE is to act as a coordinator of non-formal education programs. The BNFE also acts as a focal point to international aid programs, including the UNESCO LIFE.

**NGOs**

One of the recurring figures in literatures on Bangladesh’s literacy policies is the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), “a national network in NGOs” in Bangladesh specializing in education and literacy. A coalition of NGOs working in the field of education, CAMPE is distinctive in the monitoring role it plays. CAMPE has published Education Watch reports, an assessment in the numerous education projects within Bangladesh annually or biannually. Other major NGOs involved in literacy projects include national organizations such as BRAC, DAM and INGOs such as Save the Children International. The NGOs are in charge of delivering literacy education to those in need, with their own curriculum and materials. The number of NGOs

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in the field of educational provision is estimated to be over 1,000.\textsuperscript{83}

5.1.4. External Assistance

\textit{CapEFA Program (UNESCO)}

The literacy initiatives in Bangladesh were expedited by UNESCO’s Capacity-building for EFA Program (the CapEFA Program).\textsuperscript{84} Established in 2003, the CapEFA program is jointly financed by Northern European governments of Denmark, Finland, Italy, Norway, Sweden, along with Italy and Switzerland.\textsuperscript{85} Created to fund capability development and further the achievement of the EFA goals, the CapEFA program has four areas of thematic focus: sector-wide policy and planning, literacy and non-formal education, teacher education policy, and technical and vocational education and training.\textsuperscript{86} Bangladesh has been one of the 20 priority countries of the CapEFA program and has received funds for literacy and non-formal education from 2006 to 2009.\textsuperscript{87} The grant during the first cycle of the program “Capacity-building EFA Programme 2006-2008” to Bangladesh amounted to US$1 million.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid. p. 9.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid. pp. 45-46.
Through the fund, training of actors in the field of literacy on the national and regional level became possible. The review paper of LIFE during the period of 2006 to 2009 documents that through CapEFA, “25 NGO managers were trained on the planning and implementation of advocacy campaigns.” The paper further expounds that the training of the NGO managers led way to the training of 600 volunteers, who, in turn, reached approximately 6,000 illiterate women and girls.

5.2. LIFE in India

5.2.1. Literacy in India

With the biggest number of illiterate population among the three cases, India, despite governmental and international efforts, remains to have accomplished little progress in its literacy rate since 2000. The years from 1991 to 2001, after the Jomtien Declaration for Education for All, shows significant progress in literacy rate; the adult literacy rate jumped from 48.2% to 61% in a decade. India’s state of literacy after the announcement of the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000, however, is far from satisfactory. As can be seen in <Figure 4>, the literacy rate in India rose by only 1.8% during one decade.

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Even the optimistic projection of the literacy rate in 2015, 71.4%, estimated by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, still falls short from India’s commitment to the EFA Goal 4 by more than 5 percent.92

As a federal state, India displays a significant divide between each state in terms of literacy rates.94 The discrepancy is not limited to the states; the Gender Parity Index of India shows that although the GPI in literacy has been increasing since 1991, there still is a wide discrepancy between the male adult literacy rate of 75.2% and the female equivalent of 50.8%.

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93 Ibid.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Literacy Rate (%)</th>
<th>Literate Population (in 1,000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>61.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>81.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<Table 5: Adult Literacy Rates in India, 1985-2015>\(^{95}\)

5.2.2. Literacy Policies

India is a federal state, consisting of 28 states and 7 union territories.\(^{96}\)

The education system, as a result, is devised and implemented by “three different tiers of government”: central, State level, and local government (Panchayati Raj) at the District level.\(^{97}\) Education has been under the joint responsibility of the federal government and the States.\(^{98}\) Ayyar (2008) explains the relationship between the federal government and the state as balanced partners; the central government offers grants on investment for

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education, detailed in its five-year plans, and “acquires an opportunity to bargain with the States.”

This is possible since the majority of the education budget in India originates from the State budget. According to Cheney et al. (2005), the central government provides approximately 10 per cent of the education budget as a whole, which allows the States to wield more authority in managing their own state-level education systems. The fact that the political affiliation of the governor of each state may differ adds to the reality that in India, in terms of education policies, and moreover, in terms of every single policy, the task of “speaking with a single voice” is extremely challenging.

In India, policies to boost literacy rates, like many educational reforms, have been initiated by the government. India’s literacy campaigns have a long history that goes back to the 1960s. The central government of India prioritized primary education as a way of improving literacy rates. Adult literacy education, on the other hand, was thought to have a “different purpose” and has been otherwise neglected. The importance of adult literacy was recognized by the

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government in the 1980s when the National Literacy Mission (NLM) was established. The National Literacy Mission launched the Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) in 1988. The TLCs was successful; the Indian government claims that by 2003, “95% of India’s villages and people have been covered” by the TLCs, due to its nature of being “area-specific, time-bound, volunteer-based, outcome-oriented, and mass program.” One of the most distinctive characteristics of the TLCs was the fact that it was district-based and that its resources were essentially from the community-level.

After the implementation of the TLCs, the central government has embarked upon another mass literacy campaign called the “Saakshar Bharat.” Unlike the TLCs, Saakshar Bharat does not aim to cover all states and districts but has targeted areas. Under the new Saakshar Bharat Mission which started in 2009, the districts which have “adult female literacy of 50 per cent or below” are eligible for the support provided by the central government. Moreover, the Saakshar Bharat program, unlike its predecessor, is centrally financed rather than drawing from community resources. The Program utilizes the Adult Education Center (AECs) established by district governments and about 75% of the 1.2 billion dollars expense has been covered by the central government.

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So far, the Indian government is touting the Mission as a success.

5.2.3. Actors

The Government

Literacy policies in India are almost entirely under the purview of the government. Although some elements of the policies are described as “decentralized” policies, the scope of decentralization is significantly different from the other countries. In the case of India, decentralization occurs when district-level or state-level governments, rather than the central government, take charge of education policies. Even in such “decentralized” process of policy implementation, the main stakeholder of literacy provision is the government. The Department of School Education and Literacy of the Ministry of Human Resources Development takes responsibility of literacy policies in India. Under the Department of School Education and Literacy are various divisions relevant to literacy policies including the National Literacy Mission Authority and the Directorate of Adult Education.¹⁰⁷ On the state level, states have their own State Literacy Mission Authorities (SLMAs) and have the power to discontinue certain education projects.¹⁰⁸ On the district level, there

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are “local self-government bodies,” called Panchayats but the power that these district-level governments have on adult literacy programs vary from state to state.\textsuperscript{109}

A look into the Indian literacy policies makes clear that it was the government which launched the centrally sponsored NLM which led the TLCs, and more recently, the Saakshar Bharat Mission. The government’s aim is “to follow an integrated approach to literacy,” and so far, the central government’s approach towards India’s literacy issue, which encompasses concerns on gender, caste, and regional disparities as well as poverty, has been “holistic.”\textsuperscript{110} Non-formal education in India, as a result, has been considered to be practiced within “the traditional framework of formal education system.”\textsuperscript{111} The fact that the government is the main actor in adult literacy provision is further cemented when considering that the government serves as the main financial backer of a majority of non-formal education (NFE) projects in India.\textsuperscript{112}

\textit{NGOs}

The national report prepared by the Indian central government for the

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid. p. 1.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid. p. 6.
CONFINTEA VI, the International Conference on Adult Education, clearly states that “literacy and Continuing Education in India has predominantly been a government responsibility except for a very limited scale of NGOs involvement.”\textsuperscript{113} Quotes from the Ministry of Human Resources Development, the main government branch in charge of education policies, indicate that the central government is determined “to make literacy as a people’s mission.”\textsuperscript{114} Mathew (2005) also cites that actors from the civil society were involved during all stages of policy formation and implementation. In addition, the good practices introduced in Mathew (2005) and in the Effective Literacy Program website were mostly central-government sponsored programs implemented by district governments.

A distinctive feature in India’s literacy provision is not, like other LIFE countries, the active participation of local-, national-, or international NGOs, but the role played by individual volunteers. India’s previous literacy campaign, the Total Literacy Campaigns, for instance, had literacy volunteers to actively participate during the process to educate the illiterates.\textsuperscript{115}

5.2.4. External Assistance

A national report on adult education and literacy notes that “there has not been any significant external funding”\textsuperscript{116} in this field. Unlike other LIFE countries in South Asia, India is not the recipient of UNESCO’s extra-budgetary CapEFA Program. External assistance from international actors have been limited to UNESCO’s technical support in advocacy and in target-setting through the LIFE framework and in a larger scale, the international initiatives and promotions to fulfill the EFA goals. The funding of adult literacy programs, as a result, was covered by the Central and State governments. In the case of the Saakshar Bharat Mission which is currently in operation, the Central government provides about two thirds of the entire fund required for the campaign, while States are responsible for the remainder of the necessary budget for adult literacy.\textsuperscript{117}


5.3. LIFE in Pakistan

5.3.1. Literacy in Pakistan

Pakistan is another LIFE participant which has experienced a steady increase in adult literacy rates since the 2000s. The country’s literacy rate before the announcement of the Dakar Framework was at 42.7% but the most recent statistics on the adult literacy rate, measured after a decade later, in 2009, is at 54.9%, indicating a 12.2% increase in adult literacy rate. The Pakistani government has also taken account of its adult literacy rate most frequently among LIFE member states in South Asia; the UNESCO Institute of Statistics collected the adult literacy data for five times during the last decade.

![Figure 6: Adult Literacy Rates in Pakistan, 1985-2015](image)

Pakistan’s gender parity index throughout the years, however, displays a worrying aspect of Pakistan’s adult education. Pakistan’s most recently measured GPI is at 0.59. While the literacy of male adults are at 68.6%, the female adult literacy rate remains low at 40.3%. The gender discrepancy of Pakistan is greater than any LIFE country in South Asia. To achieve its goal of reaching 73% of adult literacy by 2015 or by a further set deadline, the illiterate female population may as well be the focus of the adult literacy programs.

<Figure 7: Gender Parity Index in Pakistan>\textsuperscript{119}

The divide in literacy rates is not only limited to gender. As a federal state, consisting of four provinces and three federating units,\textsuperscript{120} Pakistan displays a conspicuous provincial discrepancy in adult literacy. While the


Islamabad Capital Territory, in which the national capital is situated, has an adult literacy rate of 82%. 63% of adult population in Balochistan is reported to be illiterate.\textsuperscript{121} The significant discrepancy becomes a critical problem primarily because Pakistan is a federal polity with a decentralized system of education. Even if the central government makes international commitments in order to boost its adult illiteracy rate and reach the EFA Goal 4 by 2015, Pakistan can only be accountable to its commitment when state governments’ policies are aligned with the initiatives of the central government. An analysis on Pakistan’s current system of literacy provision, however, shows that the emphasis given to the adult literacy issue and the resources devoted to it differ considerably by provinces. The gap between the resources mobilized by provinces is merely one of the factors hindering Pakistan from missing its goal of reaching 73% adult literacy rate by 2015, by more than 5%.\textsuperscript{122}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Literacy Rate (%)</th>
<th>Literate Population (in 1,000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>64.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>67.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>72.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


5.3.2. Literacy Policies

The importance of literacy is well acknowledged by the Pakistani government. The National Education Policy (1998-2010) stipulates that in order to reach the EFA Goal 4 until 2015, “achieving universal primary education” is the foremost priority of Pakistan. Although the Education Policy specifies that the focus on primary education will be complemented by non-formal education, adult education is a neglected sector in the national education scheme, as even the plans on non-formal education are focused on children and young adolescents, sidelining literacy and education for the youth and adults.

The LIFE framework, since its launch in 2006, acted as a catalyst for the government to take adult literacy issues into consideration. The Ministry of Education became the LIFE focal point and the Pakistani Ministry of Education reported that after the implementation of the LIFE framework, a LIFE Core Group composed of public and civil society stakeholders involved in literacy provision was formed with the Ministry of Education at the helm. In addition,
a Parliamentarian Caucus on Literacy in Pakistan (PCLP) made up of politicians, education specialists and members from the civil society was created to promote the adult literacy agenda and to gather support for literacy programs.¹²⁷

The Pakistani government further reports that the launch of LIFE framework also paved way to the drafting of literacy and non-formal education plans on the national and provincial level, with a national target of literacy rate of 86%.¹²⁸ Advocacy on adult literacy, one of LIFE’s key objective, took form in approximately 150 government-initiated workshops for national actors involved in literacy provision.¹²⁹ Another major milestone for Pakistan was the launch of the National Curriculum for Literacy in 2007. This national curriculum is a collaborative output produced by the Ministry of Education, with consultative assistance from the civil society as well as the provincial-level governments.¹³⁰

Albeit the ambitious target and the plans in progress, literacy provision in Pakistan is suffering a severe lack of resources. Universal primary education,

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due to the government’s initiative and with the direct or indirect pressure on EFA from the World Bank, has been greatly emphasized during the EFA era. The percentage of each sector within Pakistan’s annual education budget is a definite proof; while 43% of the budget is allotted to primary education, 24% and 23% is spent on secondary and on higher education respectively, which leaves merely 10% of the education budget to the sidelined sectors of education, encompassing “adult literacy, non-formal education, teachers training, [and] madrassahs reform.”

5.3.3. Actors

The Government

The Constitution of Pakistan is unique in that it plainly notes the state’s role in literacy provision, by stipulating that “the state shall remove illiteracy.” The responsibilities of education, and more specifically, the responsibility of adult literacy provision, is shared by the federal state and provincial governments. Ever since the decentralization strategy in the education sector was introduced to Pakistan in 2001, a new district level has been formed under the provinces, thereby giving more competencies to the

local level.\textsuperscript{133} After the reforms in 2001, the Ministry of Education is now responsible for policymaking, coordinating, and monitoring education programs, whereas the provincial Education Ministers are in charge of managing and implementing programs at all levels.\textsuperscript{134} Newly installed sub-national district governments play the role of “planning human resource, physical, and financial needs of the education sector”\textsuperscript{135} at the local standpoint.

The government in all levels, however, are not the primary actors in the non-formal education sector. During the devolution process of the Pakistani education system in 2001, the Pakistani government analyzed that programs managed by NGOs and other civil society organizations were relatively more successful than programs led by “the government and world bodies”\textsuperscript{136} due to the NGOs’ bottom-up characteristics. Government initiatives, however, do exist. The National Literacy Campaign, led by the National Commission for Human Development has reportedly opened 6,000 Adult Literacy Centers across the country.\textsuperscript{137} Choudhry (2005) suggests that as of 2005, there were 13,000 literacy centers in operation. While some of them were established by the

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid. pp. 6-7.
government, others were financed by the civil society.

NGOs

Because of the little attention and financial support given to the adult literacy agenda, actors in the private sector have been the primary implementers of adult literacy policies as well as initiatives. This trend was aided by the decentralization plans which was put into action in Pakistan from 2001. The NGOs involved in education take part in the consultative process of education policymaking.\textsuperscript{138} Representatives of NGOs are part of the LIFE Core Group and the Parliamentary Caucus. National-level NGOs such as the BUNYAD Literacy Council, the Pakistani Association for Continuing and Adult Education (PACADE), as well as caste-based organizations (CBOs)\textsuperscript{139} are actively taking part in the LIFE framework. One interesting category of stakeholders involved in literacy provision is the academia; universities including the Fatima Jinnah Women University, the Islamia University Bahawalpur,\textsuperscript{140} and the Allama Iqbal Open University\textsuperscript{141} participated in

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
developing policies as well as the national literacy curriculum.

5.3.4. External Assistance

Like Bangladesh, Pakistan is a beneficiary of UNESCO’s CapEFA Programme. Since the CapEFA program in Pakistan was targeted at the literacy and non-formal education sector and as the period of the CapEFA program completely overlaps with that of the LIFE framework, it is difficult to separate the outcome of LIFE from that of the CapEFA in Pakistan. During the period of 2006 to 2009, Pakistan has received US$980,000 for capacity development concerning “adult literacy and non-formal basic education.” The financial assistance from the CapEFA program in the case of Pakistan was used to create “gender responsive” literacy materials as well as materials on the Community Learning Center (CLC) model which is in full operation in other Asian countries, including Nepal and Bangladesh. The CapEFA project also aided workshops on literacy for NGO and NFE managers.

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5.4. A Comparative Analysis

A comparison of the three LIFE countries in South Asia shows that all three countries experienced certain degrees of progress in their adult literacy rates and in their gender parity index. Table 7 and Figure 8 indicate the progress in each country in adult literacy rates and GPI. The progress in adult literacy rate was calculated by subtracting the literacy rate from the period of 1994-2005 from that of 2006-2011. The year 2006 was used as the watershed in terms of adult literacy rates, as it is the year when the UNESCO LIFE framework was launched in all three countries. Progress in achieving gender equality in adult literacy was also calculated in the same way as that of adult literacy rates.

![Figure 8: Progress towards EFA Literacy Goal in LIFE Countries](143)

Among the three countries, Bangladesh has shown the strongest initiative. In terms of literacy rates, after Bangladesh comes Pakistan, and then India with the smallest improvement in literacy rate as well as GPI. Bangladesh’s literacy rate has increased by more than 10% and its GPI has also increased. With the highest gender parity among the three cases, Bangladesh is missing the EFA Goal 5, achieving gender equality in education by 0.14. Pakistan has also fared relatively well, by achieving an 8.8% increase. India’s progress was the slowest. India achieved a 1.8% increase in its literacy rate and a 0.03 increase in its GPI.

The best case among the three, Bangladesh, is different from other countries in that it is the only unitary government with a centralized education structure. In addition, NGO participation was strong during the implementation process. Pakistan, on the other hand, is a federal state with a decentralized education system and the government led the establishment of adult literacy centers around the country. There, however, were voices heard from the community-level during the devising period of projects and uniquely, universities were involved in creating curriculums and project designs. Pakistan, like Bangladesh received the assistance extra-budgetary CapEFA Program from UNESCO for capacity development in literacy and non-formal education. India, however, did not. Despite its political decentralization, India has a three-tiered governmental system, making central government-led plans even more difficult to be implemented down to the district level. In addition, the government was the main literacy provider via centrally sponsored mass campaigns.
All in all, the three LIFE countries which were analyzed in this research have achieved progress in their literacy rates and in their gender parity index. This, however, does not change the fact that their most recent data on literacy strongly suggest that they will not be able to achieve the EFA Goal 4 and 5, the achievement of which is the key objective of the UNESCO LIFE framework. Bangladesh and Pakistan’s most recent literacy rates miss the EFA Goal 4 by around 16%. For India to reach the EFA Goal 4, 18.2% of the adult population needs access to literacy education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Pakistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Progress in Literacy Rate</td>
<td>+10.2</td>
<td>+1.8</td>
<td>+5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Goal 4</td>
<td>-16.3</td>
<td>-18.2</td>
<td>-16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress in GPI</td>
<td>+1.0</td>
<td>+0.03</td>
<td>+0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Goal 5</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Pakistan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
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<td>Federal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education System</td>
<td>Centralized</td>
<td>Decentralized</td>
<td>Decentralized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIFE Focal Point</td>
<td>Bureau of Non-Formal Education</td>
<td>National Literacy Mission</td>
<td>The Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO Involvement</td>
<td>Umbrella NGO</td>
<td>Weak Consultative</td>
<td>NGOs, CBOs, universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modality</td>
<td>CLCs</td>
<td>Government-led mass campaigns</td>
<td>CLCs</td>
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<tr>
<td>External Assistance</td>
<td>CapEFA</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>CapEFA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<Table 7: Progress and Modalities in Literacy in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan>
In order to verify the decisive factors that led to the progress in adult literacy provision in the three cases, this research set focus on three factors likely to affect adult education in each country: literacy policies, actors, and external assistance from UNESCO. The policymaking and policy implementation on literacy in each country shows elements of convergence as well as divergence in the key factors.

**Sidelineing of Literacy**

One commonality evident in all cases is the sidelining of literacy and non-formal education for adults. Country reports by UNESCO as well as accounts drafted by national governments indicate that the national governments are well aware of all of the six EFA goals set in Dakar in 2000. Although fully acknowledging the significance of each goal, the national governments strongly placed priority in universal primary education. Education budgets were concentrated mainly on the formal education sector, whereas the non-formal education sector and education for youth and adults received nominal amount of financial resources.

External assistance from multilateral and bilateral aid organizations added to the government’s inclination to promote EFA Goal 2 on UPE; the World Bank, the international organization with the largest financial presence in international education, focused almost exclusively on UPE for its EFA agenda. Although UPE is a pivotal goal which the international community
should achieve in the near future, it overshadows the other EFA goals. Sidelining of literacy, therefore, arises from the isomorphic trend triggered from the national and international level.

**Two Decisive Factors Affecting Literacy Provision**

Because of the sidelining of literacy, actions taken by UNESCO on international literacy have great repercussions on each country’s literacy policy. As the single organization which has promoted literacy as part of its mandate since its conception, UNESCO is the most authoritative actor on global literacy. Consequently, UNESCO’s extra-budgetary assistance on capacity development, the CapEFA Program, resulted in a convergence in the modality of adult literacy provision in three countries subject to the comparative analysis. The CapEFA Program, in the case of the three countries, acted as a coercive isomorphic force. Funded by the governments of Denmark, Finland, Italy, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, the CapEFA Program was earmarked for the capacity development in literacy and non-formal education in Bangladesh and Pakistan. The fund provided via the CapEFA Program was by no means large, amounting “between US$ 74,000 and US$ 995,000.” The lack of national budget allotted to adult literacy provision, however, amplified the impact of the funds.

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The national governments of the three recipients of the CapEFA Program chose the Community Learning Centers as the main modality of literacy provision. The extent of government involvement in adult literacy provision and the contents of education provided in each country differed considerably. In Bangladesh, civil society organizations showed strong initiatives in opening and managing the CLCs and had free reins to create new curriculums for adult literacy education, whereas in Pakistan, a national curriculum was developed by the federal government. Nevertheless, the two countries showed isomorphic tendencies in that they adopted flexible, bottom-up approaches to adult literacy provision, with active participation from NGOs, CBOs, and universities on the national level. Bangladesh, in particular, is a case in point which showcases the significant role that an umbrella NGO network can play on providing literacy education for adults in a relatively more organized manner. UNESCO LIFE’s emphasis on community-based, flexible approach to adult literacy provision has so far been effective. The degree may vary, but the results of the South Asian LIFE countries indicate that Bangladesh and Pakistan, which have or are in the process of adopting the isomorphic policies and modalities set by UNESCO, experienced greater progress in their literacy rates.

India, on the other hand, displays the tendency of decoupling from isomorphic tendency in literacy provision. To boost its literacy rate, India adopted a mass literacy campaign led by the government. A number of factors influenced India’s decision – the success of the government-led Total Literacy
Campaign in the late 1980s and the 1990s and the traditional “rigid structure” of the Indian bureaucracy which persists after the decentralization, to name a few. Mathew (2005), in the background paper for the *EFA Monitoring Report 2006, Literacy for Life*, asserts that in India, the literacy sector has been the field where “a major non-government say in the approach and strategy and presence in organizational structures and management and monitoring system” was visible, but the flexibility of the Indian approach paled to that in Bangladesh and Pakistan. One critical difference between India and the other two countries is that in the case of India, external pressure of the UNESCO, in the form of the CapEFA Program, was missing.

However, among the two countries which were recipients to the extra external assistance from UNESCO, emerges another discrepancy in the actors who implemented the policies on the ground. In the case of Pakistan, the central government was the main actor which opened the adult literacy centers around the country while in Bangladesh, CLCs were operated by the communities themselves. Another trait noticeable in the Bangladeshi case is that in Bangladesh, decision-making on literacy programs were made with the NGOs, and members of the communities deeply involed, and that the decision making process was bottom-up rather than top-down. The case of Bangladesh had a civil society organization, CAMPE, which served the monitoring as well as the evaluating role, and was consulted by UNESCO during the process of LIFE policymaking. NGO managers in Bangladesh were also the target of capacity training, leading to educated volunteers and eventually, to a higher adult literacy
A case study of UNESCO LIFE in the three South Asian countries leads to two interesting findings. First, among a number of factors which can affect the whereabouts of national literacy policies, external assistance from UNESCO and more importantly, active community participation have shown to be the decisive factors that affect adult literacy rates in the LIFE countries. The UNESCO LIFE Framework itself also served as a force of isomorphism.

As the “LIFE Vision and Strategy Paper” suggests, LIFE puts national governments at the center of its implementation. By launching LIFE, the three LIFE countries national governments became more responsible for literacy provision. By appointing LIFE focal points, UNESCO LIFE concentrates the decision-making authority on literacy provision to national governments. This move is not an unusual one for UNESCO. Indeed, UNESCO’s focus on sector-wide approaches towards education and capacity development of national governments clearly show that UNESCO’s main counterpart in technical assistance has always been national governments.

Now that the national governments become the primary decision-maker of literacy policies, each country’s LIFE framework takes a different form and involves different actors. In Bangladesh and Pakistan, the LIFE framework was implemented simultaneously with UNESCO’s CapEFA
Program. These cases showcased that formal pressure by external actors can lead to stronger and coercive isomorphism. India, which had received only the technical assistance via regional meetings, country reports, and internet resources, on the other hand, remained unchanged in its approach towards adult literacy provision. The newly instated Saakshar Bharat Mission has more commonalities with its predecessor the Total Literacy Campaign than the modalities promoted by UNESCO.

But considering that UNESCO LIFE itself acts as a force of isomorphism, India may be the case in which the country’s structure of governance and education was at odds with the UNESCO LIFE’s “one-sized” mold. Indeed, UNESCO LIFE too is designed to strengthen the capacity of the central government. UNESCO does not underestimate the importance of civil society participation in promoting literacy. In fact, it is the UNESCO UNLD report that emphasizes that in the case of literacy provision, “the participation of civil society is particularly crucial since CSOs run so many programmes on the ground.”146 This report further highlights the significance of the local context of literacy and contents that “local ownership and management of literacy programmes are the best way forward.”147 This view is in accordance with that of Robinson (2005) which stipulates that the civil society and NGOs

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147 Ibid. p. 54.
are the actors which have a long history of focusing on adult literacy. Robinson (2005) further highlights that when designing literacy provision, diversity is the key issue to be taken into account.

UNESCO acknowledging the importance of civil society participation, however, has not directly create a framework which puts the lesson into actual practice. The LIFE framework is by no means a “one-size-fits-all” program which was promoted during the 1950s and 1960s with an aim to eradicate illiteracy. Nevertheless, it embodies the "traditional" approach taken by UNESCO: education is the government's responsibility and it is the government that sets the education policy.

A probing into the LIFE framework reveals the following findings. First, certain departments or centers on the national government level is appointed as the LIFE focal points. The LIFE focal points are the main agents of the LIFE framework. Each focal point is at the center of advocacy and according to the LIFE Vision and Strategy Paper (2007), ultimately in charge of delivering the literacy programs as well. Second, UNESCO, through LIFE, aims to disseminate good practices of literacy provision. One example of this is the promotion of community learning centers in Asia. Lastly, UNESCO, via the CapEFA Program promoted in two of the three LIFE countries in South Asia, puts efforts in the capability development of central government.

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For community participation, the UNESCO LIFE framework itself calls for more “partnerships” with members of the civil society. UNESCO LIFE’s reach, however, primarily remains with the national government. This approach fits well with unitary governments but complicates the matter when state-governments are involved. Even in the case of federal governments it is the national government’s capacity which is of UNESCO’s concern. Literacy programs and capacity for the state- or district-level entities are missing.

Added to the isomorphic force of LIFE are other sources of isomorphism in education. The isomorphic force of UNESCO LIFE with CapEFA is relatively weak compared to that of the World Bank. The World Bank’s primary educational concern is on the achievement of universal primary education and the Bank’s impressive financial and political influence on national governments, leads to yet another isomorphic tendency of the sidelining of literacy education. All countries analyzed in this research are far from achieving the EFA Goal 4 by 2015 and adult literacy. Isomorphic trends originating from the international level are conflicting with each other, thereby affecting the education system and policy of national governments and sub-national governments to neglect the provision of literacy education.

All in all, LIFE, although a framework which formed worldwide initiatives to boost adult literacy rates, is a flawed program which did not take the importance of community participation in adult literacy provision as well as the diverse educational systems of national governments fully into account. UNESCO, due to its lack of financial resources, is threatened by the coercive
isomorphism on promoting universal primary education from the World Bank and major bilateral agencies. Despite the efforts of international and national actors in the field of literacy, adult literacy remains to be a sidelined issue even as the EFA agenda is coming to a close.
6. Conclusion

By conducting a comparative case study on the UNESCO LIFE framework, this research identified the factors that contribute to progress in adult literacy in the cases of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Through a qualitative analysis on three dimensions – educational structure, main actors, and the availability of external assistance from UNESCO – in each of the LIFE countries in South Asia, technical assistance with financial backing and active participation from the community level are shown to be the decisive factors that affect the modality of literacy provision on the national and sub-national level as well as the increase in the literacy rate and gender parity index in each country. Bangladesh and Pakistan, regardless of their structure of the education systems, or main actors involved in literacy provision, displayed an isomorphic tendency in literacy policies and in the modalities used to implement the policies. In the case of adult literacy, the community-based method has shown to be effective in boosting the literacy rate in each country. A decoupling from the prevalent isomorphism in literacy policies was detected in India, which is not the recipient of the CapEFA Program which provides technical and financial aid earmarked for the field of literacy and non-formal education.

A stronger trend of isomorphism, initiated by the World Bank and multiple bilateral donors, however, is at odds with UNESCO’s isomorphic ideals on adult literacy. Suffering from a severe lack of financial and technical
resources on education, and pressured with the World Bank’s emphasis on achieving the EFA Goal on universal primary education, the case countries prioritized primary education, thereby sidelining issues concerning adult literacy and non-formal education for adults. Multiple trends of isomorphism arising from the international level leaves strong impacts on the education system and policies of each government, and recipient countries converged to relatively more coercive isomorphic ideas with conditionality and financial strings attached. LIFE itself, especially in countries with additional assistance from UNESCO in the form of the CapEFA Program, acted as a force of isomorphism.

While the implementation of the LIFE framework led to a higher progress in countries that fit the mold in terms of educational and governmental structure, as in the case of unitary Bangladesh with a centralized educational structure, countries with decentralized education systems and multilayered governments experienced difficulty in implementing the literacy policies originating from the central governmental level. All in all, this leaves an important lesson for future UNESCO programs on adult literacy: without considering the national or sub-national implementers of literacy provision, giving full ownership to national governments alone does not lead to progress in adult literacy rates and gender equality in literacy.
Limitations and Topics for Further Research

In order to assess the progress in adult literacy in the LIFE countries, this research employed the indicators used by UNESCO: national adult literacy rates and gender parity indices. This methodology, however, has the shortcoming of not being able to put one important factor in literacy provision into consideration: the quality of literacy programs. There is a significant lack of data available on the quality of literacy education in any of the LIFE countries. In addition, the quantitative literacy rates and gender parity indices provided by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, although being the most authoritative data on literacy currently available, have their own limitations as many nation states have different definitions on literate people and the way of taking census of conducting household surveys to count the national literacy rates differs. To better document and analyze the state of adult literacy in developing countries, methodologies to collect statistical literacy data as well as qualitative data needs to be developed in the future.
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Abstract in Korean

배제된 문해율:
UNESCO LIFE에 대한 비교 연구

염수 연
서울대학교 국제대학원
국제학과 국제협력전공

모국어로 글을 읽고 쓸 줄 아는 능력인 문해율은 교육을 위한 가장 기본적인 조건일 뿐만 아니라 개발도상국의 개발 정도를 측정하는 지표로 사용되고 있다. 그러나 국제적으로 각 국가의 문해율은 다른 교육 정책에 밀려 큰 관심을 받지 못해왔고, 그 결과 낮은 문해율이 여전히 고질적인 문제로 남아있는 나라가 많은 것이 현실이다.

이 연구는 국제기구 차원에서 문해교육의 실상을 살펴보고 국제 기구의 정책이 각국의 문해율에 미치는 영향력을 분석하는데 목적이 있다. 이를 위해 2006년 국제연합교육과학문화기구(UNESCO)의 주관으로 발족한 역량강화를 위한 문해사업(the Literacy
Initiative for Empowerment) 참여 국가 35개국 중 방글라데시, 인도, 파키스탄 3개국의 사례를 중심으로 비교 연구를 실시하였다.

이 연구에서는 세 국가의 문해율 교육정책, 교육 거버넌스 및 외부 지원이라는 세 가지 요소를 중심으로 비교 분석을 시도하였다. 분석 결과, 교육에 대한 관심이 부족한 개발도상국에서 국제기구 차원의 예산 지원과 기술 제공, 그리고 비정부기구나 시민단체의 문해율 교육에 대한 적극적인 참여가 문해율 상승에 기여한다는 점을 확인하였다.

주요어: 성인 문해율, 모두를 위한 교육 (Education for All), 국제연합 교육과학문화기구 (UNESCO), 사회학적 제도주의 (sociological institutionalism)

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