A Document Analysis of Community Learning Centers in Australia: Development of A Model for Pakistan

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Purpose: This research explores the emerging role of Community Learning Centers as a vehicle of change in Australia, as a best practice model. This study was a part of research thesis for the development of a model of community learning center in Pakistan.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Furthermore, this study was qualitative and based on document review. For this purpose, World Bank WBI Evaluation process was followed to conclude the findings. In this research, ten reports and official documents were retrieved from 1st October 2023 to 31st January 2024. Moreover, priori framework was used for thematic analysis.

Findings: The major themes were: background, organization, program implementation, impact and challenges. The findings elaborated the legislative support, policy safeguards and quality measures of AQF and ASQA for 2500 registered training organizations of community learning in all eight states and territories. It includes public and not-for-profit facilities with aim of personal enrichment, adult basic education, accredited and non-accredited vocational education. These facilities were providing seamless transition from non-formal education to formal education as well as increasing employability and productivity of remote, rural and high equity groups.

Implications/Originality/Value: This insight will provide guidelines for policy, structure and implementation in Pakistan in the long run.

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Introduction
Pakistan continues to struggle with low enrollment rates in education, especially in rural areas and among disadvantaged groups, despite attempts to enhance access. This issue is exacerbated by economic
obstacles, cultural constraints, and inadequate infrastructure, which hinder many from pursuing education. Pakistan's overall 26.2 million children are out of school, according to ASER 2023. There are also significant disparities in literacy rates between urban and rural areas and between males and females, with 76% of urban areas being literate compared to 51% of rural areas. The net enrollment rate at the primary level (grades 1-5) was around 77% in 2020-21 (ASER-Pakistan, 2022). However, dropout rates remain high, especially at the secondary level. These statistics highlight the need for continued efforts to improve education in Pakistan, particularly in addressing gender and geographic disparities, as well as reducing dropout rates to ensure that all students have the opportunity to complete their education. Moreover, tackling socio-economic disparities and fostering community engagement in education can help surmount many of the obstacles to education in Pakistan.

Community learning is a collaborative process where individuals come together to share their knowledge, skills, and experiences, creating a collective learning environment whether informal or formal that results in engagement and empowerment. The social and cultural structures are vital for the community engagement. Community learning plays a critical role in providing marginalized youth and children with essential skills, including functional literacy, vocational skills, and work-related skills. This is particularly important for those who are unable to continue their education in the formal system due to disability or other social and economic factors (Belete et al., 2022).

**Literature Review**

In 1998, the UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok launched a Community Learning Centre (CLC) project as part of its Asia Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL) (UNESCO Bangkok, 2001). The initiative aimed to reach marginalized individuals with limited access to education. A CLC was defined as a local learning hub outside the formal education system, established and managed by community members to provide diverse learning opportunities for community development and improved quality of life. Notably, a CLC can operate from existing infrastructure such as health centers, places of worship, or primary schools, eliminating the need for new building (UNESCO, 2013). The APPEAL project is showcased in a compilation titled "Community-Based Lifelong Learning and Adult Education: Situations of Community Learning Centres in 7 Asian Countries" (UNESCO Bangkok, 2016). This collection highlights the diverse experiences and situations of Community Learning Centres across seven Asian countries, underscoring the importance of inclusive and community-driven approaches to lifelong learning. Examples of such institutions include folk high schools in Scandinavian countries (Bjerkaker, 2021), Volkshochschulen in Germany (Lattke & Ioannidou, 2021), adult education centers in Georgia (Sanadze & Santeladze, 2017), and similar centers in Belarus and Ukraine, which are often attached to "houses of culture" run by local governments (Lukyanova & Veramejchyy, 2017; Smirnov & Andrieiev, 2021). Other examples include Japan's kominkan (Oyasu, 2021).

Community learning in Australia is an important component of the country's educational landscape, encompassing a diverse range of initiatives that promote lifelong learning and social capital development. The education system is guided by the principles of accessibility, inclusivity, and community-driven empowerment, these initiatives provide a wide range of educational programs designed to meet the unique needs and interests of individuals, communities and regions. These include adult learning organizations, community learning centers & colleges, recreational programs, neighborhood houses, vocational and technical education, indigenous learning programs, and informal learning networks (Adult Learning Australia, 2020).

Together, they offer a vast range of courses, workshops, and activities that encompass essential skills like literacy and numeracy, digital literacy, vocational training (accredited or non-accredited), employment and recreational pursuits like arts and crafts. Additionally, they address important areas such as health and well-being, environmental sustainability, and cultural awareness, promoting holistic community development and social cohesion (Community Colleges Australia, 2022).
Unfortunately, Pakistan faces challenges in achieving universal primary education due to low enrollment rates and high dropout rates at the primary level and furthermore at secondary level, with significant disparities in enrollment based on geographic location, gender, and special educational needs. Despite signing onto the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Pakistan fell short of achieving 100% universal primary education by 2015. However, the nation is now committed to achieving other SDG indicators, including quality education. By addressing the root causes of inequality and empowering local communities to take ownership of education, Pakistan can make significant strides in improving access to quality education and employment to its citizens.

Pakistan can draw valuable insights and inspiration from Australia's community learning approaches, which can inform and strengthen its own community education initiatives, leading to more effective and inclusive learning opportunities for its citizens. This study aims to bring forth a view of Australia’s community learning for the establishment of a community learning model for Pakistan.

**Objectives of the Study**
1. To understand the structure of community learning in Australia.
2. To examine the contribution of community learning centers in Australia.
3. To identify the implication in the contexts of Pakistan.

**Research Methodology**
This study employed a qualitative world view to explain the phenomenon of community learning centers, while adopting a qualitative research approach. The research paradigm is rooted in interpretation. Community learning in Australia was addressed as a case and different official document were treated as the source of information. A thick description is developed by the qualitative document review. For the procedure of document review a protocol is developed with the help of established research procedures. As document review was outlined by Glenn A. Bowen (2009) is used, that involves systematically identifying, extracting, and analyzing information from existing documents. Following the guidance of the World Bank WBI Evaluation Group (2007), a systematic process of extracting the information is adopted. That involves accessing, synthesizing, and evaluating official documents published by government bodies. Carroll C. & Booth A. (2013) priori frameworks was used for drawing upon deductive themes of this research.

**Inclusion Criteria**
Inclusion criteria was developed to ensure the validity of the research, with a focus on public records from government offices and international agencies. The source of the documents were government websites and database between October 1, 2023, and January 31, 2024. Initially, 25 documents were retrieved, meticulously studied, and then narrowed down to a final selection of 10 documents on the bases of deductive themes of the research.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Document Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Adult Community Education: Australian Environmental Scan 2020</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Adult Learning Australia</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>The Role of Community Education in Australian Regional and Rural Economic Development</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Community Colleges Australia</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Adult Learning Australia: Pre-budget Submission 2022</td>
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<td>Common Wealth of Australia</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Australia Country Education Profile</td>
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<td>Community Colleges Australia: 2022 in a review</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>VERTO Conference: Don Perlgut</td>
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Data Analysis
A data analysis matrix was created in MS Excel to organize and examine the documents aligned with the priori framework themes. During the data familiarization and synthesis process, additional codes and emerging themes were incorporated into the analysis, enabling a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the data.

Results
Community Learning in Australia
Community learning centers have emerged as a vehicle of change in remote indigenous communities by meeting individual and specialized community aspirations. Australia, a developed and sound economy has its 82% of population between 15-24 years engaged in full-time studying or work, among them 83% were male and 82% were female, across states and territories. In them, 86% were in capital territory and 79 % were in South Australia. Along them 10% of the population of same group were in partial engagement of studying or work. In 2023, 20-24 years age group 90% has attained the certificate III or 12 years and above qualification, 93% of them were female and 87% were male. In this situation, the educational challenge appear in Australia were equitable education outcomes, to eliminate gender gap and the level of tertiary qualification for the indigenous people in regional, rural remote areas.

In 2023, 15-74 years 63% has attained non-school qualification. In the same year, 11% of 15-74 years of age were studying the non-school qualification. The young people between 15-24 years age group 61% were at school in 2023 and 40% of 20-24 years were towards the non-school qualification. In the Commonwealth of Australia, it comprises eight states and territories. Education and training are state and territory governments’ responsibility, moreover the Australian government and states share the finance and administration. The non-school qualification comprises informal and no-formal education and training. In Australia, it includes different opportunities such as social and lifelong learning programs, vocational education and training, community education and adult education programs in capital and state territories.

Background
Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) is the national policy of education in Australia for the qualification regularization, that is agreed by the Australian government and state territories. The educational planning process is practiced through National Cabinet, formally it was known Council of Australian Governments. The National Cabinet is responsible for the key decisions, it is a forum that provides opportunities to the leaders of national, state and territories to make decisions on national matter. The education process, consists of three distinct parts school education, vocational education and training and higher education. The quality of AQF is accredited by Tertiary Quality and Education Standard Agency (TQESA) and Australian Skill Quality Authority (ASQA) or state or territories authorities. Australian higher education institution and registered training organization (RTOs) are approved and registered to their respective authorities, TQESA and AQSA. In Australia, the vocational education and training is flexible and multiple pathways. Australian Skill Quality Authority is VET regularity authority which includes national, state and territories government, registered training organizations and the industry sector for shaping polices to develop workforce. VET is high quality and nationally recognized that is strengthen by National Skill Commission with public, private and adult and community-based RTOs.

Philosophical Background
The community education is highly focused in Australia. Different RTOs are register in public and private sector for community education. Learner-centered and need-based accessible lifelong learning opportunities are available through Adult Community Education (ACE) program. ACE organizations are not-for-profit organizations that can be tracked back to 1880s. It is a distinct connection between educational settings, workplaces and communities. ACE got recognition in 1990s and acknowledgement from Council of Australian Government for social inclusion and skills & workforce development. Moreover, in 2002 it has accommodated different changes in education and training. In 2008, Ministerial Declaration called for more value adding role in VET, as ACE already started to align with the community demands.

**Definition and Purpose**

The ACE is supported and defined in states and territories in different ways. Mostly, recognize as informal and non-formal education programs for personal enrichment and adult basic education. All jurisdiction, specifically focus disadvantage and disengaged adults in learning process for workforce and work-related outcomes. In NSW and Victoria ACE contributes all types of learning programs including formal VET. In Australia, there are almost 2500 ACE providers. Personal Enrichment/ Interest Learning is a specialized area that is offered in all ACE facilities, most of adult community education program include literacy, numeracy, language, digital and other basic skills. Between 250-400 ACE providers offer vocational education and training, that are mostly present in NSW and Victoria. These programs are whether formal or non-formal (accredited or non-accredited). In the year 2018, there were 13,426 program enrolments in adult basic education programs at RTOs/ community education providers. This program includes many equity groups as people with disability, unemployment and non-English speaking background. In nationally recognized ACE vocational training 481,200 students were enrolled in the same year. According to VET 2019 Student Outcome Report 16.7% were shifted from unemployment to employment. The satisfaction level of the students was exceptional from the ACE.

**Organization**

Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) provides the essential compliance standard protocol and essential conditions for the organization and implementation of all programs. AQTF is developed with the collaboration of Australian Government, state and territory governments. The ACE providers are organized and registered according to their core activity focus and influenced by the state and territory government in which it operates. Each jurisdiction funds and operate differently according to their community demands.

The ACE providers have various names in different states as they are disparate groups such as: community centers, community colleges, neighborhood houses, community men’s shed, university of third age and more.

**Legal Support**

The National Vocation Education and Training Act 2011 was the bases for high-quality vocational education training sector. However, in the late 1980s, Australia responded to global changes by introducing the National Training Reform Agenda (1987-1996). This included establishing a Standards Framework for vocational education and training credentials to reform the system and its ties to the workplace. As a result, there was a transition from Commonwealth to Territory government delivery of education, leading to a more formalized approach to adult learning and school-to-work transitions.

**Aims and Objectives**

The core objectives of this Adult Community Education Program were personal enrichment in lifelong learning paradigm but by considering the variations of community needs and demands it contains significant variations. The preliminary aims are the literacy, life skills and vocational education. The basic four areas where it delivers are:

1- Personal enrichment program, including formal and non-formal educational set ups.
2- Adult basic education whether in formal or non-formal settings.
3- Formal training and vocational education
4- Building pathways from non-formal education to formal education settings

Program Implementation
The Australian Quality Framework (AQF) is a national body that sets compliance Standards and Essential Conditions for all educational programs in the Common Wealth. It supports Vocational Education and Training Quality Framework (VETQF) and AQTF for registered Training providers (RTOs). The AQTF provides collaboration within the government and state territories governments, industry sector and training organizations. AQTF supports high quality consistent VET sector throughout the country. It comprises the standards for state and territories bodies registration, accreditation and auditing.

Impact
The human resource development, increase in social capital and increased literacy skills are the major domains of impact that are created by the community learning centers. According to the core areas the impact can be seen as:

1- Personal enrichment learning: According to ABS 2016-17, 1.1 million Australian has participated in personal enrichment programs of ACE. The basic goal of 36.6% was to improve and learn skills, 33.8 for the interest and recreation and 25.5 % joined for personal development. It contributes for the personal hygiene, health and well being as it provides the opportunities for socialization, learning and passing different skill, and physical and mental functioning.

2- Adult Basic Education has improved self-confidence, self-functioning and developed better understanding of work and further motivates for learning. It can be alone or with vocational content whether accredited or non-accredited. Dymock (2007) gauged the non-accredited enrollment around 4000 students engaged in 125 providers except Northern Territory of Australia. Accredited Adult Basic Education program includes social skills courses, employment courses, general education program and mixed education program. In 2018, there were 13,426 enrollments in ACE VET providers. Various equity groups such as people with disability, non-English speaking background, unemployment and outer and remote regions have significant representation in ACE VET programs. In this way, ACE VET are responding to high literacy challenge of social equity and inclusion.

3- ACE providers also deliver formal vocational education that help to increase work skills, increase job status and salaries. In 2018, 481,200 participants enrolled in ACE formal vocational programs. In ACE enrollment 36% were from regional and remote areas, 21% from people with disability and 35% were 45 years or over age groups.

4- The ACE Pathways Programs has increased opportunities for moving from one type of learning program to another that enhance learning experiences and life-wide opportunities. The pathways between above three learning activities make possible re-engagement in learning and build social inclusion and social capital for the country.

Challenges
Funding: The government funded programs are available for the ACE customer but still limited fund is barrier for participation, particularly disadvantage learners are from lowest income brackets. The cost of programs limits their ability to join the gateway for learning pathways.

Data: It is estimated that more than 2500 ACE providers are located in Australia but the limited data about their capacity, resources and contribution build a challenge to use its optimal potential. The assessing the appropriate contribution will acknowledge full range of outcome that can enhance the fund particularly equity group.
Conclusion
Pakistan can get valuable insights from the Australian community learning center model, which prioritizes inclusivity, accessibility, and community empowerment. By embracing comparable methodologies, Pakistan can bolster its community education initiatives, fostering a culture of lifelong learning and social capital building. Australian community learning centers offer a diverse range of programs, from literacy and vocational training to cultural and recreational activities, to meet the multifaceted needs of their communities. Pakistan can draw inspiration from this comprehensive approach, incorporating similar programs into its own community learning centers to address the unique requirements of its population, inclusivity, and fortify community strength. By implementing these strategies in a community learning model, Pakistan can establish vibrant community centers that catalyze personal growth, social wellbeing, employment and collective progress.

Recommendations
Building on the success of Australia's community learning centers, the following recommendations are for Pakistan's context to develop a model, aiming to enhance community education initiatives in community learning centers:

1- Australia sets a compelling example by providing dedicated government funding, legal support for community education programs, acknowledging their critical role in tackling pressing social and economic issues. Pakistan can similarly prioritize community-based educational initiatives by allocating necessary resources and implementing supportive policies, for establishing and maintaining such community learning centers for the provision of education and vocational training at their door steps in regional, remote and rural areas.

2- Pakistan can learn the development of educational policies and design from the Australia where the technocrats from the trade, industry and commerce are along the educational experts in educational planning process to foresee the needs of future requirements.

3- Australia's community education initiatives foster a culture of continuous learning, enabling individuals to pursue knowledge and skills beyond traditional schooling. Pakistan can adopt a similar approach, promoting a mindset shift that values lifelong learning and skill development, and providing opportunities for individuals to upskill and reskill throughout their lives, leading to personal growth, social capital and economic prosperity of the country.

4- Encourage individuals to take ownership of their learning journey, develop critical thinking skills, and adopt self-directed learning approaches whether in formal or informal settings and can also provide transition from informal learning to formal education.

5- Create welcoming and inclusive community learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of all community members, regardless of ability, gender, age, or background. Design facilities that are physically and socially accessible, incorporating flexible learning spaces and adaptive technologies to support the unique requirements and preferences of people with disabilities, women, youth, and marginalized groups.

6- Design and deliver personalized educational programs that cater to the unique requirements and aspirations of each community, offering a range of initiatives such as literacy classes, vocational training, agricultural knowledge, computer skills, trades, and entrepreneurship, language courses, health education, and citizenship management.

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