# The Factors Contributing to the Success of Community Learning Centers Program in Rural Community Literacy Development in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Case Studies of Two Rural Communities

Akbar Zolfaghari (Corresponding author)

Faculty of Human Ecology, University Putra Malaysia

No.17-14, Pangsapury Vista Impiana, Taman Bukit Serdang

Seksyen 10, 43300, Seri Kembangan, Selangor, Malaysia

H/P: 60-1-2264-6430     E-mail: Akbar_zolfaghari@yahoo.com


Associate Professor Dr. Mohammad Shatar Sabran

Director of UPM Co-curriculum Centre

University Putra Malaysia

UPM Serdang, Selangor, 43400, Malaysia

H/P: 60-1-9220-9818, Fax Number: 60-3-8946-8557     E-mail: Shatar@putra.upm.edu.my


Azam Zolfaghari

Payame Noor University: Kuala Lumpur Branch

No.17-14, Pangsapury Vista Impiana, Taman Bukit Serdang

Seksyen 10, 43300, Seri Kembangan, Selangor, Malaysia

H/P: 60-1-2264-6427     E-mail: Azam_zol2009@yahoo.com

**Abstract**

Literacy plays a significant role in community development. Without literacy, development goals cannot be achieved easily. Through literacy, the community does not face any challenge to improve their quality of life. For this reason, developed and developing countries nowadays are investing a lot on social and natural innovations, plus human capital in communities to increase their level of literacy. Iran is no exception. For this purpose, the government of Iran has formulated several community literacy development programs in the country. One of the major programs that has been implemented for this purpose is the Community Learning Centers Program (CLCP) (Mehdizadeh, 2003).

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, CLCP was implemented in early 2000. It has had very encouraging results in solving the problem of illiteracy in this country. All communities that have pioneered the program have experienced a remarkable increase in their literacy level (Ebrahimian, Bahirai, & Iranian National Commission for ISESCO, 2006). What are the reasons of such achievements? Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that have contributed to the success of CLCP in community literacy development in the Islamic republic of Iran.

**Keywords:** Community Learning Centers Program, Rural Community, Literacy, Development, Community Development

## 1. Introduction

Literacy and community development have a strong connection whereby literacy is a tool for community development. The main goal of community development is to improve the quality of life among community members. To achieve this goal, the government of Iran has implemented several programs to improve the level of literacy to improve the quality of life.

Among the programs that have been launched for literacy development were the Public Program, Literacy Program for Employees and Laborers, Literacy Program for the Armed Forces, Conscript Teacher Program, The Program of Literacy Mobilization, The Program for Nomadic People, Person to Person Program, Miscellaneous Learners, Literacy Program for People on Dole, Literacy Program with the Help of Prayer Imams in Mosques and Literacy Program for Parents at School. Community Learning Centers Program (CLCP) is among these programs that has been implemented for literacy development in order to improve the quality of life (Abhami, 2002; Ebrahimian, 2002b; Mehdizadeh, 2003).

CLCP is the newest and most important literacy program in post revolution Iran that was introduced by the Third and Forth Literacy Development Plans from 2000 to 2009 (Abhami, 2002; Ebrahimian, 2002a; Mehdizadeh, 2003). It emerged as a result of shortcomings in previous literacy programs. Since the implementation of the program in the early 2000s, CLCP has had encouraging results to solve the problem of illiteracy in the country. Those people who had participated in the literacy classes at CLCP experienced much improvement in their literacy levels (Abedi, 1991; Ebrahimian, et al., 2006).

Some argue that the success of CLCP was due to the presence of its effective activities while others believe that the success of CLCP was due to a combination of several factors. Therefore, the goal of this study is to find out the factors which have contributed to the success of CLCP in community literacy development in the Islamic republic of Iran. For this purpose, two rural communities namely Golshan and Nasr Abad in two different states of Kerman and Yazd in Iran were selected as case studies. The selection was based on their literacy level. The community with the lowest literacy level and most privation each state was chosen.

## 2. Methodology

To achieve the purpose, data were collected from three types of respondents: educators, learners and executives data. Learners' data were collected from those who have participated in CLCP in these communities to learn the literacy skills. Educators' data were collected from people who have participated in CLCP in these communities to teach the illiterates. Executives' data were collected from people who have participated in CLCP in these communities to help both educators and learners in achieving their goals.

The respondents were selected because they were involved directly with the CLCP in these communities. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondents. Primary and the secondary data were collected in this study. The primary data were collected through both Face to Face and Focus Group Discussion (FGD), while the secondary data were collected through the printed and unprinted media, published and unpublished articles, journals, books and reports.

The results of this study were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively such as transcriptions of data gathered during the interview with the respondents. In this study, the qualitative aspects of the documents both published and unpublished had been summarized and classified according to the necessary data

## 3. Results of the Study

Based on the study, what made the CLCP famous is not merely because of the successful roles that the program has implemented, but what makes it more interesting is the fact that the success of CLCP depended more on its relationship with other factors. This argument is supported by the results of the study that were gathered from two selected communities which participated in the CLCP. The respondents of the study believed that the government, community participation, good educators, local leaders, international organizations had helped CLCP in community literacy development in these communities. In their opinion, all of these factors worked together to the success of CLCP. According to the respondents, each factor had its own advantages and strengths. Removing one factor will retard the process of achieving success. This was because every single factor is inter-connected to each other. One factor is no more or less important than the other. The details of the results of factors which contributed to the success of CLCP in community literacy development in two communities that have been studied are shown in Figure 1.

As shown in Figure 1, one of the factors that had played a significant role to the success of CLCP in community literacy development in Iran is local leaders. The respondents believed that local leaders could act as spokespersons and as bridges between the government and the local people. They noted that local leaders also forwarded the demands of the local people to the government. The respondents said that without this factor, it was very difficult to convey any message or information from the national authorizations to the local people. It was also very difficult to organize people when the local leaders are not effective. Thus, effective local leaders are needed to ensure the success of programs in community development process. The presence of effective local leaders is a very significant contributing factor to the

success of the CLCP.

Respondents of the study also expressed that community participation had also made contributions to the program's ability in contributing to the success of CLCP in community literacy development besides local leaders. According to them, community participation had allowed CLCP to perform its duties in a more efficient and effective way. Based on the respondents, the CLCP did not have to waste its time convincing the people in the community to get together and work hard. Instead, it could use its time to concentrate on other major issues. With strong support, effort and time from the local people, CLCP in these communities was able to achieve its objectives with much less difficulty.

From the viewpoint of respondents of the study, the presence of good educators in these communities cannot be ignored to the success of the program. There is not much CLCP can do without the presence of good educators, regardless of how effective, efficient and good the CLCP was. Respondents of the study expressed that, good educators had allowed CLCP to well implement its duties. Based on the study, the existence of good educators had made it possible to use materials in CLCP with less difficulty. The selection of the right programs was also another function of good educators that was important to the success of CLCP in these communities. The respondents believed that without the selection of the right programs, CLCP would be helpless to contribute to the success of community literacy development programs. The respondents also asserted that the behavior pattern of educators played a major role in contributing to the success of CLCP. Good educators could play an important role in encouraging learners, improving the curriculum and assessment of professionals. They can also play an important role in the development of attitudes in learners, not only through the information that they convey to the learners but also through the manner in which they communicate.

According to the study, in addition to the factors above, the government of Iran had also helped CLCP in improving the level of literacy among people in these communities. The government had supported CLCP by furnishing the literacy classes, preparing the textbooks, establishing the planning objectives and providing the guidelines, information, and plans and funding levels. The government had also allocated the remarkable budgets and facilities for CLCP in these communities to promote the level of literacy and decrease the level of illiteracy.

As many respondents of the study revealed, international organizations is another factor that had played a key role in promoting the level of literacy in these communities. In their opinion, CLCP and the international organizations cooperatively employed the results of the international educational conferences and seminars to improve the teaching methods and level of literacy. They had cooperatively set up several workshops and seminars to facilitate the exchange of experiences among the participating communities and countries and to develop the CLCP number. Overall, as respondents mentioned, CLCP had developed its relationships with the international agencies to use the successful experiences of the other countries.

From the viewpoints of the respondents of the study, all of these factors had played a very significant role to the success of CLCP. These factors had major impacts to help CLCP in community literacy development. Without the presence of these important factors, the CLCP alone was not able to achieve this success. This is, because all of them are inter-connected and inter-dependent on each other, working together towards the success of the CLCP.

**4. Discussion**

The results of some studies show that, many factors contributed to the success of programs in community literacy development (Ahmadi, 2001; Bamberger, Economic Development, & Economic Development Institute Workshop in Community Participation, 1986; Fendley & Christenson, 1989; Mohseni, 1995; Reyahi, 1997; UNESCO, 2002; Werner, 1987). The most important factors are:

1. Local Leaders

2. Community Participation

3. Good Educators

4. Governments

5. International Agencies

Local leaders are being associated with the success of programs in community literacy development because they act as spokespersons and as bridges between the government and the local people. They forward the demands of the local people to the government. Without this factor, it is very difficult to convey any message or information from the national authorizations to the local people. It is very difficult to organize people when the leaders are not effective. Werner (Werner, 1987) believes that activities in communities are planned, started, organized, and controlled by the local leaders who are people in positions of authority, influence, or power. According to him, the local leaders have a major role in providing sources such as financial and material supports.

In addition to Werner, this argument has also been well supported by Ayres and Potter. Ayres and Potter (1989, p. 2) have noted that "the success or the failure of community development programs depended on the attitudes of leaders

towards change in the community". If the leaders have a positive attitude towards change in the community, they may have the courage, motivation and willingness to initiate some actions for the benefit of the whole community. If the leaders have negative attitudes, they may oppose to any change in the community.

Besides local leaders, community participation also makes contributions to the success of programs in community development. Community participation allows the programs to perform their duties in a more efficient and effective manner. Shatar Sabran(2003, p. 2)for example have illustrated that the participation of the local people is important in the process of community development. If local people have positive attitudes towards change, the rate of success of community development programs will be high. If there is a significant gap between the attitudes of leaders and community people, then it may be more difficult to initiate and implement any program successfully. The rate of success of any program will be higher if the gaps between attitudes of the leaders and the community people are minimized. Hence, it is better to close the gap completely.

The presence of good educators in communities is also another factor to the success of programs in community literacy development. The existence of good educators for example, makes it possible to use materials in programs with less difficulty. As UNESCO(2002) addressed, good educators are the main factors to help programs in community literacy development process. According to UNESCO(2002), the success of the programs largely hinges on the role of the good educators. Besides carrying out educational activities in programs, they are also supposed to work as a catalyst for change in communities. They also receive training in making use of locally available resources from different organizations like Agricultural Development Center and Health Center. They act as a bridge between learners and CLCP.

Apart from educators, governments also help programs improve the quality of life among people in communities. Governments support programs by preparing the resources, establishing the planning objectives and providing the guidelines, information and plans, and funding levels. They allocate the remarkable budgets and facilities for programs in communities. Ebrahimian, Bahirai and Iranian National Commission for ISESCO (2006) addressed the role of government in helping programs in community literacy development. In their list of criteria for the success of community literacy development programs, the government appears to be the first criteria on the list, followed by community participation, NGOs, educators, local leaders and international organizations.

International organizations are the next factors that help programs in promoting the quality of life. The results of the international educational conferences and seminars have been used by the local people to improve the teaching methods and to improve the level of literacy among people. International organizations implement several workshops and seminars to facilitate the exchange of experiences among the participating people and to develop the programs to solve the problems. International organizations exchange successful experiences of CLCPs among participating countries. The role of international organizations in the success of programs in community literacy development has been noted in the study conducted by Mirhosseini. Mirhosseini (1996, p. 91) has positively assessed the role of international organizations to help programs in the process of community literacy development. She adds that CLCP develops its relationships with international organizations to help them in teaching and educating the foreign emigrant illiterates. Indonesia has a good experience in this case. In the country, as mentioned by Simanjuntak and Bachtari (2004), international organizations support programs to provide a major section of the funding needs and to ensure the implementation, monitoring and evaluating of programs.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the study, what makes the CLCP famous is not merely because of the successful roles that the program has implemented, but what makes it more interesting is the fact that the success of CLCP depended on the presence of effective programs and activities, and their relationship with other factors such as local leaders, community participation, international organizations, good educators and government. All of the factors worked together for the success of CLCP. Each factor has its own advantages and strengths. Removing one factor will retard the process of achieving success. One factor is no more or less important than the others. Therefore, all of literacy programs and activities in CLCP at these communities have been implemented effectively with cooperation of these factors. To understand which factor was more or less important to help CLCP is very complex. So, without the presence of the important factors, CLCP alone was not able to achieve this success.

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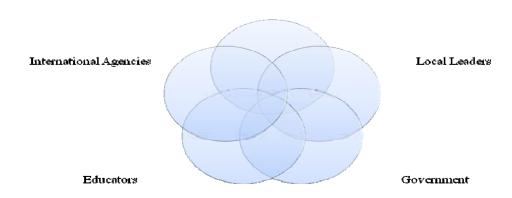


Figure 1. Factors Contributing to the Success of CLCP in Golshan and Nasr Abad

This figure shows the factors contributed to the success of CLCP in community literacy development in two selected communities namely Nasr Abad and Golshan.