



**Tailoring Aflayouth: Implementation and Adaptation Strategies in a Youth  
Employability Curriculum**

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### **Abstract**

Youth unemployment is a global concern. International organizations often see employability programs as a solution to integrate young people into the labor market. However, curricula must be adapted to be relevant to local educational and socio-cultural settings. This research explores through in-depth interviews whether and how a general employability curriculum developed by an NGO—Aflatoun International—is implemented and adapted by its partner organizations worldwide. This research shows that partners implemented the curriculum in various settings and made adaptations especially prior to its implementation. Findings imply that curriculum designers must anticipate both culturally and logistically related adaptations. To do so, collaboration between partners and curriculum designers and capacity building are key. Future studies can examine how involving the private sector in the implementation and adaptation would help ensure the relevance and quality of the curriculum.

*Keywords:* youth employability, curriculum adaptation, qualitative research

### **Samenvatting**

Jeugdwerkloosheid is een wereldwijde zorg. Internationale organisaties zien arbeidsinzetbaarheidsprogramma's vaak als een oplossing om jongeren te integreren in de arbeidsmarkt. Echter, curricula moeten worden aangepast om relevant te zijn voor lokale onderwijs- en sociaal-culturele omgevingen. Deze studie onderzoekt via diepgaande interviews of en hoe een algemeen arbeidsinzetbaarheidsscurriculum ontwikkeld door een NGO—Aflatoun International— wordt geïmplementeerd en aangepast door haar partnerorganisaties wereldwijd. Dit onderzoek toont aan dat partners het curriculum hebben geïmplementeerd in verschillende omgevingen en aanpassingen hebben gemaakt, vooral voor de implementatie. De bevindingen suggereren dat curriculumontwerpers zowel cultureel als logistiek gerelateerde aanpassingen moeten anticiperen. Om dit te doen zijn samenwerking tussen partners en curriculumontwerpers en capaciteitsopbouw essentieel. Toekomstige studies kunnen onderzoeken hoe de betrokkenheid van de private sector bij de implementatie en aanpassing zou helpen om de relevantie en kwaliteit van het curriculum te waarborgen.

*Trefwoorden:* arbeidsinzetbaarheid van jongeren, curriculumaanpassing, kwalitatief onderzoek

## **Tailoring Aflayouth: Implementation and Adaptation Strategies in a Youth Employability Curriculum**

In the 1990s, the term ‘youth bulge’ emerged to describe the growing proportion of young people in non-Western regions compared to the rest of the population, leading to an increase in youth unemployment (Assaad & Levison, 2013; O’Higgins, 2001). Youth unemployment continues to be a global concern up to the present day. In 2023, 14% of the youth globally were unemployed, whereas this figure drops only to 5% for the global adult population (World Bank, 2023). This phenomenon carries greater weight in non-Western regions, where youth is estimated to represent 40% of the workforce by 2030 (Giacomazzi, 2024). Furthermore, additional challenges such as underemployment, poor quality jobs in the informal sector, and inadequate aggregate demand contribute to aggravation of this scenario (O’Higgins, 2001).

To combat this situation, international organizations have steered their efforts by creating employability programs in non-Western countries (Assaad & Levison, 2013; Singh & Ehlers, 2020). With a common objective to reach a large part of the young population, these employability programs and policies are often addressed in a standardized and universal manner (Singh & Ehlers, 2020). For example, a well-known program “Passport to Earning,” initiated in 2021 by UNICEF and the multinational corporations Accenture and Microsoft aimed at helping millions of young people in various countries for them to develop skills and acquire certifications to prepare for the labour market through a standardized curriculum available on a digital platform (Generation Unlimited, 2021).

Through such curricula, international agencies promote “universal” educational standards that are considered replicable in diverse countries and settings. Global uniformization, however, may compromise students' learning outcomes due to curricula’s lack of relevance (Zhao et al., 2023) and raises questions about the political objectives of these

organizations mainly supported by Western nations to further a neoliberal agenda (Guerin, 2017; Honeyman et al., 2021; Klees & Qargha, 2014).

One solution to this matter is to adapt general curricula to local practices, values, and knowledge to ensure that learning outcomes are achieved (Boyd-McMillan & DeMarinis, 2020). When it comes to employability, adaptation is critical to fit local norms and demands as well as youth's needs (Fox & Kaul, 2018; Honeyman et al., 2021). Employability skills do not have the same attributes, definitions, and importance in diverse settings and employability curricula need to be adapted to these settings to be beneficial to the youth (Tran et al., 2022).

In this study, I focused on one of the youth employability curricula—Aflayouth—that is designed by an international non-governmental organization (INGO) Aflatoun International. Implemented in diverse countries, this curriculum aims at providing the youth with employability skills that will help them prepare for the labor market (Aflatoun, n.d.). Thus, through the lens of implementers (i.e., teachers and coordinators), the research explores whether and how Aflayouth is adapted to the youth's needs and to their local educational settings.

### **Youth employability**

Youth employability is a concept used by international organizations to foster the integration of young people in the labor market. The term youth refers to the developmental period between adolescence and adulthood, covering differential age ranges according to regional contexts and stakeholders. United Nations agencies use the age range from 15 to 24 to define youth. On the other hand, the African Union considers that the age period extending from 15 to 35 years old (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2013). This research follows Aflatoun International's definition of youth as those between 16 and 24+ years old.

The International Labor Organization defines employability as “the capacity of a person to secure a job, to keep it, to cope with changing technology, and labor market conditions, and to build a career” (International Labor Organization, 2015, p.12). Youth employability programs aim to equip young individuals with essential skills for the job market, including foundational skills like numeracy and literacy, technical skills, digital skills, and transversal skills like communication and critical thinking (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2021).

Youth employability programs are rooted in Gary Becker's human capital theory from the 1990s, which introduced the “skills-based definition of employability” (Suleman, 2021). This theory posits that developing knowledge, skills, and abilities in people creates human capital, a form of wealth. To increase national income, governments and educators promote skill development among the youth through employment programs. Although not all of these programs have positive impacts on the labor market, Kluge et al. (2016) showed in their research that bigger impacts are made in middle-low income countries where populations are more vulnerable.

### **Curriculum implementation: fidelity and adaptation**

A curriculum can be defined as “a series of purposefully planned learning activities” (Karakus, 2021, p.201) that include learning objectives, skills, knowledge, and values to teach learners (Gouédard et al., 2020). Curricula are dynamic documents and tend to evolve based on how they are implemented by their practitioners. Curriculum implementation can be defined as “the fulfilment of officially prepared course content and process” (Karakus, 2021, p.202) and is achieved when students acquire the knowledge and skills introduced in the courses (Karakus, 2021). However, there is a debate about whether to implement a curriculum in a way that it strictly adheres to the guidelines or whether it should be adapted to the local conditions. Curriculum fidelity advocates that the implementation of a curriculum should be

done exactly how it was originally designed. It is rather a top-down approach, since teachers are supposed to replicate the guidelines of the curriculum (Cho, 1998). On the contrary, curriculum adaptation can be defined as the changes made by teachers in the initial curriculum based on local context and students' needs and background knowledge (Nalbantoğlu et al., 2022).

Several arguments are often put forward concerning the debate of curriculum fidelity versus adaptation. The proponents of curriculum fidelity argue that curriculum should not be adapted to ensure the standard quality of the teaching materials across different educational settings. In contrast, the defendants of curriculum adaptation value the importance of integrating local values, practices, and needs into the curriculum to ensure a positive impact on learners (Moore et al., 2013).

### **Adapting curricula to local settings**

A bottom-up approach to curriculum adaptation might ensure efficiency and relevance to learners' contexts. From the perspective of the place-based education theory, curriculum adaptation is necessary for students to learn better. This theory addresses the importance to link educational content to the learners' reality in order for them to make sense of the knowledge acquired and use it to enhance local communities' development (Deringer, 2017). Specifically, Smith (2002) emphasizes the value of place-based education for youth employability by encouraging students to explore local opportunities that contribute to and support their communities, especially in rural areas (Smith, 2002).

Moore et al. (2013) designed a theory on curriculum adaptation with three dimensions. The first, logistical and philosophical fits, involves adaptations due to constraints like resources and time or aligning with cultural contexts. The second dimension involves timing: proactive adaptation occurs before implementing the curriculum, while reactive adaptation occurs afterward. The third dimension on the positive or negative valence of these adaptations

according to teachers' perspectives is not used in this research for methodological reasons, for it necessitates quantitative instruments (Moore et al., 2013).

### **The Aflayouth curriculum**

This research focuses on the employability book of the Aflayouth curricula designed by Aflatoun International. Specialized in social and financial education, Aflatoun International has developed four curricula for different age groups, including the Aflayouth curriculum. This curriculum is composed of four books and aims at supporting young adults from 16 to 24 years old develop necessary skills to enter the labor market. The first book focuses on social and financial education, the second on employability, the third on entrepreneurship and the fourth book is a resource toolkit. In 2022, the Aflayouth curriculum was implemented in the six regions of the Aflatoun partner network<sup>1</sup> by fifteen partner organizations located in different countries. The book is composed of ten lessons addressing topics such as “Recognising Skills for Success in the Workplace” or “Job Interviewing.” These lessons are supposed to be taught with the active-learning pedagogy, a teaching method promoting collaboration and engagement and according to which teachers have the role of facilitators rather than knowledge transmitters (Altinyelken & Hoeksma, 2021).

### **Current study and scientific relevance**

Up to now, almost no attention has been paid to adaptation of employability programs. Yet, some research focused on the adaptation of curricula in classrooms, stressing the importance of teachers' inputs when it comes to curricula adaptation (Karakuyu, 2023; Vaughn et al., 2016). As suggested by Miller-Day et al. (2013), more research is needed on the types of adaptations teachers make when they implement a curriculum and the reasons why they make such adaptations. Given the limited number of studies, this research promises

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<sup>1</sup> Americas, Middle-East and North Africa, Anglophone Africa, Francophone Africa, Asia, Europe and Central Asia

to advance the understanding of whether and how teachers concretely adapt and implement a curriculum.

Furthermore, this research focuses specifically on the local and cultural adaptations of employability curriculum. The research in this area is limited and a call for action has recently been made by Honeyman et al. (2021) and Tran et al. (2022). They addressed the need for employability programs to go beyond universal implementation and consider local settings and cultural values and practices. This study examines the adaptation of an employability curriculum to the local and cultural contexts, responding to the recent calls to explore the influence of cultural settings on youth employability programs.

To summarize, although the Aflayouth employability curriculum is used in diverse settings by partner organizations across the globe, there is no empirical information concerning whether and how this curriculum is adapted locally. This research, for the first time, contributes to answering these questions and further the knowledge on adaptation strategies carried out at the organization level and their associated challenges.

### **Research question**

The overarching goal of this research is to explore whether and how a global employability curriculum is adapted locally in partnership countries. Additionally, the research aims to find out the challenges experienced by the partner organizations and what helped them in the process of adaptation. Relatedly, the research question is: Whether and how is Aflayouth employability curriculum adapted to meet the unique needs of the participating youth?

My research objective is to find out answers to the following questions:

(1) How is the Aflayouth employability curriculum being implemented in the partners' countries? Do partners implement the curriculum without any adaptation to local needs or do



they adapt the curriculum for the youth who are involved in the program? If the latter is the case, who are the stakeholders involved and how do they adapt the curriculum?

(2) What challenges do partners face during the adaptation and implementation?

(3) What tools (such as frameworks, checklists) are currently being used? What tools are needed to support the adaptation?

## **Methods**

### **Type of research**

This research adopts a qualitative approach, using individual semi-structured interviews. This method gives participants the possibility to focus on certain questions and gather detailed information (Merriam, 2002). The research follows an interpretative qualitative method to understand how the stakeholders experience the adaptation and implementation of the Aflayouth employability curriculum according to their local settings (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research offers an effective way of understanding the participants' experiences and allows them to voice their opinions.

### **Participants**

Participants in the research are members of Aflatoun's partner organizations in twelve countries: Burundi, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Lesotho, Myanmar, Peru, Philippines, Senegal and Somalia. Participants, both males and females, are mostly coordinators within their organization and most of them teach the curriculum. The selection of the participants was made by Aflatoun regional managers following the non-probability sampling method, according to which the sample is chosen in line with specific criteria (Vehovar et al., 2016). Eligibility required individuals to have taught or coordinated the implementation of the Aflayouth curriculum, and to speak in English or French or have a translator available during the interview. All partner organizations implementing the

Aflayouth curriculum in 2022 were contacted, which means the whole population was invited. However, four organizations did not reply on time to participate in the research.

Since participants had different cultural backgrounds, I prioritized trust-building and cultural sensitivity before conducting the interviews. Clear explanation of the research, choice of online platforms according to participants' preferences and respect of communication habits and time zones were key practices (see information and consent letter in Appendix I).

### **Instruments and procedure**

Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted following an interview guide reviewed by the Ethics committee of Utrecht University and Aflatoun International (see interview guide in Appendix II). Two participants answered the questions in writing due to time difference and the lack of availability to conduct an interview. Three interviews were conducted in French and the rest in English with the help of a translator during two interviews. Overall, questions aimed at having a clear understanding about how the adaptation and implementation were done in diverse local settings. Interviews were held online on Teams and WhatsApp according to participants' preferences. They lasted around 45 minutes and were recorded and transcribed with consent. Transcriptions were first conducted via an online and secured European platform called Good Tape, which respects the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Then, they were proofread and translated into English when necessary. All interviews were then analyzed using the NVIVO 14 software (Phillips & Lu, 2018).

### **Data analysis**

I conducted a thematic analysis based on the main themes of the research questions to understand the context of curriculum implementation and adaptation and find patterns in the data collected (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The analysis followed the inductive coding method, which consists in labelling data based on the actual data set (transcribed interviews and written documents), without having pre-defined codes. This method is deemed appropriate for

this research since the data collected is specific to partner organizations and their educational settings (Vears & Gillam, 2022). The coding evolved and was refined during data collection (Vears & Gillam, 2022). Furthermore, since this research takes place in a multicultural setting, this method gives an opportunity to grasp local experiences and practices (Nevid & Maria, 1999).

The data coding process followed three stages: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Williams & Moser, 2019). Open coding consisted in studying the interviews in depth to find similar topics and concepts (Williams & Moser, 2019). Once this stage complete, axial coding was conducted to redefine categories and refine them to prepare for selective coding. Finally, the selective coding stage consisted in organizing the categories into main results themes. As Williams & Moser (2019) mention, this coding process was not linear and necessitated re-reading and rearranging the data several times.

## **Results**

The purpose of this research is to find out whether and how Aflatoun partners implement and adapt the Aflayouth employability curriculum and the challenges that they experience in the process. This section outlines the results in accordance with the main themes of the research questions. Participants are presented with the letter “P” followed by a randomly assigned number ranging from 1 to 12.

### **Implementation of the Aflayouth Employability Curriculum**

In this section, I explored whether and how participants implement this curriculum with the purpose of getting a general overview on the nature of curriculum implementation. Table 1 summarizes the key results for each participant.

**Table 1***Implementation of the Aflayouth employability curriculum by partner organizations*

Partner organizations' numbers	Implementation of the curriculum	Implementation setting	Location of the training	Schedule of the implementation	Youth age	Youth education level	Youth socio-economic background
P1	No	Non-formal	Youth Center	NA*	NA	NA	NA
P2	Yes	Non-formal	Youth Center	1 session / week	18-20	High school graduates	NA
P3	Yes	Non-formal	Youth Center	2 sessions / week	16-35	Mostly middle school drop-outs	70% coming from IDP camps
P4	Yes	Non-formal	School	NA	18-22	Vocational school students	NA
P5	No	Formal	School	NA	15-18	High school students	NA
P6	Yes	Non-formal	Youth Center		19-25	University students	NA
P7	Yes	Non-formal	Youth Center	1 to 2 sessions / week	16-26	High school graduates and drop-outs	Urban and rural youth, IDPs
P8	Yes	Non-formal	Youth Center	NA	18-35	University students and others	NA
P9	Yes	Formal	School	One session per week	15-18	High school students	Mostly from the Armenian diaspora
P10	Yes	Formal	School	Flexible	15-20	High school students	Students from low-income families
P11	Yes	Non-formal	Youth Center	Two sessions per week	15-34	School drop-outs or high school graduate	IDPs and vulnerable women
P12	No	Non-formal	NA	NA	18-60	Illiterate women	Women from rural areas in poverty

\*NA refers to Not Available

***Implementing the curriculum in diverse settings***

Nine out of twelve participants in the research confirmed that their organization implements the Aflayouth employability curriculum and six of them teach it on a weekly basis. Most participants indicated that they implement the curriculum as part of non-formal education outside of the classroom environment. The remaining partners (P4 and P10) implement it in schools and integrated the curriculum into different subjects such as mathematics or English.

Participants were also asked about the profile of the youth benefitting from the curriculum. Over half of the participants stated that they target young persons aged between 15 and 26 years old, being either in or outside the education system. P6 and P8 target university students. P3, P7 and P11 stated that they teach the curriculum to people up to 34-35 years old and they all target internally displaced people (IDPs). One of them targets women who “dropped out of school” or are “survivors of gender-based sexual violence” (P11).

Three participants do not implement the curriculum. P1 explained that it was due to a retention problem, leading the organization to teach only the first book of the curriculum on social and financial education. P5 and P12 both chose to teach the entrepreneurship book instead of the employability one to answer the needs of the targeted population (P12) and because the organization was involved in a broader project on entrepreneurship (P5).

***Implementing the active-learning pedagogy***

Implementing the Aflayouth employability curriculum comes together with the implementation of the active-learning pedagogy, which is appreciated by participants due to its interactive nature. They raised that it created more engagement with the youth. “Those teachers who use the employability book share that they are happy to use it mainly because it's interactive” (P7). Overall, participants stated that students enjoyed this method because it allows them to feel empowered, discover themselves and develop useful skills: “Six months

ago these people could barely present themselves in a group, and today, they're presenting themselves in front of 200 people” (P2).

However, participants also raised concerns about the fact that this method was different from what teachers and students are used to, and thus necessitates additional preparation and changes in the teaching and learning approach. P2 and P4 mentioned that at the beginning some students felt insecure to participate in the activities and needed a “sense of trust, enthusiasm and confidence” (P4). P9 also shared that teachers “were a bit rejecting it at first”.

**Adaptation**

In this section, I examined whether and in what ways the Aflayouth employability curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of youth it targets. In so doing, I followed the taxonomy of Moore et al. (2013), and specifically proactive, reactive, logistical, and philosophical adaptation of curriculum. In Table 2, I made a classification of the types of adaptation that emerged from the interviews according to this taxonomy. The results are presented using a cross-analysis of these features; starting with proactive adaptations for logistical and philosophical fits, followed by reactive adaptations for logistical and philosophical reasons.

**Table 2**

*The types of adaptations observed in this study from the perspective of Moore et al.'s taxonomy.*

	Proactive	Reactive
Logistical	Duration of sessions Order of sessions Material used to teach	Duration of sessions
Philosophical	Translation Selection of sessions Modification of the content Adaptation related to national initiatives	Spontaneous changes Translation

### *Proactive logistical adaptation*

This section deals with adaptations related to the duration of sessions, their order and the material used to teach them. These themes emerged from the interviews and align with Moore and colleagues (2013) classification as proactive logistical adaptations.

The first theme I examined was the duration of sessions. All participants reported that they change it in some way. Aflayouth sessions typically take 90 to 120 minutes. Six participants (P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P11) indicated that they shorten or divide the sessions into two to fit their teaching time or “allow [the students] to return home” (P6). On the contrary, P2 and P3 mentioned extending the duration of sessions to ensure that students understand the concepts and do the activities. “We never ever go below the suggested time (...) because we're dealing with young people that have few exposure or access to education” (P3).

The second theme was the order of sessions. The majority of participants declared changing it for several reasons. Notably, four participants (P3, P7, P8 and P11) reported implementing the curriculum as part of a broader employability program and hence teach the sessions following the order of the themes in these programs.

The third theme that I examined was the materials used for teaching purposes. Interviewed participants referred to the materials as being the required equipment to teach the curriculum, such as flipcharts, sticky notes, printed documents or technological devices. Of all the participants asked about the use of materials, P6 and P7 responded that they used substitute material available in their settings and P2 and P9 reported using the material available in other local organizations. P4 highlighted that a “big deal of budget” was dedicated to printouts of the educational materials. Finally, P2 and P2, who taught the

curriculum online expressed that students needed to have access to digital devices and internet connection to attend the sessions.

Overall, this section shows that participants made proactive logistical adaptations concerning the duration of sessions, their order, and the material used to teach.

### ***Proactive philosophical adaptation***

Proactive philosophical adaptation is related to changes in the curriculum before starting to teach it, such as translations, choice in the sessions taught, modification of the content of the sessions and changes embedded in national initiatives.

The first theme in this subsection was translation. Four partners translated the Aflayouth employability curriculum before starting to teach it in Armenian, Burmese, Filipino/Tagalog and Mandarin. The other partners used the initial translated versions provided by Aflatoun International in Arabic, English, or French. P7 and P9 declared using two to three different translated versions to better fit the students' and teachers' abilities. "We tried to implement [the curriculum] in the Armenian language (...) but sometimes we have learners who are not Armenian so we shift between the languages (P9)". One partner mentioned the urgent need to translate the curriculum to Kirundi to "use terms that are easy for these young people" (P6).

The second theme was the choice of the sessions. Ten sessions constitute the employability curriculum. Participants explained which sessions they opted to teach and why. P4 and P9, who teach the curriculum in formal education settings reported that they teach all the sessions. The two most chosen sessions were: "Recognizing Skills for Success in the Workplace," and "Identifying Challenges and Solutions". The majority also declared teaching the first two sessions of the curriculum: "Orientation Session: What's out there" and "Making choices: types of jobs". These were chosen because they match with students' "background,"



educational level, and local realities. “Each one of [the student] has a story (...) so it was on that basis that we chose the sessions” (P2).

Thirdly, a central aspect of proactive philosophical adaptation that surfaced from the interviews is the modification of the content with local examples, names, currencies, and other norms that apply to a specific context (Moore et al., 2013). Of all participants interviewed, only P6 reported not having made any adaptation. P9 stated that they only chose to change the currency without any other modifications to give students an international perspective. The other participants shared that they modified the content with examples that are familiar to the local context. For example, P2 and P7 explained how they used the stories of national role models to illustrate how to build a successful career: “The examples are closer to their reality. (...) It's much easier for [students] to understand what we're trying to teach” (P2). Another participant reported that the organization found it important to adapt the session on “Rights and Responsibilities in the Workplace” by replacing rights and regulations examples to make sure they align with the “National Employment Law” (P3). The session on job interviews was also adapted by a partner organization to better fit local gestures, for example appropriate sitting positions for women “when they're seated with men” (P7).

Finally, P6 linked the Aflayouth employability curriculum to a government project promoting youth employment and self-funding. In this case, some students “who have been trained under the Aflayouth program are also selected for training and capacity building under the [government] project” (P6). Additionally, P10 stated that the curriculum was adapted to national directives and especially met the requirements of the Most Essential Learning Competencies of the Department of Education.

This section showcases how partners reclaim the curriculum by making proactive philosophical adaptations involving translation, choice of sessions taught, content modification and integration into national initiatives and regulations.

***Reactive logistical adaptation***

Reactive logistical adaptation is related to logistical changes that occurred after the organizations started to implement the curriculum. In this study, the mere emerging theme about was the duration of sessions. P8 explained that the duration of the sessions was shortened due to the fact that “trainers were already familiar with the exercises.” P2 and P4 reported adapting the duration of the session as they were teaching it, with the possibility of extending them if the topic was too complex for the youth. Overall, participants underlined the importance of being flexible and allocating more time to more complex sessions.

***Reactive philosophical adaptation***

Lastly, participants reported adaptations falling under the reactive philosophical adaptation category, including spontaneous changes by teachers or oral translations made after partners started implementing the curriculum.

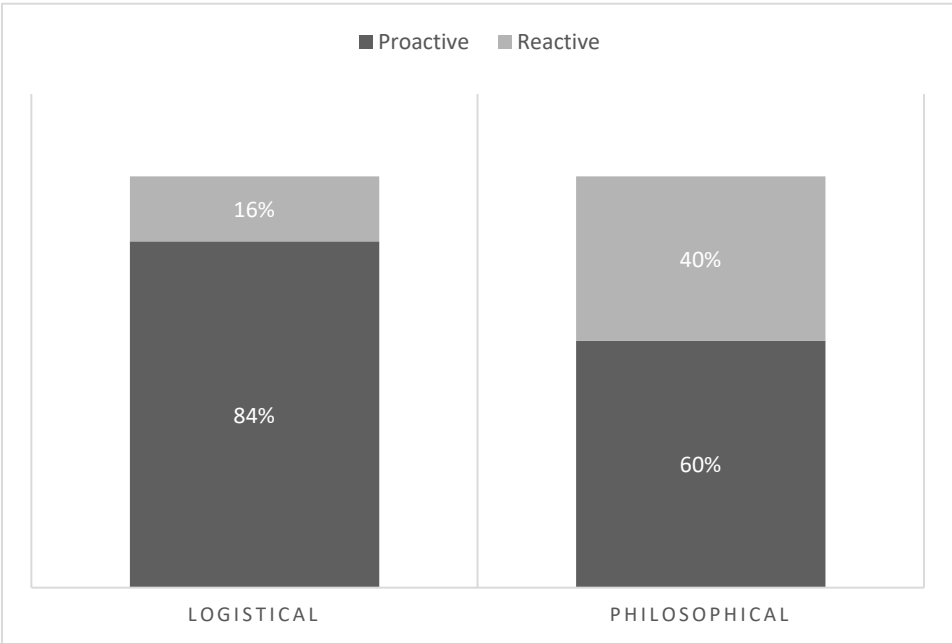
First, the participants implementing the curriculum unanimously stated that teachers make spontaneous changes while teaching the sessions. “[The curriculum] is evolving. It's not like you first contextualize and that's the end of it” (P3). When asked about examples of such changes, P3 and P6 mentioned replacing employment examples with local jobs to ensure learners could identify better with these careers. P2 reported replacing the names used in the curriculum with the names of the youth in the program. P7 said that the more teachers teach the curriculum, the more they “become more adaptive with the sessions and the topics” to address the needs of the participating youth. In contrast, P4 and P10 stated that teachers are encouraged to stick to the curriculum that is offered by the organization although they are still given freedom to revise it if they see fit. Finally, P11 shared that teachers were making changes to make it more fun and entertaining since the learners are “stressed, frustrated, tired, and traumatized.”

As for translation, P2, P7, P10 and P11 reported that they translate terms “on the spot” from the versions in French, Arabic or English to local languages. As one participant put it: “The curriculum is in French, but when we teach it, we make it more practical in Swahili” (P11). Such translations are made orally by the teachers to make sure “[students] understood what we meant” (P2).

To conclude, participants expressed in details the curriculum adaptations carried out to fit the youth’s needs. Figure 1 shows the division between proactive and reactive adaptations according to their logistical and philosophical characteristics. 84% of logistical adjustments and 60% of philosophical adaptations were made proactively. On the other hand, Figure 2 shows the distinction between philosophical and logistic adjustments according to their proactive or reactive nature. Although, logistical fits represent 47% of proactive adaptations, philosophical adjustments were made more frequently both proactively and reactively.

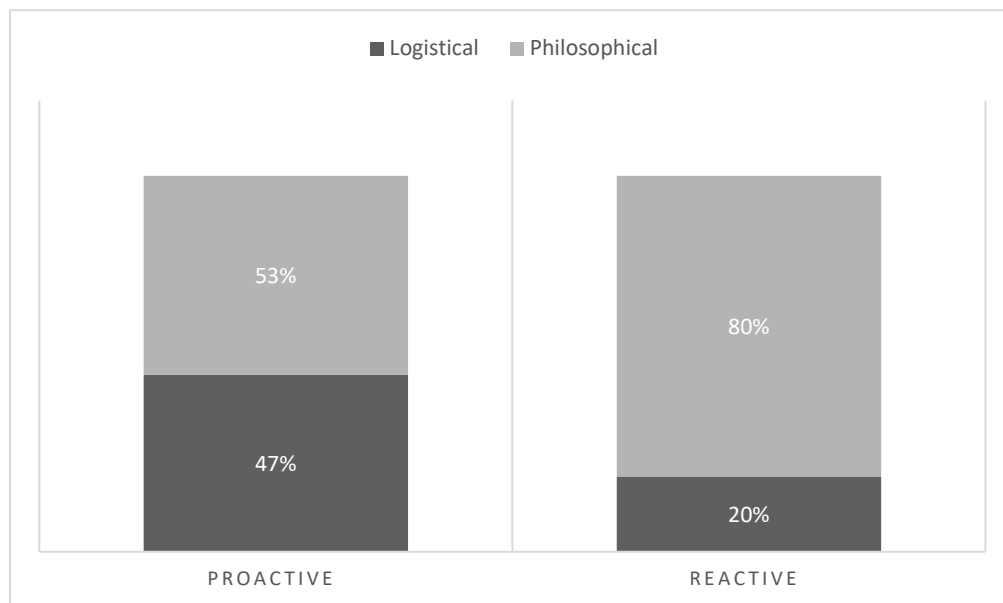
**Figure 1**

*Cross tabulation of proactive and reactive adaptation by fit (philosophical and logistical)*



**Figure 2**

*Cross tabulation of philosophical and logistical adaptations by timing (proactive and reactive)*



### **Stakeholders involved in the adaptation**

Interviews revealed that the adaptation of the Aflayouth employability curriculum involved direct and indirect stakeholders ranging from coordinators of organizations to teachers and learners.

Almost all participants were responsible for teaching the Aflayouth curriculum and were directly involved in its adaptation. Moreover, they all had coordination roles and participated in the implementation of the curriculum in their organization. Interviews revealed that coordinators were more involved in proactively adapting the curriculum, whereas teachers tended to make more reactive, spontaneous changes and translations while teaching it. On the other hand, students can be considered as indirect stakeholders because adaptation decisions were made by teachers and coordinators following based on youth's needs and backgrounds.

When considering stakeholders, one might think of private sector as being one of them. Interestingly, although the lack of employment opportunities was mentioned recurrently as a challenge for the youth, the private sector was neither consulted nor involved in the curriculum implementation or adaptation process. There were a few exceptions. P2 reported inviting representatives from a national insurance company and the Ministry of Budget and Finance to give a presentation to young people on “the importance of financial education,” “opening a bank account,” and employability. P6 mentioned linking the Aflayouth program with an initiative from an investment bank towards women and young people. Two participants also shared suggestions. P4 reported that students suggested incorporating more activities outside the classroom, such as “learning visits” to companies and “industry information sharing” to promote practical learning experiences. Additionally, P2 strongly emphasized on the importance of raising awareness, while teaching Aflayouth, about local working opportunities through internships and volunteer work to prepare the youth for the workforce.

### **Challenges**

To explore key challenges faced by stakeholders when using the Aflayouth employability curriculum, I asked participants to share their difficulties in implementing and adapting the curriculum.

### ***Implementation***

Participants reported several challenges related to logistical constraints and the pedagogical approach when it comes to implementing the curriculum.

Three participants stated that youth was experiencing logistical challenges related to internet connection and transportation, which could make their attendance to the sessions difficult (P2, P4, P6). “These students have poor internet in their hometown and some of them do not even have a computer” (P4). As for the active-learning pedagogy, P2 mentioned that

the youth “had a bit of trouble getting into the action” (P2). Finally, two partners dealing with IDPs reported experiencing challenges with the growing interest of young people to attend the course. P7 explained that he receives up to 600 applications for a course that has only 20 spots available. Similarly, P11 mentioned selecting 25 women per center out of “millions in need.”

Participants expressed certain challenges experienced by teachers while implementing the curriculum. Challenges with regard to having a clear understanding, interest, and ownership of the curriculum in the first place were mentioned: “[Teachers] need to spend much more time preparing lessons and searching for materials” (P4). Another partner expressed concerns about the difficulty to retain “capable teachers,” who may leave for other opportunities and who must be replaced by new ones who need training (P7). Finally, P6 and P11 stated that one of the main challenges were “the lack of support from Aflatoun” to assist in the implementation of the program in their context.

In conclusion, participants highlighted various challenges faced in implementing the curriculum, ranging from logistical difficulties to pedagogical adjustments, recruitment and retention challenges and the need for ongoing support.

### ***Adaptation***

As for the challenges related to adaptation of Aflayouth, only P2 and P4 shared that they didn’t experience any challenges. On the contrary, P6, P7, P9 and P10 pointed at the “language barrier” and reported that the youth and teachers may not always be comfortable with the language in which the curriculum is taught: “Since our teachers come from different provinces and Tagalog is not their mother tongue, and hence they are having difficulties understanding some words in the books” (P10). Another participant stated that the organization has done so many adaptations that “it’s a bit hard to remember what you change and how it originally looked like without losing the whole sense of it” (P3). P7 said that, given the diversity of the youth targeted, it was sometimes a challenge to adapt the curriculum

in a way to make one feel connected to the content: “Some people, because the environment they were born and raised in is not a city, you have to provide examples from their own regions” (P7).

P3 and P8 mentioned that they had difficulty adapting the timeline and the flow of the initial curriculum to their local constraints. P3 also stated that a challenge has been the lack of feedback from Aflatoun after the organization adapted the curriculum.

Taken together, various challenges of different types were revealed when it comes to adapting the curriculum. Related to this statement, P2 declared: “We will never be able to create a manual that works for everyone. (...) You really have to be in a given context to be able to properly contextualize the content.”

### **Tools**

To address the final research question, participants were asked about the tools they use as well as the tools they desire to implement and adapt the Aflayouth employability curriculum.

Only four participants mentioned using the tools given by Aflatoun International to adapt and implement the curriculum: P3 and P10 used the “guidebook” and “adaptation template”, P8 declared using a “checklist” to adapt the content to the local setting, and P2 said s/he only uses the “pre and post-evaluation template” to be filled by the youth and chooses not to use any adaptation tool to remain flexible.

Three participants reported needing more tools to implement and adapt the curriculum. P4 mentioned that they desire to provide teachers with “a toolkit with cases, ice-breaking and team-building activities, and videos,” so that teachers would feel supported while preparing the sessions and hence would become more comfortable teaching the curriculum. P3 reported needing a book specifically designed for students so that they can go home with take away

messages. Finally, P11 mentioned a need for more tools to assist teaching the curriculum according to the active-learning pedagogy approach.

The most striking finding from this section was the importance to Aflatoun trainings given by participants. Over half of the majority reported that they and/or their colleagues participated in training sessions before they started to teach the curriculum to the youth. P4, P6 and P7 reported that they needed additional trainings to keep up to date with “new skills and new techniques” (P7). Finally, P11 stated that online trainings were not sufficient and that “onsite training should be considered” to fit better with the context.

Overall, less than half of the participants reported using and needing tools provided by Aflatoun international to implement and adapt the curriculum. However, two thirds emphasized the importance of teacher training to guarantee effective curriculum delivery.

### **Discussion**

This study represents a pioneering effort to examine the adaptation of a general employability curriculum to local settings across various countries by diverse organizations. While there is extensive literature advocating for the adaptation of general curricula to local settings, few studies have been carried out to understand how the adaptation is made empirically (Miller-Day et al., 2013; Vaughn et al., 2016). The purpose of this study is to gain insight into whether and how Aflatoun partner organizations were implementing and adapting the Aflayouth employability curriculum according to the youth’s needs. The findings revealed that while most partner organizations do implement and adapt the curriculum following common patterns, significant variations exist depending on the context.

The first research question was related to how partner organizations implement the curriculum. Three quarters of participants interviewed declared implementing the curriculum. Results show that, despite a wide variety in the targeted population, most partners implement it in non-formal education settings in youth centers on a weekly basis, targeting youth



between 15 and 26 years old. These results are expected insofar as non-formal education is key to reach out to vulnerable and diverse youth such as IDPs, school drop-outs or students living in conflict-affected regions (Yasunaga, 2014). Employability programs such as Aflayouth are then beneficial in non-formal education settings since local organizations can support the youth in their contexts (Perin & Brčić, 2014). As for the implementation of the active-learning pedagogy, stakeholders mostly seemed to welcome this approach with enthusiasm. Literature shows that the active-learning pedagogy has a positive impact on the acquisition of employability skills because it inherently promotes the development of such skills through teamwork, role play and problem-solving (Pegg et al., 2012; Power, 2012). However, as reported during the interviews, this approach involves a heavier workload for teachers, context-specific implementation challenges and requires to be embedded in local - sometimes more traditional teaching practices (Altinyelken & Hoeksma, 2021; Pegg et al., 2012).

The second research question concerns the way partner organizations adapted the curriculum to their local needs. The taxonomy of Moore et al. (2013) was used to analyze the data. Even though adaptation choices were made primarily proactively for philosophical reasons, reactive and logistical adaptations still represent a good part of the adaptations. On the one hand, more proactive than reactive adaptations are made both for logistical and philosophical reasons. Results regarding philosophical adaptations are quite similar to ones of Moore et al (2013) with most adaptations being made proactively. What is unexpected is that the study by Moore et al. (2013) show that most of the logistical fits were made reactively, which is not the case here. This is likely due to trainings and tools given to partner organizations before they start to implement it, as well as the motivation from partners to adapt the curriculum to make it fit as much as possible to local constraints. Notably, philosophical adaptations are more balanced, indicating that teachers are key stakeholders in

carrying out these reactive adaptations (Vaughn et al., 2016). On the other hand, philosophical adjustments were made more frequently than logistical ones, both proactively and reactively, although logistical adaptations represent almost half of proactive adaptations. This finding is coherent with Fitzsimons et al. (2020), who advocate mainly for philosophical adaptations – emphasizing that curricula should be culturally sensitive, promote indigenous knowledge and taught in local languages. However, Moore et al. (2013) demonstrated in their study that two thirds of the adjustments were logistical in nature and therefore defend the idea that philosophical adaptations are not enough to ensure an efficient curriculum implementation. Designers must take this finding into account and for instance design sessions which must not be taught in a specific order or make the sessions independent of each other. The duration of sessions could also be more flexible, as Miller-Day advocate in their study (2013).

The third research question was related to the stakeholders involved in the curriculum implementation and adaptation. Findings are somewhat unexpected. Teachers, coordinators and learners were direct and indirect stakeholders, as they embodied the population affected by the implementation and adaptation of a curriculum. What is surprising was the absence of the private sector in the implementation or adaptation of the curriculum. This finding contradicts with the research that recommends that private sector should be involved in in the implementation or adaptation phases to ensure that skills developed are relevant to companies' expectations (Ehiyazaryan & Barraclough, 2009; Puad, 2018). For the Human Capital theory to be fully applicable and impactful, the private sector should play an important role in the implementation of employability curricula to assist in the development of relevant knowledge and skills (Puad, 2018). For example, local organizations could involve the private sector in interview practices, career planning, CV writing, or introduce additional activities such as company visits or career guidance mentoring (United Nations Development Programme, 2017).

The fourth research question was related to challenges encountered by partners when it comes to the implementation and adaptation of the curriculum. Although partners take ownership of the program by adapting it to their local realities, the range of challenges faced raise doubts about whether partners can implement and adapt it exactly how they believe would best benefit the youth. It questions the extent to which this curriculum can be considered in line with place-based education, a bottom-up approach aiming at educating young populations with indigenous knowledge and skills to develop their communities' well-being (Grunewald & Smith, 2014). For instance, most participants do not teach all the curriculum, which indicates that its content may not be always relevant to the youth's realities. Furthermore, research shows that education should be taught in local languages and be coherent with communities' epistemic interpretations (Geo-Jaja, 2013; Giacomazzi, 2024). The fact that some participants did not only stress the importance of translation into local languages but also raised some concerns about the difficulty of translating it contradicts this point. Foregrounding local knowledge to prepare students develop their communities and engage with the global world is a central aspect of place-based education (Fernandes et al., 2013; Overton et al., 2020). In the case of Aflayouth, the process seems reversed: the curriculum is designed at the global level and is adapted to local settings afterward. Therefore, its adaptation approach might rather fit with the concept of glocalization, where educational standards are set globally and then combined with local knowledge and practices (Geo-Jaja, 2013; Overton et al., 2020).

The last research question aimed at knowing which tools were used and needed by partners to implement and adapt the curriculum. A surprising disparity emerged from the results as some did not use any tools whereas others asked for additional ones. Training sessions were considered key to be better prepared and qualified to implement and adapt the curriculum. This finding aligns with Moore et al. (2013), who recommend combining the

provision of program-specific resources with proactive support and training opportunities. The study by Nalbantoglu & Bümen (2024) demonstrated the idea that the more teachers have access to professional development opportunities, the more qualitative the adaptation of a curriculum will be. Consequently, it seems important to further develop regular training initiatives to better equip partner organizations to tailor the curriculum and be more comfortable with the active learning pedagogy.

### **Practical Implications**

One overall implication that emerges from the findings of this study is the need to sustain and develop cooperation between local partners and curriculum designers to facilitate a deeper understanding of the varied educational settings and challenges faced in different regions. Regular meetings and collaborative workshops, in addition to needs assessments, help create a dynamic exchange of information, ensuring that the curriculum remains responsive to local needs. One alternative could be for Aflatoun to create a framework with general learning requirements and resources, which partners would then develop into a localized curriculum. The article from Fitzsimons et al. (2020) supports this idea of combining “centralized control” and “localized flexibility” in the case of the Learning Passport project. Another example is the Green Mindset Framework developed by Save the Children, which provides local partners with a toolkit including outlines and necessary resources to design their local curriculum (Garcia La Moneda & Hidalgo, 2023). Qualitative capacity building within the Aflatoun network would facilitate the set-up of such a bottom-up approach, fitting better with the place-based education theory.

### **Strengths and limitations**

This study has several strengths. First, it was the first study to investigate how a general employability curriculum was concretely implemented in practice by a wide variety of partners. Thus, it provided valuable empirical information on the implementation and

adaptation strategies made locally. Second, the entire population involved in the Aflayouth program in 2022 was contacted and a majority of them participated, providing a large overview of its use worldwide. This comprehensive approach enhances the validity and reliability of the conclusions drawn.

However, several limitations in this research might have impacted the depth and breadth of the findings. First, even though all partners organizations were contacted, not all of them were able to participate in the study. This lack of data affects the comprehensiveness of the findings and their generalizability. Second, several participants experienced challenges speaking in English during the interviews. Translators helped face this language barrier but also could have contributed to the omission of valuable insights and a less accurate presentation of participants' answers. Third, conducting online interviews might have prevented participants from feeling comfortable sharing their insights virtually, affecting the depth and spontaneity of their answers.

### **Recommendation for further research**

The above limitations highlight opportunities for further research. First, increased efforts to involve all partners in research would allow to better capture how the Aflayouth employability curriculum is used in the regions. Second, the research could include face-to-face interviews and on-site observations to avoid technical difficulties associated with virtual meetings and to complete and cross-check the data collected during the interviews. Third, further research could be conducted at different points in time to understand the impact of time on the way partners implement and adapt the curriculum and how it evolves as they become more comfortable teaching it. The article from Larsen and Samdal (2007) confirms what a participant stated about the fact that expert teachers are more likely to adapt a curriculum in his classroom than novice teachers. Finally, the influence of language barriers

and different epistemological beliefs on stakeholders' understanding of the curriculum could be further investigated when adapting a curriculum to diverse settings (Giacomazzi, 2024).

### **Conclusion**

This study set out to investigate whether and how the Aflayouth employability curriculum was implemented and adapted by partner organizations to meet the youth's needs. Results showed that adaptation was mostly carried out by partners prior to its implementation. Overall, findings imply that curriculum designers must anticipate both culturally and logistically related adaptations. To achieve this, capacity building and a better collaboration between partners, curriculum designers and the private sector could increase ownership and ensure the local relevance and quality of this employability curriculum.

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## **Appendix I**

### **Informed consent and information letter**

Master's program: Pedagogical science: Youth, Education and Society - 2023-2024

Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Utrecht University

Researcher: Clara Galea

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#### **Information about the research project**

The goal of this research is to understand whether and how the Aflayouth employability curriculum is concretely adapted and implemented by Aflatoun's partner organizations to meet youth's needs.

The research invites all partner organizations worldwide that implement this curriculum for participation. It will particularly explore trainers' viewpoints on whether and how the curriculum is adapted to local settings, aligning with cultural values and practices concerning youth employability.

The research will be conducted by Clara Galea, a student of master's program in "Youth, Education and Society" at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. Clara Galea is also currently an intern at Aflatoun International, working with the Education team.

She will be the only researcher working on this research, collecting and processing the data.

Processed data can be accessed by Clara's supervisor at the Utrecht University for the purposes of thesis supervision and by the members of Aflatoun International for professional purposes to improve their knowledge of curricula implementation by partner organizations.

#### **Information about participation**

The participation in this research will last from April to the end of May 2024En.

Participants will be invited to have an interview of 45 minutes with Clara Galea. She will

ask questions regarding participants' adaptation and implementation of the Aflayouth employability curriculum in their context. The interview will be held online, participants must therefore ensure they have access to internet. The interviews will either be recorded via Teams (audio), or WhatsApp with an external recorder according to the participant's convenience.

Taking part in this research will not only support Clara Galea in her research work, but it will also provide information and feedback to Aflatoun International about how curricula are concretely implemented and how to improve their adaptability to diverse educational settings.

### **Information about privacy**

Clara Galea will collect personal contact data such as email address and phone number to contact each participant and organize the interview online.

During the interview, participants will be asked to provide professional data such as information, examples, experiences or written working documents when they answer questions related to Aflayouth curriculum adaptation in their country.

To secure privacy, participants will be asked whether they prefer to be cited with pseudonyms in the research to ensure their personal data, especially their identity, are kept private.

Personal and professional data will be stored on the researcher's Utrecht University SharePoint folders, which is only accessible by the researcher.

Personal contact data will be stored only for the duration of the research.

### **Data subjects' rights**

The participation in this research is voluntary and will not be compensated. The participant has the following rights:

- The participant can withdraw from participating at any point in time without any



consequences.

- The participant has the right to be informed and to access and correct personal data (email address and phone number)
- The participant has the right to ask the researcher to stop using and deleting personal data at any moment.

To exercise those rights, the participant can email the researcher Clara Galea

([c.l.galea@students.uu.nl](mailto:c.l.galea@students.uu.nl)).

Additionally, the participant has the right to file a complaint with the Data Protection Authority (<https://autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl/>). The participant can also contact the Utrecht University's privacy department ([privacy@uu.nl](mailto:privacy@uu.nl)) or the Data Protection Officer of the Utrecht University ([fg@uu.nl](mailto:fg@uu.nl)) – in that order – for exercising their rights and for questions and complaints.

Academic supervisor for questions and/or complaints: Çisem Gürel [C.gurel@uu.nl](mailto:C.gurel@uu.nl)

By filling the following personal information and ticking the YES boxes of the following statements, you provide informed consent to participate in this research.

Full name:

Phone number (WhatsApp)/ Email address:

Name of the organization:

I am providing informed consent to make personal contact data accessible by the researcher

(full name, email address and phone number):

YES       NO

am providing informed consent that my answers to the questions asked during the interview will be processed by the researcher in order to respond to the research question mentioned above:

YES       NO

I am providing informed consent for the researcher to record and transcribe my

interview: YES  NO

Date, place

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Signature

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## Appendix II

### Interview guide

- What is your role and experience within the organization?
- Do you or your organization use the employability book of the Aflayouth curriculum? If so, for how long have you been teaching this curriculum? If not, what are the reasons for not using it? Could the lack of adaptability or relevance of the curriculum in your context may be one of the reasons? Explain.
- Whether and in what ways has the Aflayouth employability curriculum been modified or adjusted to better fit your local context? Follow-up questions:
  - o Did you translate it? If so, in which language?
  - o What is the average duration of the sessions?
  - o Did you follow the order of the sessions or did you modify it? Explain your choices.
  - o How many and which sessions of the book did you teach? Explain your choices.
  - o Which material did you use?
  - o Did you invite coaches or guest speakers?
  - o Did you make changes in the content of the book: scenarios, names, currencies etc.?
- Did you (or the organization) use specific tools to adapt the curriculum? If so, which type of tools (guidebook, training, checklist, form or framework...). Were there any specific tools, training, or documentation that you felt would have been beneficial to support you during the process?
- What is the profile of the youth you are teaching the curriculum (age, gender, socio-economic background...). Did it influence the adaptation choices that you and/or your organization made in the curriculum?

- After adapting the curriculum within your organization, do you or other trainers make spontaneous changes or adaptations while teaching?
- If so, what prompts these adjustments, and can you provide specific examples?
- If not, what factors contribute to maintaining the curriculum as originally adapted?
- What were the biggest challenges in the adaptation and in the implementation of the curriculum?
- In your experience, was the curriculum easily adaptable to your specific context? Could you provide details or examples of activities or lessons that were easy to adapt and/or other that presented challenges in adaptation?
- In your experience, what are the biggest challenges in your country when it comes to youth employability? Do you think that teaching the Aflayouth employability curriculum has an impact on youth employability in your country or community? Why or why not?