



FOSTERING A SOCIAL PRACTICES APPROACH FOR ADULT LITERACIES TO IMPROVE PEOPLE'S QUALITY OF LIFE IN RWANDA

Dr Peter Mtika¹, Prof Pamela Abbott¹, Ismael K. Byaruhanga²

¹University of Aberdeen; ²IPAR-Rwanda

INTRODUCTION

Literacy is a human right and essential for people's quality of life (World Bank, 2018). Literacy enables individuals to flourish, have healthy children, and improve their livelihoods (Abbott et al., 2020). In Rwanda, adult education has the potential to play a critical role in addressing illiteracy. This policy brief highlights the impact and policy recommendations from the implementation of a "Fostering a social practices approach for adult literacies to improve people's quality of life in Western Rwanda" Project. The project was implemented in Western Province by the University of Aberdeen, the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research-Rwanda (IPAR), the University of Rwanda's College of Education and three Teacher Training Colleges (Mururu, Rubengera and Gacuba

II), between October 2017 – March 2023. The overall objective of the project was:

to develop, implement and embed a social practice approach for adult literacies education in Rwanda that can be managed and delivered by local institutions to support people's livelihood through poverty reduction and inclusive socioeconomic development.

Rwanda recognises that adult literacy education is essential for poverty reduction, improved health, and increased participation in community development (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning [MINECOFIN], 2013).

BACKGROUND: THE PROBLEM OF ILLITERACY IN RWANDA

In Rwanda, adult literacy rate for individuals aged 15 years or older is around 73% (NISR, 2018). However, it is nearer 50% if it includes those who can only read a passage with difficulty (Abbott, 2019). Most of those who are illiterate are women and people living in rural areas. Women and men who are illiterate are excluded from mainstream socio-political and certain forms of informal employment and entrepreneurships (Abbott et al, 2020).

Our research in Western Rwanda showed that only ten per cent of adults had attended an adult literacy course. It also showed that only 14% of those who had attended an adult literacy course gained the skills that they hoped they would gain. Furthermore, 66% still could not read Kinyarwanda and 76% could not write in Kinyarwanda, while 93% could not do simple calculations (Abbott, 2019). An inability to read matters because it affects individuals in their abilities to read important information, such as medical prescriptions. Similarly, inability to perform simple calculations affects people because they struggle to count money when buying or selling goods at the markets or in shops or counting wages.

Addressing adult illiteracy is central to the Rwanda Government's policy (Ministry of Education [MINEDUC], 2014), which identified poor provision of adult education due to lack of training for adult literacy tutors, poor funding for the sub-sector, and a dominant use of a teacher-centred approach when teaching adult literacy.

SOCIAL PRACTICES APPROACH FOR ADULT LITERACIES EDUCATION

The project has involved implementing a culturally responsive, learner-centred, social practices approach (SPA) for adult literacies education in three districts (Rusizi, Karongi and Rubavu) for the past five and half years. We have adapted the existing adult education curriculum in Rwanda by using the SPA.

Compared with the teacher-centred approach, the SPA has been found to be more effective for adult learners. In this approach, adult learners are empowered to identify the issues that matter to them and develop relevant knowledge and skills

which they can then apply in their day-to-day lives (Street, 2016).

The SPA is practice-oriented and focuses on people's everyday lives and livelihood practices. It considers learning as purposeful and embedded in people's social contexts.



Photo. Case study: Adult learners taking part in a compost manure making for kitchen gardens

Some of the SPA teaching techniques include role playing, working in pairs or groups, problem and solution mapping, singing, dancing, ethnographic walks, case studies (e.g., farming, sanitation), games, etc.

The community adult literacies tutors (CALTs) we have trained are enthusiastic about the SPA. The adult learners have welcomed being active in their learning, contributing to decisions about what they will learn and gaining practical knowledge that helps them in their daily lives.



Photo. Adult learners and a tutor in a group discussion

ACHIEVEMENTS

The project has trained five academics at the University of Rwanda's College of Education (UR-CE) to develop knowledge and skills in the social practices approach to adult literacies education. It has supported the development and validation of a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Diploma in the social practices approach to adult literacies at the UR-CE.



Photo. First cohort of CPD Diploma 2019

Through the CPD Diploma, the project has supported the training of five tutors in each of the partner TTC and at least two other tutors in each of the other 13 TTCs in Rwanda. Four adult education practitioners from an NGO (ARTCF) working in the Southern Province have also been trained. Other individuals trained through the CPD Diploma programme include officials from Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB), district directors of education (DDEs) in the partner districts, and an official from the Ministry

of Education (MINEDUC). The trained TTC tutors have trained volunteer community adult literacies tutors (CALTs) through an apprenticeship model. The CALTs have been at the forefront in delivering adult literacies classes to over seventeen thousand adult learners in three districts in Western Province and in the Southern Province (through ARTCF). The project had the support of the Joint Action Development Forum (JADFs) who facilitate improvements of adult literacy rates.

Table 1. Beneficiaries of the Social Practice Approach to Adult Literacies Project (2018 - 2023)

CLASSIFICATION OF BENEFICIARIES	NUMBER		
	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL
University of Rwanda-College of Education (UR-CE) staff trained in the Social Practices Approach (SPA) as Professional Developers by University of Aberdeen staff	2	3	5
Teacher Training College (TTC) staff trained and awarded the CPD Diploma in the SPA by the UR-CE	13	47	60
Staff from an NGO, Association Rwandaise Des Travailleurs Chrétiens Féminins (ARTCF) trained and awarded the CPD Diploma in the SPA	1	3	4
Other national and local government education officials (district directors of education, Rwanda Basic Education Board, Ministry of Education) trained and awarded the CPD Diploma in the SPA	1	3	4
Community Adult Literacy Tutors (CALTs) trained in SPA by TTC literacies tutors and ARTCF staff	209	280	489
Adult learners graduated from courses taught by CALTs using the SPA in western and southern provinces	13,996	3,139	17,135
Indirect beneficiaries, families of graduates (estimated)			49,696

Furthermore, research findings from graduate adult learners on the project show that the learners' lives improved in different ways after completing the programme (see., Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Benefits of participating in the SPA for adult literacies



As shown in the Fig. 1, the learners who graduated from the adult literacies highlighted several ways in which the courses improved their lives, such as understanding of nutrition and hygiene, healthier children, improved household income enabling them to save and pay health insurance, understanding the importance of a kitchen garden and keeping animals and how to do this, and becoming community leaders. The adult learners retain the knowledge and skills they developed during the classes and continue to use this to improve their quality of life.

The project's other achievements relate to the potential for sustainability of the social practice approach (SPA) for adult literacies education in Rwanda. These include:

- Development and validation of a Rwandan SPA for adult literacies CPD Diploma programme for trainers of trainers. This diploma is offered by the UR-CE.
- Development and implementation of training programme for community adult literacies tutors using an apprenticeship model. This is offered through TTCs.
- Development of training materials and tutor guides, which has been published and made available under a creative commons license for use by any stakeholder.
- The Development of teaching and learning materials using locally available resources such as banana fibers, sand, stones, white sacks etc....
- The SPA has been embedded within the B.Ed. programme at the UR-CE. Similarly, TTC tutors who have completed the diploma programme in SPA are embedding it in the training of primary school teachers.

LESSONS LEARNT FROM IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT

During the project's implementation, we have learnt invaluable lessons. These include:

- The CALTs undertake the role on a voluntary basis. As such, they sometimes miss classes whenever an income generating opportunity comes up elsewhere. It was essential therefore that they were paid a small salary on our project to retain them
- The importance of scheduling classes at a suitable time and for a reasonable duration of no more than three hours to optimise attendance and participation. Adult learners are generally poor and must earn a living through different activities, such as farming or informal enterprises. Adult classes should therefore not interfere with the learners' other commitments.
- Many potential adult learners are deterred from taking a literacy course when it is taught on the premises of a church of a different denomination of their own. It is essential therefore to consider non-affiliated venues in which to conduct adult classes, such as primary schools
- Many older learners drop out of literacies classes because they have age related sight loss and cannot afford reading glasses.
- Many literacy centers lack basic teaching infrastructure (a room to teach in chalk board) and learning materials.
- With training, CALTs whose highest qualification is a Primary School Leaving Certificate, can teach adult learners using the SPA. The training for CALTs should be inclusive of all learners including persons with disabilities.
- Men are less likely to attend adult literacies classes. This needs to be addressed given the need to ensure that adult literacies education is gender transformative by involving more men.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To scale up and sustain the provision of adult education using the SPA for adult literacies nationally, consideration should be given to the following:

- » The Government should consider finding sustainable funding to support the implementation of the policy, e.g., purchase of teaching and learning materials, training of more community education tutors, salaries for community adult literacy tutors, and community awareness to increase up-take of adult literacy education among males.
- » TTCs across the country should consider taking on the formal responsibility of training community education tutors. There is already some expertise within the TTCs in social practices approach to adult education.
- » TTCs, working closely with UR-CE, and REB should develop a national teaching qualification for community education tutors. The training qualification should be underpinned by an apprenticeship training model. A minimum entry requirement should be set out
- » An adult education centre should be established at each primary school to facilitate the delivery of adult classes, in the afternoon, evening, or weekends, to suit the availability of adult learners. This is to ensure that classes do not interfere with other commitments such as working on the family plot, informal enterprises, childcare/preparing meals for households.
- » UR-CE has a critical role in supporting the quality of adult education provision. The University should set up an Adult Literacy Education Unit, which should work with TTCs, REB and MINEDUC to support further research into adult literacies education.

The proposed recommendations are in line with the Rwandan Adult Basic Education Policy and Strategy.

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Cover photo. Graduates of the SPA adult literacies course in Rubavu in 2023.

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CONTACT DETAILS

Dr Peter Mtika; Email: p.mtika@abdn.ac.uk

Prof Pamela Abbott; Email: p.abbott@abdn.ac.uk

Ismael K. Byaruhanga; Email: i.byaruhanga@ipar-rwanda.org

TWITTER: @IPARRwanda, @AbdnCGD

PROJECT PARTNERS



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