



FOSTERING A SOCIAL PRACTICE APPROACH TO ADULT LITERACIES EDUCATION FOR IMPROVING PEOPLE'S QUALITY OF LIFE IN WESTERN RWANDA

Sustaining and Institutionalising a Social Practice Approach to Adult Literacies Education

Peter Mtika, Pamela Abbott, Wenceslas Nzabalirwa, Ismael K. Byaruhanga



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Policy Brief advocates for the institutionalisation of a social practice approach to adult literacies education (SPA-ALE) in Rwanda. The social practice approach (SPA) recognizes literacy as a multi-modal, dynamic, context-specific skill, and embedded in everyday activities. It emphasises learning by doing and the integration of reading, writing and numeracy skills into real-life situations. This approach not only enhances literacy capabilities, but also, enhances broader individual development and empowerment among adult learners. Overall, it leads to an improved quality of life.

To ensure sustainability and institutionalisation of SPA-ALE, we recommend the Rwandan Government

- Allocate sustained funding to the adult education sub-sector to support the institutionalisation of SPA-ALE.

- Establish strong multi-sectoral partnerships involving key government ministries, departments, local NGOs, and community groups, which can coordinate the institutionalisation of SPA-ALE.
- Integrate the SPA into adult education policy and formalise the role of primary Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) in training community education tutors, and primary schools as sites for the delivery of adult literacies classes.

By institutionalising the social practice approach, Rwanda can further enhance her ambition for an inclusive and equitable lifelong learning, fostering a literate citizenry that contributes to the improvement of people's quality of life. This will significantly contribute to Rwanda's socio-economic development.

INTRODUCTION

Rwanda acknowledges the crucial role of adult literacy education in alleviating poverty, enhancing health outcomes, and fostering greater citizenry involvement in community and economic development (MINEDUC, 2014; MINECOFIN, 2013). Achieving sustainable, inclusive, and equitable development requires a literate population, especially among adults, who constitute a large section of society who are illiterate. Approximately 50% of adults in Rwanda lack literacy skills, with women and people living in rural areas comprising the majority within this demographic (Abbott, 2019). Literacy is a human right, and it has individual, social, economic, and political benefits (Mtika & Abbott, 2023).

To address the problem of illiteracy in Western Rwanda, we have been implementing a seven-year adult literacy education project ‘*Social Practice Approach to Adult Literacies Education*’, with the view to improving people’s quality of life. The project has been implemented through a partnership consisting of the University of Aberdeen, the University of Rwanda’s College of Education (UR-CE), the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research-Rwanda (IPAR), as well as Gacuba II, Rubengera and Mururu TTCs.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE

The project’s overall objective

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 (Mtika, Abbott & Byaruhanga, 2023).

The project is funded by the Scottish Government under the Scotland-Rwanda International Development Programme. The project will end on 31st March 2024. It has received a total of £1,695,783 from the Scottish Government.

RATIONALE FOR SPA-ALE

The social practice approach positions literacy as deeply embedded in everyday activities (Street, 2016). It focuses on integrating reading, writing and numeracy skills into real-life contexts. It views literacy as a social and contextual activity, acknowledging that effective learning occurs through *learning by doing* and when individuals

apply literacy skills to their daily lives. The approach is participatory, competence-based, and learner-centred. This contrasts with the traditional teacher-centred model of adult literacy education which often isolates learning from real-world applications, resulting in reduced retention and limited practical relevance for adult learners (Abbott et al., 2020).



Photo: First cohort of TTC tutors who completed a Diploma Programme in a Social Practice Approach to Adult Literacies in 2019

SPA-ALE has been successfully implemented in three districts in Western Province, namely, Rusizi, Karongi and Rubavu. Research evaluation conducted has found that a social practice approach is more effective than a teacher-centred approach for adult learners. Over 90% of adult learners were satisfied with the participatory and learner-centred teaching methods.



Photo: Adult learners taking part in a compost manure making for kitchen garden case study session.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The project has accomplished notable successes since its inception in 2017 (see, Fig. 1). As the project draws to a close on March 31, 2024, we anticipate a notable increase in the number of beneficiaries.

Fig. 1 Statistics representing beneficiaries of the project.

$$\text{♀ 2} + \text{♂ 3} = 5$$

University of Rwanda-College of Education (UR-CE) staff trained in the Social Practices Approach (SPA) as Professional Developers by University of Aberdeen staff

$$\text{♀ 13} + \text{♂ 47} = 60$$

Teacher Training College (TTC) staff trained and awarded the CPD Diploma in the SPA by the UR-CE

$$\text{♀ 1} + \text{♂ 3} = 4$$

Staff from an NGO, Association Rwandaise Des Travailleurs Chrétiens Féminins (ARTCF) trained and awarded the CPD Diploma in the SPA

$$\text{♀ 1} + \text{♂ 3} = 4$$

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

$$\text{♀ 209} + \text{♂ 280} = 489$$

Community Adult Literacy Tutors (CALTs) trained in SPA by TTC literacies tutors and ARTCF staff

$$\text{♀ 13,996} + \text{♂ 3,139} = 17,135$$

Adult learners graduated from courses taught by CALTs using the SPA in western and southern provinces

49,696 Indirect beneficiaries, families of graduates (estimated)

The project has resulted in substantial enhancements to the quality of life for its direct beneficiaries. These include the following:

- Health, hygiene, and nutrition standards have improved.
- Greater involvement in community development.
- Financial literacy has been bolstered, facilitating access to economic opportunities.
- Individuals serve as role models, motivating others in the community.
- More positive outlook to life and increased confidence.

- Better decision-making skills at both individual and household levels.
- Adoption of better farming techniques and practices.
- A culture of savings has been cultivated through participation in saving groups.
- Increased support for children's educational activities.
- Marital relationships and family dynamics have improved.

(Mtika et al., 2023; Mtika et al., 2024).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND INSTITUTIONALISATION

Long-Term Funding Commitment: To ensure the sustainability of a social practice approach to adult literacies education, the Rwandan Government should consider committing to long-term funding to the adult education sub-sector. This includes allocating resources for curriculum development, purchase of teaching and learning materials, training of more community adult literacy tutors, and community awareness to increase up-take of adult literacy education, and infrastructure development. A sustained financial commitment will provide stability to the sub-sector to support the institutionalisation and sustainability of the policy. The roles of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN) and the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) are critically vital in this.

Stronger Multi-Sectoral Partnership: Establishing strong multi-sectoral partnership among government stakeholders (MINEDUC, MINECOFIN, MINALOC, REB and RALGA), local NGOs (FAWERWA and ADEPR), and international development agencies (e.g., UN Women) is crucial for the sustainability and institutionalisation a SPA-ALE. The partnerships will facilitate mobilisation of funding and resources and ensure that various stakeholders are rightfully playing their respective roles in fostering SPA-ALE. At district level, strong involvement of Joint Action Development Forum (JADFs) and District Directors of Education (DDEs) will engender a sense of ownership and uptake, as well as reinforce the links between adult education and community development in alignment with Imihigo.

Integration of SPA into Adult Education Policy: Sustaining and institutionalising SPA-ALE involves integrating its principles and practices into adult education policy. This includes incorporating relevant components into the primary school teacher training curriculum and methodologies. This integration will reinforce the importance of lifelong learning and bridge the gap between formal and informal education. Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs), with the support from Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB), need support and recognition for taking on the formal responsibility of training community education tutors. In addition, primary schools across the country should be designated as formal sites for the delivery of adult literacies education.

CONCLUSION

Institutionalising a SPA-ALE in Rwanda is imperative for fostering sustainable, inclusive, and equitable lifelong learning. SPA-ALE aligns with Rwanda's commitment to ending adult illiteracy, alleviating poverty, enhancing health outcomes, and fostering greater citizenry involvement in national development.

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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: University of Aberdeen; Email; p.mtika@abdn.ac.uk

Professor Pamela Abbott: University of Aberdeen; Email: p.abbott@abdn.ac.uk

Professor Wenceslas Nzabairwa: University of Rwanda; Email: wzabairwa@gmail.com


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

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The Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR-Rwanda)

 Kimihurura, KG 627 St, Building No.4

 P.O Box 6005 Kigali-Rwanda

 Tel: (+250) 789099704

 E-mail: info@ipar-rwanda.org |  Website: www.ipar-rwanda.org

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