

Pedagogical Practices in Non-Formal Adult Literacy Classes in Zambia

eTale 2022



This article presents a study conducted in Katete District, Eastern Zambia that explored 1) the pedagogical practices used in this context, and 2) facilitators' choices of certain teaching methods. Literacy classes were dominated by the teacher-centred lecture method. Researchers found that lecture-based instruction, when applied in a participatory manner, could produce considerable gains in learning. However, the authors contend that many learners would have benefited more from a learner-centred approach.

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Source: Sichula, N.K.; Genis, G. (2019). Pedagogical practices in non-formal adult literacy classes in Zambia. *International Review of Education*, 65, 879–903. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-019-09808-y>

In Zambia, adult literacy education is mainly provided in the form of non-formal literacy classes with a general emphasis on the economic aim of alleviating poverty. Exploring the pedagogical practices used in this context and facilitators' choices of certain teaching methods, this article presents a study that was conducted in Katete District, Eastern Zambia. Data was collected through interviews, observations, and focus

group discussions with literacy managers, facilitators, and adult learners. Literacy classes were dominated by the teacher-centred lecture method. Researchers found that lecture-based instruction, when applied in a participatory manner, could produce considerable gains in learning. However, the authors contend that many learners would have benefited more from a learner-centred approach. In sum, the authors conclude that the pedagogical practices applied fell short of international pedagogical standards for both adult and non-formal learning.

- Non-formal adult learning refers to meaningful lifelong learning activities that are organised and conducted outside the formal education framework and meet the learning goals of adults in different contexts.
- In Zambia, adult literacy education is mainly provided in the form of non-formal literacy classes, with a general emphasis on the economic aim of alleviating poverty.
- In practice, both provision and focus are guided by geographical location.
- The government of the Republic of Zambia has directed that learner-centred pedagogy should be used in all adult literacy classes in the country.
- Our rationale for investigating the application of pedagogy in adult literacy classes was twofold: first, literacy is an important aspect of everyday communication and human development as a whole and second, pedagogy plays an important role in both the acquisition of new literacies and the improvement of literacy practices.



Present study

This article presents the findings of a study on pedagogical practices used in non-formal adult literacy classes in Katete District, Zambia. The aim of this study was to explore pedagogical practices in relation to international standards of non-formal and adult learning pedagogies and from the perspective of literacy as social practice (LSP), whereby reading and writing are embedded in the real-life contexts of the learners.

Research questions:

- 1. What pedagogical practices are used in non-formal adult literacy education in Zambia?*
- 2. How do the facilitators select the teaching and learning methods?*

Methods

The study followed a qualitative research methodology. Participants were literacy managers, facilitators, and adult learners in two literacy programmes: the government-run literacy programme and the Tikondane literacy programme. Literacy managers and facilitators were interviewed, classes were observed, and adult learners participated in learner-focused discussions in Cicewa. The data were analysed through inductive thematic analysis.

Pedagogical perspectives that framed the study

Standards of adult learning pedagogy

- Adult learning pedagogy is rooted in instrumental, humanistic, experiential, social, and transformational learning theories.
- Adult learners are characterised by diverse backgrounds, needs, and aspirations.
- In principle, adult learning is centred more on

individual need than on collective or group learning needs.

- Successful learning is only possible when educators carefully design and select teaching and learning strategies to address individual needs while remaining committed to the teaching and learning process.
- Educators are expected to use interactive pedagogical strategies and identify individual learners' difficulties, abilities, and prior learning experiences. Concurrently, they also decide how best to help individual learners in their quest to acquire new knowledge and skills.
- Effective adult learning requires a teaching and learning approach which incorporates participatory pedagogies that are learner centred.
- Learner-centred pedagogy fosters a collaborative approach to teaching and learning, in which learners are valued as partners in the generation of knowledge, not merely as recipients of information provided by their teachers.
- Educators should create a teaching and learning environment that encourages learners to actively engage in class, prompting them through self-directed and reflective learning to consider how they wish to utilise the skills and knowledge acquired in class.
- Learner-centred pedagogy reflects a democratic approach to teaching and learning in which learners take ownership of the learning process.

Standards of non-formal learning pedagogy

- The idea behind non-formal learning is to promote learner-centred, pedagogical environments for active learning that are socio-culturally appropriate and that match the interests and aspirations of learners.
- The instruction methods used in non-formal learning are better adapted to learners than those used in formal

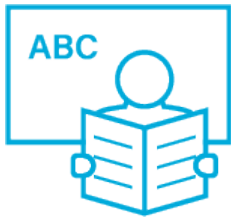
learning, because they operate on the principle of flexibility and occur in a variety of settings with learners of different orientations.

- A learner-centred pedagogy in a non-formal learning environment involves creating and increasing opportunities for learners to actively participate in class while supporting them to conduct purposive, self-directed, learning activities.



Findings

- Instruction methods depended on the lesson and topic in hand.
- Interviewees said that a lesson on literacy skills requires the use of teacher-centred lecture instruction, whereas non-literacy-based lessons involve the use of focus group discussions, narratives, drama, and role play.
- Some facilitators used songs for learners to remember the lesson they had studied.
- While most considered teacher-centred lecture instruction to be important in teaching literacy skills, some attempted to incorporate participatory methods aimed at enhancing learners' acquisition of literacy skills.
- Some learners preferred learning literacy skills in a similar manner to children in primary school.
- Some learners said they would prefer a method where the teacher writes on the board and allows learners to write in their books, because it could help them to learn faster than just talking.



Conclusions

- While some facilitators discussed teaching from the perspective of learners' needs and using participatory methods, in reality most lessons were teacher-centred, consisting of dictation and drill exercises.
- The idea that literacy learners are illiterate and ignorant was an influencing factor in the facilitators' choice of instruction methods.
- They considered teacher-centred lecture instruction the best method for teaching literacy to adult learners who were unable to read and write.
- Some facilitators preferred a combination of lecture and participatory methods.
- However, even with this combination, the aim was to enhance learners' understanding of the lesson and not to help them apply what was being taught.
- The study concluded that little is occurring with regard to the application of the learner-centred pedagogy to meet the expectations of the 2012 curriculum framework on pedagogy in adult literacy learning in Zambia.
- Thus, authors of the study suggest the application of a holistic approach to adult literacy learning programmes in Zambia.
- This would include reconceptualising literacy in line with the 21st-century view of literacy as a multiple situated practice and aligning instructional methods with the roles of learners and their learning goals.