

## **Adult Literacy, Situated and Participatory Pedagogy in Overcoming Challenging Learning Discourses in Zambia**

by

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### **Abstract**

Literature on adult learning pedagogy has been inundated with divergent opinions on the affordances of situated and participative pedagogy in adult learning. There is a dominant view that adult learning programmes that take a situated and participative approach are essential for facilitating learning by overcoming the learning challenges encountered by learners. This article discusses the contradiction between theory as espoused in the literature by different scholars and practice as evidenced by the findings of two case studies in Zambia that explored the teaching and learning in adult literacy classes. The discussion is centred on the proposition that situated and participative teaching offers a solution to teaching and learning challenges in youth and adult literacy classes. An ethnographic approach was used to generate the findings of the study. It was established that participatory teaching did not play a role in the teaching of literacy in the literacy classes, rather the teaching was teacher-centred and was influenced by the learning content, the purpose of the literacy programmes, facilitator's identities, and more importantly the learners asked to be taught in a teacher-centred fashion, despite the available opportunities for participatory engagement.

**Key words:** *Adult literacy, learner and teacher-centred methods, lifelong learning, participative pedagogy, situated learning.*

### **Contemporary views on adult literacy and development**

Literacy is an important element of all aspects of human progress particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where research in adult literacy learning has identified literacy is an essential tool for everyday human communication and interaction. Fundamentally, in a rapid globalisation of society characterised by technology, literacy continues to occupy an important space in all aspects of daily life and human development. In particular, youth and adult literacy learning programmes are seen to affect several developmental outcomes at community and national levels in many developing countries (Blunch, 2017). Benavot (2015); Hanemann and Scarpino (2016) point out that literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has not only been recognised as an important tool for the development of individuals but also as an essential component for the betterment

of society through lifelong learning. Although such views of literacy are often inclined towards schooling, it is also argued that adult literacy learning programmes have a potential to bring about considerable changes in the lives of the learners (Blunch, 2017). Adult learning has different purposes which are influenced by the goals and aspirations of the learners; nevertheless, literacy remains an important part towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as set out by the agenda 2030 (Robinson-Pant, 2016).

Since the 1960s and the Experimental World Literacy Programme, (UNESCO, 1976) which influenced Zambia in the early literacy programmes after political independence from Britain in 1964 (Sichula, 2020), there has been a continuous affirmation that literacy has economic, social and political importance for development and that a literate population can have a considerable impact on the economic growth of a nation (UNESCO, 2015). Societies that are considered to have high levels of literacy have been seen as having a wide variety of economic productivity compared with those with low levels of literacy (Oxenham, Diallo, Katahoire, Petkova-Mwangi, & Sall, 2002 ; World Bank, 2001). Similarly, Blunch (2017) reported that in developing countries, adult literacy programmes have produced considerable positive effects on labour participation, income, and increased school participation of children and parental involvement.

### **Youth and adult literacy learning in Zambia**

Youth and adult literacy learning programmes are provided both as school and non-school-based programmes. School-based programmes are mainly provided by the Zambian Government through the Ministry of General Education which is the main provider of adult literacy programmes in the country. However, the provision is largely concentrated on those youth and adults who missed an opportunity or withdrew from formal schooling and wish to proceed with schooling. The programme includes a small component of non-school-based youth and adult literacy programmes (Ministry of Education, 2015; Ministry of Education Science Vocational Training and Early Education, 2012) mainly provided by the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (Ministry of Education Science Vocational Training and Early Education, 2012). The programmes are provided as non-formal education functional literacy programmes to youth and adults interested in acquiring survival skills including weaving, carpentry, bricklaying, tailoring farming and entrepreneurship (Sichula, 2018a). The provision of these literacy programmes are guided by individual policies of each provider because there has been no national policy to guide the provision of youth and adult literacy learning in Zambia since the country's independence.

Other agencies involved include NGOs who mainly provide youth and adult literacy programmes as an enabler to the success of their community development programmes in

the communities they operate. The challenges faced by youth and adult literacy programmes in Zambia are lack of an independent national policy which has subsequently affected funding, national studies in adult literacy, the coordination of adult literacy programmes, training of facilitators and development of teaching and learning materials ((Sichula, 2020; Sichula & Genis, 2019). Surprisingly, despite these challenges, there has been a remarkable improvement in youth and adult literacy levels in Zambia which is estimated at 85% (UNESCO, 2017). However, the main purpose for which youth and adult literacy is provided, which is to address the country's poverty situation including youth unemployment seem not to be realised. Poverty is estimated at 42% and unemployment at 42.7% (Central Statistical Office & Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2019). The effects of poverty and unemployment on the population are multidimensional and this issue remains a central focus of teaching and learning in youth and adult literacy programmes in Zambia. The importance of recognising the various kinds of socio-economic benefits of literacy programmes and the required support is well documented and emphasised in the literature on youth and adult literacy.

In attempting to contribute towards enhancing literacy programmes in Zambia, specifically improving their relevance and meaningfulness to the socio-economic well-being of the participants, the study sought to address the issue of pedagogy for the following reasons: First, pedagogy is widely understood as central to facilitating a meaningful application of literacy skills by the literacy participants in their daily lives (Moberg, 2006; Mortimore, 1999). An appropriate pedagogy is key for achieving not only the goals of the adult literacy classes but also for helping learners by showing them how they can apply the knowledge and skills taught in the literacy classes to solve their everyday problems. Often an appropriate pedagogy in adult learning is seen in the context of situated and participative pedagogy (Campbell & Burnaby, 2001; Dighe, 2006; Prinsloo & Street, 2014; Rogers, 2002). For example, the Zambian curriculum framework for youth and adult literacy sees situated and participatory teaching methods as appropriate and adopts them on the premise that they overcome learning barriers by encouraging active learning through participation and interaction (MESVTEE, 2012). It further directs teachers to use learner-centred teaching methods including the local context of the learners and available learning resources because they are considered essential for success in adult literacy classes (MESVTEE, 2012).

Although these claims could be true in other contexts, there has been no study done in Zambia to support the claims made on learner-centred pedagogy in the development of this curriculum. Therefore, the interest of this article is to discuss the findings of two case studies on teaching and learning methods in the context of the claims advanced for situated and participative pedagogy in adult literacy classes in Zambia. In generating answers for this

purpose, three research questions became crucial: What teaching methods are used in adult literacy classes? How are the teaching methods used by the facilitators in the adult literacy classes? and how do they justify the use of such teaching methods? To set the scene for this discussion, the article begins by engaging in an analysis of the importance of pedagogy for literacy programmes.

### **Importance of pedagogy for literacy programmes**

Pedagogy is considered an integral element of an organised literacy programme for conveying theories and principles to learners to attain the goals and objectives of the learning programme (Zuofa & Olori, 2015). It comprises various teaching-learning methods and instructional techniques that are embraced in a teaching-learning process (Adjapong & Emdin, 2015). These are important for the quality, success, and effectiveness of Adult Literacy Learning Programmes (ALLPs) (Adams, 2016; Caruth, 2014; Larson & Marsh, 2014; Westbrook et al., 2013). Teaching in adult learning is described as situated, participatory and interactive engagement for achieving desired learning for the learners and the entire literacy programme (Boon, 2011; Campbell & Burnaby, 2001). This implies that it is not enough for the literacy facilitator to simply understand the subject of literacy but equally important to know how to select and use appropriate pedagogies. The ultimate aim of teaching is to facilitate a desirable change in learners including skills, knowledge, values, abilities and capabilities (Zuofa & Olori, 2015).

A survey of the literature indicates that there are several methods of teaching that are used in many educational programmes including adult learning programmes. But for the purpose of this study, the author has drawn on the well-recognised distinction in the literature between teacher-centred and learner-centred pedagogies (Gargallo Lopez, Garfella Esteban, Sahuquillo Mateo, Verde Peleato, & Jimenez Rodriguez, 2015; Rogers & Horrocks, 2010). Embedded in these two broad pedagogical approaches are four sets of teaching-learning methods: expository and evaluatory methods which relate to teacher-centred, and participatory and discovery methods which relate to learner-centred (Rogers, 2009). These four pedagogical approaches have been taken as a framework for this study. The author acknowledges that these pedagogical approaches are not only applicable or specific to the teaching of adult literacy, but can be applied to any teaching and learning situation.

*Teacher-centred pedagogies (expository and evaluatory)* Teacher-centred pedagogies are based on the practice of the teacher transmitting knowledge and skills from him/herself to the learners and assessing this transfer. It is important to recognise that teacher-centred pedagogies are not only associated with modern or institutionalised education (schooling); they have also been part of indigenous education systems (Luke, 2012). For

example, in many African traditional education systems, oral traditions and practices are performed carefully and repetitively for better understanding. The emphasis is placed on obedience and respect for elders because they are regarded as the custodians of knowledge and experiences which are transmitted to the young through narratives and explanations (Vanqa, 1996). In this mode of teaching, the role of the learner is to listen and obey the instructions and explanations given by the elders (Mwanakatwe, 1974; Snelson, 2012).

Teacher-centred pedagogies elevate the teacher to the position of the possessor of knowledge and skills which the facilitator passes to the learners who are seen to lack them (Gargallo Lopez et al., 2015). Examples of teacher-centred pedagogies include expository and evaluatory teaching methods. *Expository* teaching is authoritarian in nature and is characterised by the learners' being largely passive recipients of information and knowledge transmitted by the teacher (Hamilton-Ekeke, 2007). Through lectures and demonstrations, the teacher presents the learning content expected to be mastered by the learners (Vreman-de Olde, de Jong, & Gijlers, 2013). However, this pedagogy limits the learner to be an object as opposed to being the subject of the teaching-learning experience. A second example of teacher-centred pedagogy is *evaluatory* teaching. This is associated with assessing learners through questions and tests of various kinds (Caccamise & Snyder, 2005; Rogers, 2009), seeking to find out how well they have learned a particular subject or topic (Hamilton-Ekeke, 2007); this becomes in itself a method of new learning. These methods encourage rote learning as opposed to real-life experience-based learning.

#### *Learner-centred pedagogies (discovery and participatory)*

The practice of *learner-centred pedagogy* is premised on the notion that teaching and learning activities are focused on the learners, that the role of the teacher is to facilitate the learning activities and allow the learners to be in control of their learning (Schweisfurth, 2015). The idea behind this approach is that the learning needs, interests and aspirations of the learners are more important than the wishes of the teacher and the goals and objectives of the adult learning programme (Knowles, 1970). It is assumed that learner-centred pedagogy enables learners to experience deep and meaningful learning as they engage and co-construct knowledge with their facilitators (Schweisfurth, 2011). Other people have also suggested that learning programmes that take a learner-centred approach are essential for facilitating learning in class by overcoming the learning challenges encountered by learners. The common challenges associated with adult learning include situations where the learning content is not relevant and responsive to the needs of the learners, failure to acknowledge that many adult learners lack courage and confidence to learn new skills and that ignoring their previous education and life experiences makes learning new skills challenging, and being

taught by an educator who lacks knowledge of the adult learners and the appropriate application of the principles of adult learning (Biryukova, Yakovleva, Kolesova, Lezhnina, & Kuragina, 2015; Brookfield, 1986; Knowles, 1973; Knox, 1986; Rogers & Street, 2012).

Learner-centred pedagogy is believed to offer a solution to many of these learning challenges. For example, it is suggested that using the real-literacy approach (situated pedagogy in which the content is based on the literacy material from the local community) to literacy in a situated adult literacy class is more meaningful to learners because learning relates to their daily lives (Rogers, 1999) and that teaching is more effective when learning tasks are practical and highly participatory (Imhabekhai, 1998). In this context, it follows to say that adult literacy teachers (usually called facilitators) are required to be open to the learners' experiences and to make efforts to relate with learners with minimal adherence to their prescribed role of a teacher. This thinking also suggests that successful facilitation involves facilitators viewing themselves as equally participants in the adult teaching-learning process (Zuofa & Olori, 2015). For Rabekoka, Hvorecky, Manazmentu, and Slovakia (2015) successful teaching methods are those that take learners into account, learner-centred pedagogy.

Examples of learner-centred pedagogies include *discovery* and *participatory* learning methods. *Discovery learning* is investigative in nature and is widely thought to be more effective than direct forms of instruction (Vreman-de Olde et al., 2013). It involves posing a challenge to the learners (individually or in small groups) and allowing them to find solutions by either guiding them or through their own trial and error (Hamilton-Ekeke, 2007). This pedagogy allows learners to find out for themselves the new knowledge and understandings they need. It helps them to develop new skills and ways of doing things (Rogers, 2009).

*Participatory pedagogy* is a co-construction pedagogy by both the facilitator and the learners. This pedagogy encourages educators and learners to engage in free discussions and collaborative teaching-learning in which they exchange ideas and learning experiences (Campbell & Burnaby, 2001). Participatory pedagogy is usually based on group teaching and learning, in which learners do something to help their learning. Group teaching-learning becomes a joint enterprise and creates a learning co-operative. The core of participatory pedagogy is the collaborative teaching-learning interaction between the learners and the educator and among the learners themselves (Rogers 2009).

It is important to recognise that in their daily activities, adult learners tend to assume that they are in control of many aspects of their lives, and as a result may resent some forms of external control. On the other hand, it is also important to appreciate that in a classroom setting, the learners' concept of reality might be different. In some instances, adult learners surrender their decision-making to their facilitators and accept the identity and role of a learner,

being told what to do. Because of this, frequently some tension occurs both between teacher and learners and inside the learners themselves. So the idea behind learner-centred pedagogies is that they encourage the learners to be fully involved in the decision-making processes of the learning programme and to have some measure of control over their learning (Biryukova et al., 2015; Nabi, Rogers, & Street, 2009; Van Vliet, Winnips, & Brouwer, 2015; Vaughn, Parsons, Gallagher, & Branen, 2015; Vreman-de Olde et al., 2013).

#### *Mixed teaching-learning methods*

Some scholars, including Hamilton-Ekeke (2007); Rogers (2009); Siraj-Blatchford, Muttock, Sylva, Gilden, and Bell (2002); and Vreman-de Olde et al. (2013), have suggested that the effectiveness of teacher-centred pedagogies can be enhanced through a combination with interactive strategies. For example, Luke (2008) suggests intertwining teacher-centred with learner-centred pedagogies to achieve improvements in teaching; weaving traditional and dialogic teaching methods to facilitate classroom interaction in which new relationships are formed and different forms of learnings take place is essential. Similarly, Vreman-de Olde et al. (2013) suggest that incorporating an inquiry-based approach to evaluatory teaching would enhance teaching and learning as opposed to concentrating on testing the memory of the learners. This suggests that effective teaching is more likely to be assured when teaching methods are combined than when teaching is concentrated on a single teaching method. It will also meet the varied needs of the learner, each with their own preferred learning styles (Rogers & Horrocks, 2010).

#### **Negotiating pedagogies**

Learners like teachers may respond differently to teaching methods. For example, some learners may learn best through teacher-centred methods, while others may learn best through learner-centred active learning (Brookfield, 1986; Knowles, 1973; Knox, 1986). For this reason, teaching adults is based on the notion of negotiation between facilitator and learner and the use of pre-determined teaching methods is often discouraged (Rogers, 2009; Zuofa & Olori, 2015). Both literacy practices and adult literacy learning pedagogies are best shaped by the everyday experiences of the learners. Informed by sociocultural learning theories, literacy is understood better when explored in situated contexts (Perry, 2012; Rogers & Street, 2012; Street, Rogers, & Baker, 2006), where literacy is seen to consist of practices that are socially and culturally embedded (Street, 2006) and which occur everywhere and at any time as people engage in their everyday activities and social events (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000). Equally, most adult learning is understood as experiential by nature, in the sense that it is rooted in the real-life experiences and much of it occurs in everyday informal

interactions. This suggests that the most important aspect of adult learning is informal learning – that is, unplanned, unintentional, and unstructured learning in terms of objectives, which does not normally lead to certification (Rogers, 2014). This stance resonates with one of the widely held views on the characteristics of adult learners, that they do not come to literacy classes as ‘ignorant’ and inexperienced, rather they are believed to possess vast lived but tacit experiences and knowledge that are crucial for new learning.

## **Methodology**

In this study the researcher endeavoured to explore the teaching methods used to teach literacy in adult literacy classes. To achieve this objective, the researcher was interested in using an approach that would allow to tap into the literacy learning realities of the learners and the teaching by the facilitators based on their perspectives. Thus, an ethnographic approach was adopted in which the researcher observed facilitators on how they taught literacy to their learners. The learners were also asked during focus group discussions to share their experiences of participating in the literacy classes. Ethnography has emerged as an important pedagogical tool for literacy especially in the context of Literacy as Social Practices (LSP) (Barton et al., 2000; Street et al., 2006). This view argues that teaching literacy needs to build on the existing everyday literacy practices of the learners (Prinsloo & Street, 2014; Rogers & Street, 2012). For this to succeed it requires systematic efforts to identify the literacy practices of the learners, and ethnography comprising the learners become a literacy content resource (Papen, 2005; Perry, 2012). Since ethnography is rooted in anthropological studies, often characterised by a researcher living among the research participants and making in-depth observations of the culture of the people (Nabi et al., 2009), it was not applied to this study in its pure sense. Rather, it was applied in a manner that facilitated and supported the observation of how the literacy facilitators negotiated their way into teaching literacy and generate the reasoning behind their teaching. It was necessary for listening to and observing how the facilitators negotiated their teaching and what they said regarding teaching and learning and how their teaching benefited the learners.

The two qualitative case studies were the youth and adult literacy learning programmes found in the Katete District in Eastern Zambia. The first case comprised of the government national functional adult literacy (FAL) programme and the second was a Non-governmental organisation (NGO) literacy programme. The case studies were adopted on the basis of the need for an in-depth observation of how the pedagogical contexts shaped the learners’ efforts to improve and acquire new literacy skills.

The participants of the study were adult literacy facilitators and adult learners. Participation in the study was voluntary. The selection and inclusion of the two literacy



programmes and the participants was based on the following criteria: the two literacy programmes were the only youth and adult literacy programmes in the district at the time of the study; the adult literacy facilitators were the main implementers of the literacy programmes, and the adult learners were included for being the key beneficiaries of the literacy programmes. Furthermore, the inclusion of both the facilitators and adult learners was based on regular attendance. Literacy centre supervisors were contacted and provided information on the facilitators who were regular in the literacy classes. For the learners, class registers were accessed and used to identify learners who were regular in class. Once identified the facilitators and learners were contacted individually and sought their consent to participate in the study. This was after explaining the purpose of the study and their role as they accepted to participate. Therefore, in the FAL programme, the adult literacy facilitators (ALFs) were 6 males and 2 females, and the adult learners were 31 females and 8 males. In the NGO literacy programme, there were 2 females and 1 male facilitator; the learners were 15 females and 5 males. The ethical protocols observed included voluntary participation, participant's informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy such that all the names of the participants in this article are pseudonyms.

Interview sessions were conducted with all the eleven adult literacy facilitators of the two literacy programmes (eight from FAL and three from the NGO). Four focus group discussions were conducted with adult learners in the government FAL programme and two in the NGO programme. Four class observation sessions were conducted on adult literacy facilitators involved in face-to-face teaching in the government FAL and one in the NGO literacy programme. The number of observations were based on the number of literacy classes which were available. The role of the researcher was limited to observing how the teaching was conducted rather than participating in the teaching while at the same time observing, as it was felt that this might result in the loss of focus (Kumar, 2014). Three sets of data were gathered from the study; interviews, focus group discussion and observations. First the researcher observed the literacy class of the NGO for 48 minutes. Particular attention was directed to the teaching and learning materials used, the language of instruction, the class composition and how the context shaped learner participation in class. After reflecting on this observation for two days a follow-up interview was scheduled and conducted with the facilitator to seek clarifications on the organisation of the class, teaching methods used and the justification. Thereafter, the researcher proceeded with face-to-face interviews with the facilitators and conducted focus group discussions with the adult learners (this was achieved in three weeks). In the FAL programme the researcher also commenced with class observation sessions and used the same criteria as in the NGO literacy programme. The time

spent for the observation sessions varied, the least was 48 minutes and the maximum was 1h and 15 minutes. After the follow-up interviews on all the observation sessions the researcher proceeded to face-to-face interviews with the facilitators and focus group discussions with the adult learners. The focus group discussions with learners were conducted in Cinyanja (local language spoken by the people) and was translated into English with the help of the translator.

Inductive thematic analysis was used and allowed themes to emerge from the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). So the analysis of the interview, focus group discussions and observation data followed an open coding protocol. We first sorted the data transcripts (interviews, FDGs, and observations) based on each respective literacy programme. Each set of data was coded and checked individually and independently for quality assurance. The categories that emerged from this analysis were the management and organisation of the literacy classes, facilitator's identities and their pedagogic practices, the meaning and justification of the teaching methods used to teach literacy and how the literacy context was shaped. In presenting the findings we draw on the data from the interviews with the literacy facilitators and observations to explore the theme on management and organisation of literacy classes. Then we draw on focus group discussions to explore how the literacy context was shaped and pedagogy.

### **Management and organisation of the literacy classes**

This section reviews the management and organisation of classes in the two programmes: the functional literacy programme and the NGO literacy programme. Research has often linked learner achievement in adult literacy classes to the management and organisation of programmes (Mayombe & Lombard, 2015; Stronge, Tucker, & Hindman, 2004). The facilitator is seen as an enabler in creating an environment for this success, who creatively manages and organizes the class in a way that situates their learners to engage in classroom learning and contribute in a positive and productive manner (Reutzel & Clark, 2011). Although there are many debates on the notion of learning, and the management and organisation of adult literacy classes (Carr-Hill Roy, Fiona Roberts, & Currie Elizabeth, 2010), there is a common understanding that learning is both informal and organised (Rogers, 2014), and that instructional skills may not matter the most if learners in the classroom are disengaged. So, classroom management is a priority area of concern in adult learning as well. In addressing this theme, the article reviews the management and organisation of the two case studies.

The literacy classes in the functional literacy programmes were organised in a formal and structured manner. The programme followed different primers including subjects such as farming, hygiene, weaving, pottery, carpentry, entrepreneurship, and environmental matters.

The purpose of this programme was to provide functional literacy for improving agricultural practices in the rural areas (Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, 2003). Similarly, the NGO literacy programme comprised of teaching literacy and other vocational skills such as gardening, cookery, and tailoring. The purpose of the programme was for individual and community empowerment.

Establishing whether the facilitators were trained to teach adults was essential to the purpose of this study. We established that three literacy facilitators in the FAL programmes had one week training in adult learning pedagogy and the rest had no training at all, while only one facilitator in the NGO had training in adult learning pedagogy. We observed that majority lacked training in andragogic skills, and those who had the training in teaching adults were only trained for one week, which seems inadequate for a standard pedagogical training. In summarising the practice of using volunteer facilitators Jeremiah who was one of the facilitators in the FAL programme for example indicated that the use of volunteer facilitators served as a cost-effective option for the literacy programme providers:

*... the reason for engaging us on voluntary basis is that we are cheaper to maintain... because look the literacy programmes are offered for free by the providers.*

The practice of using untrained facilitators is not new in most literacy programmes in Zambia. However, the practice has the potential to retard the efforts towards improving the literacies among the poor rural communities whom it aims to serve. The facilitators in many adult literacy programmes are often volunteers and majority lack training in adult learning (Rogers, Cohen-Mitchell, & Manandhar, 2000). Although this practice has become common in Africa (UNESCO, 2013), and Zambia in particular (Sichula & Genis, 2019), not much appears to be done to address the situation in Zambia. For example, even documentation on the national figures of adult literacy facilitators is not available. So, the training of literacy facilitators cannot be overemphasised, it is crucial not only for equipping facilitators with knowledge and skills for material delivery but also for improving the general provision and management of literacy programmes.

### **Facilitator's identify and influence on their pedagogic practice**

Research has shown that there is a close relationship between identity and learning, and adult literacy programmes are known for providing a strong lens for examining this relationship (Tett, 2014). Facilitator identity in this case relates to how the facilitators perceived themselves, how they perceived their literacy tasks and shaped their pedagogic practice in class. It is also established that the identity of an adult educator has an enormous impact on practice (Tisdell, 2013). Additionally, facilitators' beliefs about the adult learners and

their learning discourses have been known to influence pedagogic practice (Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000; Tett, 2014). In this study, the facilitators perceived themselves typically as teachers of illiterate adult learners. They considerably perceived their literacy tasks as both an obligation and responsibility to teach. Their pedagogic practices were largely premised on seeing teacher-centred as formal and official teaching and participatory teaching as informal. Although there were variations in how the facilitators perceived themselves, their pedagogic practice typically reflected the teacher-centred orientation. The author draws on the four literacy classroom observations of the FAL programme to analyse how the facilitators viewed themselves and how they taught in class.

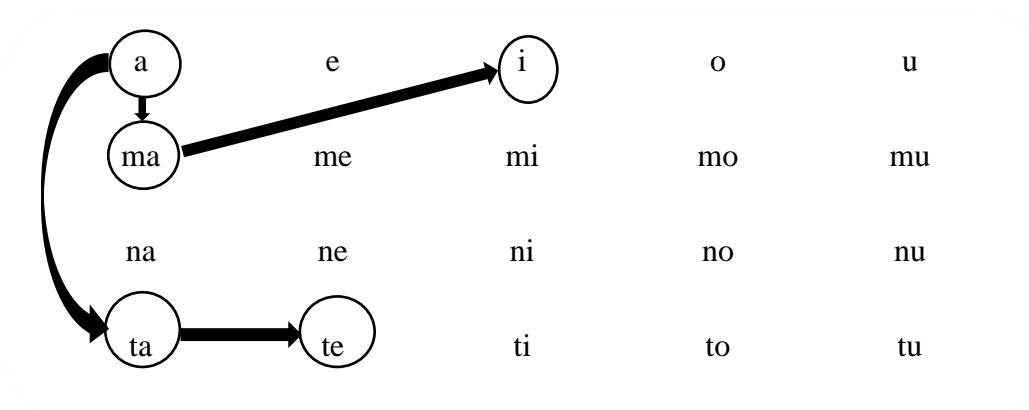
One of the lessons observed involved Jeremiah who taught two lessons which involved word formation using synthetic teaching and numeracy as shown in figure 1 below. Synthetic teaching is known for facilitating an easy step-by-step learning and overcoming learning challenges discourses that the learners may be faced with in their efforts to learn how to read and write. However, this is not the only premise upon which Jeremiah taught word building and numeracy in class. There was a sociocultural motivation to it. He indicated during the follow-up interview that his teaching was also informed by the values and norms from his immediate rural community where helping was considered as a community good. Therefore, teaching for him was perceived as a situated communal obligation and responsibility to help the illiterates. He said:

*...in this village we value communal living and help for one another. Teaching in literacy classes is also helping the illiterates to learn how to read and write...and I think at an individual level I am making a contribution to the well-being of the community.*

Although Jeremiah was literally in control of the teaching and learning in class, his belief on teaching as a collective responsibility to help the illiterates is essentially a basic fundamental to community adult literacy programmes. Community oriented adult learning programmes are critical for the success of adult literacy learning programmes. They foster collective responsibility within the community and promote ownership of literacy for all community members. This has the overall benefit of creating a community of literacy practices and ultimately building a literate community and overcoming the negative discourses associated with adult learners who have literacy learning difficulties.

During his teaching, Jeremiah had a long stick, he pointed at and shouted out each vowel and syllable, and asked the class to join him. He made several repetitions and drills with all the leaners and switched to individual learners.

**Figure 1: Lesson demonstration on word building**



He explained the formation of the word **atate** ('father'), as combining the vowels **a**, **ta** and **te**. Similarly, the word **amai** ('mother'), as combining **a**, **ma** and **i**, as shown in the figure above.

The lesson on numeracy was situated in the local context and drew on local resources to make the lesson interesting and relevant. He taught additions and subtraction. He said, "We are going to use cattle and goats for our easy understanding". He then wrote *ngombe imodzi + ina = ngombe dzibili*, meaning one cow + one = two cows. Similarly, he used this example for goats.

We observed that the inclusion of goats and cows in the lesson 'real-life context' delighted the learners. They spontaneously began taking part in the lesson. Even if the instructor did not ask a question, they raised their hands to make contributions.

Tett (2014:427) summarises this aspect of teacher identity and pedagogic practice in saying "...pedagogic practice that recognises the experiences of learners as positive resources, produces positive changes in the challenging learning discourse of the learners". However, in another observation involving Sakala who identified himself as an adult literacy facilitator of a class of 57 learners which he had been teaching for 6 months, the experience was different. Sakala's teaching was characterised by negotiating between participatory and expository teaching. For example, during observation he taught a lesson on family planning which incorporated reading and writing. He introduced the lesson with a brainstorming exercise about the methods of family planning and there was no corresponding feedback from the learners. Even after several attempts to engage the learners in a class that lasted for 61 minutes, there were only three contributions from three assertive female learners. The facilitator tried to probe the learners for further contributions, but there was no response. Then, Sakala decided to read from a textbook entitled *Health and environmental education*, and asked the learners to repeat the sentences after him and they did so. During the follow-up interview we enquired why this was the case, Sakala explained:

...my learners do not enjoy being asked questions on a lesson they have not learnt. They are more eager to respond to questions that relate to a topic or lesson covered in class than something new or general... because of this I have come to understand them, but my teaching has not changed, I like brainstorming, besides this is how I was trained to teach.

We know that participatory teaching and learning is often said to promote active learning in all learning and is regarded as the hallmark of adult learning. That adult learners learn better by actively taking part in learning tasks. In the case of Sakala, the reality of participatory teaching was different, learners had a preferred pedagogy to what the facilitator knew about teaching adult learners such that even efforts to actively engage the learners in participatory teaching and learning failed because learners had adopted a different pedagogy. Although the facilitator noticed this preference by the learners, his teaching remained confined to negotiating pedagogies between participatory and expository teaching. The sticking point out of this is that although this might be a small instance and situated event, it poses a theoretical and practice challenge to what is known about participatory teaching in situated adult learning.

The third classroom observation involved Gloria who perceived herself as both a literacy instructor and facilitator. She indicated that her role was to teach illiterate adults to transform their lives through reading and writing. She said, *...“my main role here is to teach illiterate adults, who include the elderly and young people. I teach them how to read and write because this is the only way they can improve their lives”*. Her execution of teaching was characterised by her identity as a teacher and instructor. We noticed that she dominated the class from the beginning of the lesson to the end which lasted for 22 minutes. For example, she instructed and guided the learners on reading and writing throughout the lesson. Based on what is known in the literature on teacher identity and pedagogic practice (Tett, 2014; Tisdell, 2013), although this finding is not new, it contributes to the body of knowledge by validating the existing body of literature on this subject.

In the fourth observation, we observed Mwanga, who also described herself as a teacher of adults. Her pedagogic practice relied on expository teaching which characterised one-way transfer of knowledge and information, and had minimal learner involvement throughout the lesson which lasted for 40 minutes.

A similar pattern was observed among the facilitators in the NGO literacy programme. For example, Mwansa described herself as a teacher based on her previous training and employment as a primary school teacher. She also displayed this identity in her teaching. However, although Ntutuma was trained in early childhood education, she identified herself as a facilitator and her teaching was more participatory than teacher centred.

The highlights of these classroom observations are that the facilitators seemed to be quite clear in distinguishing the use of teacher and facilitator. For example, based on their identity as either teacher or facilitator in relation to pedagogic practice, teacher meant being in control of the teaching and learning, while a facilitator guides learners in the process of teaching and learning. It is acknowledged here that the view of teacher has however transitioned to be facilitator in respect of participatory pedagogy in the context of lifelong learning (Jagtap, 2015). We also observe that the facilitators in both literacy programmes were able to clearly distinguish the teaching methods but decided to teach in a teacher-centred manner based on the learning content they followed and the demand by their learners in some cases. Further, although pedagogic training is known to have a direct influence on pedagogic practice (Laurie, 2013), in this case teacher identity was quite influential. It is understood that teacher identity is potentially shaped by different interactive complex factors that are interwoven in individual life experiences. Additionally, we see that like any other identity, teacher identity can be self-fulfilling, and can play a crucial role in stimulating teacher commitment and support for learners apart from pedagogic training (Tett, 2014). We also see that in both the FAL and the NGO programme, the lecture, evaluatory and participatory teaching were fundamentally used based on the literacy facilitator's identity.

Furthermore, despite the different facilitator identities and variations in their pedagogic practices, the facilitators in these literacy classes clearly see classroom teaching as formal and official adult literacy teaching methods. Technically this phenomenon is divorced from the adult learning notion of what is generally implied by situated and participatory adult learning (Campbell & Burnaby, 2001; Education for development, 1996). Specifically, this orientation somewhat validates the opinion that teachers often tend to feel a responsibility to teach as opposed to helping the learners to learn independently (Rogers, 2009). In much of adult literacy learning, it is said that teaching methods are expected to promote teaching and learning that conform to the context and characteristics of adult learning including self-directed learning, active learning, experiential learning and collaborative learning (Schwartz, 2014; Sichula, 2018b; Taylor, & Hamdy, 2013). We also did not see the differences in the execution of teaching between the trained and the untrained literacy facilitators. We observed that all the literacy facilitators engaged in the teaching practices based on their facilitator identity orientations.

### **The meanings and justification of the teaching methods used**

The facilitators justified their formal teaching methods in three ways: to help the adult learners become better by teaching them how to read and write, to achieve the learning objectives, and thirdly, that these teaching methods were requested by some learners.

According to Jeremiah (FAL), classroom teaching is a responsibility to make learners understand the lesson. He went on, *“With other teaching methods, the learners do not understand very well, because when I am teaching using the chalkboard, they are able to see and know what I have written.”* Sakala explained that *“I use a chalkboard teaching method more and it means that learners are mastering what I am teaching, and I am able to meet the learning objectives. Then I also ask learners to repeat after me several times, so that they master what I am teaching.”*

However, several spoke about learner-centred methods, even if they did not use them. For example, Elke from the NGO programme shared that she was oriented towards discovery pedagogy as a way of helping the learners to learn independently: *“Discovery teaching means helping the learners to become more independent in terms of expressing themselves and the way they think about so many things in their lives.”* Others said the same: *“It means that when I give them homework, I am helping them to learn by finding out things by themselves and not depending on me.”* (Malembeka). Mbewe explained his preference for participatory pedagogy, saying that it recognises the potential, abilities, interests and desires of the learners. According to Mbewe, when the learners participated in activities like a focus group discussion, their potential to express themselves in a group was enhanced. Some facilitators indicated that the importance of participatory pedagogy is premised on the idea that it is easier for someone to forget what they are told than what they have done by themselves. For this reason, participatory pedagogy produced better learning gains than any other pedagogical method. *“Like in group discussions, adult learners meet together to share knowledge on different things. So, they learn from each other as opposed to just listening from the teacher all the time.”* (Malembeka). *“Participatory strategies are relevant because they make the learner feel that they know something, and in the process, they learn something.”* (Elke). *“A focus group is a small group, so everyone who does not participate in a class they are able to participate and understand better. You involve learners in whatever you do.”* (Mulenga). *“When I use focus group discussions, it means concentrating on a small group of learners, sharing responsibilities and participatory learning. It means that when learners participate they learn more”* (Sakala).

### **Shaping the literacy context**

The situated and participatory adult learning scholars and practitioners say context is everything when it comes to adult literacy learning programmes. For example, they say context shapes the learning content, pedagogy, the literacy outcomes and the relevance of the programme. The literacy contexts of the two literacy programmes were situated in the socioeconomic contexts of the participants, specifically agricultural production. However, the



actual manifestations in the literacy classes were somewhat a departure from this as teaching and learning seemed to have been formal and traditional in most classes with a focus on reading and writing. During the focus group discussions, we asked the learners to talk about the organisation and teaching in the literacy classes. We were informed that the literacy classes are organised as functional non-formal literacy programmes for the government literacy programme, and simply adult literacy classes for the NGO literacy programme. Participation in both literacy programmes was voluntary, learners do not pay anything, and the form of assessment is based on practical demonstration to read and write the tasks that are given at the end of the classes which lasts for six months to 1 year. The four discussions were conducted at literacy centres: Kafumbwe, Katete, Mbangombe and Chimutende.

The teaching method used to teach literacy at Kafumbwe literacy centre was described as chalkboard teaching (referring to traditional classroom teaching) and the learners enjoyed being taught in this manner. It was a similar practice at Katete Central literacy centre. Specifically, the literacy learners said,

*...we are taught from the chalkboard, the teacher writes the vowels on the chalkboard, then we are asked to formulate the words and sometimes names. After that, the teacher will go round to mark what we have written. It is through this method that we learn how to read and write.*

The literacy context at Mbangombe was shaped by the literacy teaching material used by the facilitator and the purpose of the literacy class to teach reading and writing. A grade five literacy text was the main text which was liked by the learners. They said, *...“we learn in an open space because we do not have a chalkboard. So, our teacher teaches by pointing on words in the literacy book and then we read”*. The open space learning is one of the dynamics associated with youth and adult literacy learning in Zambia. Although this may be seen to be unideal learning environment by normal standards, the determination and desire to learn does not seem to deter some of the adult learners from attending literacy classes.

On the other hand, at *Chimutende*, the learners spoke in terms of collaborative learning practices characterised by active sharing of knowledge and information among themselves and the facilitator. This was unique, as most learners in other literacy classes seemed comfortable and more satisfied both by our observations in class and their own confession to be taught whenever they attended literacy classes. They told us;

*...you see we come here and meet as a class and we are taught literacy skills. Our understanding is that the instructor wants us to share what we know and the instructor shares what we do not know. So, the instructor does*

*not teach alone because we are asked questions, and for some things, we ask the instructor of the things we want to learn.*

The two focus group discussions that were conducted in the NGO literacy programme had different outcomes. In the first discussion the learners talked about the use of traditional classroom teaching which is typically based on memory-based learning. They said; “*When teaching, our teacher writes for us on big papers [flip charts]. They tell us to memorise the vowels and syllables taught including words and names of objects*”. In the second group, the literacy classes were based in teaching learners to speak the English language. The learners seemed interested in the literacy class and were enjoying, however, they were confronted with a challenge of how the literacy facilitator handled the class. They wished they had been given an opportunity to write as well than just learning to speak the language.

*We are taught how to speak English, but we do not write. It is better if we could write so that we could go through on our own. When we are stuck, we can come and ask our teacher. .. It is easy to forget by way of word of mouth,, and there is nowhere to check to help you remember what you have learned. So, the problem is with the method of teaching which does not give room for us to write.*

There are two important elements that seem to have driven the direction of the teaching and entire context of the literacy classes. The facilitator’s perspectives and orientations of teaching reading and writing and the adult learner’s interest in literacy classes. What can be seen is that what the facilitators interpreted as learner participation in the teaching and learning process was in practice superficial, because it was limited to the learners parroting the facilitator and answering the questions which were asked during the class sessions. And facilitators who were oriented towards evaluatory pedagogy associated it with expository pedagogy. They shared a common understanding that when their learners did not display the expected progress, it was a reflection on them for not teaching effectively. For example, one of the facilitators explained that her use of lecture teaching was driven by the needs of the learners. She indicated that “Sometimes I am made to teach based on the choice of the learners. They demand to be taught like children in school, especially for those who have never experienced primary schooling.”

## **Conclusion**

This article set out to discuss the findings of two case studies on teaching and learning methods in adult literacy classes in Zambia, in the context of the claims advanced for situated and participative pedagogy in adult learning. First it is established that the facilitators in both literacy programmes understood and distinguished the pedagogical approaches (teacher-

centred and learner-centred). They generated a distinction between teaching literacy and other forms of teaching and training which equally potentially shaped their teaching. They distinguished between teacher-centred methods and learner-centred methods in the context of formality and informality. Formal is acceptable, official and legitimate, whereas informal is a representation of something unofficial and lacks seriousness. They felt that teacher-centered methods are better suited for teaching literacy, while learner-centred methods are suited for other teachings especially in functional literacy and non-reading lessons. However, they failed to recognise that they were working with adults, and decided to teach literacy in a formal manner. Furthermore, and fundamentally, the idea that participatory teaching in adult learning offers a solution to all learning difficulties has been challenged in the context of this article. We found that the teaching in the literacy classes was influenced by different interacting factors, more importantly by what the learning content demanded and the purpose of the literacy programmes and not the participatory teaching or environment. This was further influenced and supported by the facilitators' identity orientations, which were coincidentally accepted by their learners. The facilitators' identified themselves as either teacher or facilitator and reflected their pedagogic practice. The adult literacy learners felt that teacher-centred methods were fine, and could be beneficial if they were applied in a typical school setting where learners could write or copy notes in their notebooks, do activities and be evaluated on their performance. The findings of this study are rather limited because of the small sample that was involved. A larger scale study is suggested to explore situated and participative pedagogies in different literacy classes in Zambia and identify the affordances and mismatches if any to determine the relevance of participatory teaching in literacy classes.

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