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Functional Adult Literacy Learning Practices and the Attainment of Sustainable Rural Community Development

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Abstract

This was a multiple qualitative case study of the functional adult literacy classes in Mkushi, Kabwe and Kapiri-Mposhi Districts of Central Zambia. The purpose of the study was to explore the attainment of sustainable rural community development through the contributions of functional adult literacy learning. The primary research question was how can sustainable rural development be attained through functional adult literacy learning? Data was collected through face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions and class observations and was analysed qualitatively using inductive thematic analysis. In line with these questions, the study established that the functional adult literacy classes were organised and conducted in a formal school-based format. Functional adult literacy practices related to: how the classes were organised, the choice of learning content and pedagogy which was applied to teach in classes. The findings were that all these practices were decontextualised from the learning environment. Although some facilitators attempted to use local examples, this was inadequate evidence to merit support for situated practices. They were simply absent from all the classes in the research

sites. In addition, there was a dominant feeling of dissatisfaction among the adult learners with regard to the relevance of what they were learning in class. Therefore, some of the adult learners challenged and doubted the perceived benefits of literacy such as literacy leads to 'improved well-being' and 'good health' of the people. They contended that they have not witnessed these benefits despite attending literacy classes for some years. Finally, in line with the fourth research question, the study found a disjuncture between what was happening in adult literacy classes and the possibility of attaining sustainable rural community development in the selected research sites. Therefore, it was concluded that the attainment of sustainable rural community development through the contribution of functional adult literacy practices in the selected research sites remains a far-fetched reality. In view of this, it was recommended that the literacy learning providers that are both Government and NGOs, need to reflect on their practices if functional literacy programmes have to attain the intended objective.

Keywords: Literacy, adult learning, functional adult literacy, sustainable rural community development

Background

The idea of sustainable development dates back to the period between the 1970s and 1980s when it was popularised as an approach for providing solutions to meeting the aspirations of the growing population with minimal damage to the environment (Bridger and Luloff, 1999). Since then, sustainable development

has been a global phenomenon which has in recent years been reinforced with increased emphasis on the protection of the environment as one of the measures for mitigating climate change (UNESCO, 2015). This emphasis has further been extended to education which has subsequently continued to witness the development of different educational programmes, projects, researches and learning activities generally encapsulated as Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Adopting the definition by Longhurst *et al.* (2014), this paper regards education for sustainable development as an educational process aimed at both the personal and community improvement through the improvement of skills, attributes and practices necessary for safeguarding the environment. Implicit in this education is the emphasis on human development while sustaining the social and economic well-being of both the present and future generations.

Integrated into education for sustainable development practices are community development and adult literacy learning (Sichula, Luchembe and Chakanika, 2016a), which are broad concepts used in various development practices by different local and international development agencies. Community development is usually used to refer to the efforts towards the improvement of the whole community. This may involve any community situated project or programme big or small whose main interest is to benefit the community. However, it is important to mention that it may not be practical for the projects or programmes to always directly and immediately benefit the entire community. Sometimes a project may target a specific group of people in a community, say, women, men or children. After receiving the training, they may engage in socio-economic activities, which could in the long-run benefit the entire community.

In view of this background, Nuttavuthisit (2017) proposes a more harmonised perspective of community development

and states that generally, community development should be understood as a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. This process should emphasise a bottom-up and interdisciplinary approach which focuses on participation and inclusiveness. Implicit in this case, is the notion of community which is not restricted to a small-scale network of individuals and social groups living in a shared physical space, but also integrating a collection of people or organisations who share some common interests.

Aligned to the foregoing view, this study regards community development as an interdisciplinary process aimed at improving the socio-economic life of the people which should be based on possibly the initiative and active participation of every member of the community (Sichula *et al.*, 2016a). This means that efforts of the community to improve themselves should be combined with those of the external development agencies. Subsequently, the study considers sustainable community development as an improvement of the whole community in a sustainable way. The attainment of this development should demand recognising that development should be framed within the context of peoples' aspirations and limitations, which usually differs across time and space (Bridger and Luloff, 1999; Nuttavuthisit, 2017).

At the same time, all efforts towards meeting the aspirations of the people should consider the ecological limitations of the earth to meet the needs of every population (Diduck, Sinclair, Hostetler and Fitzpatrick, 2012). Adult literacy learning is used in this paper as learning for the purpose of improving the already existing situated literacy practices. Finally, the concept rural is highly contested in the literature, however, in this study it has been applied as a geographical location away from the main cities associated with small-scale agriculture, poor road network and

other infrastructure, high levels of poverty and limited access to several socio-economic amenities (Central Statistical Office, 2011, 2012, 2016).

The practice in community development projects and programmes in Zambia has been emphasising sustainable development, particularly in agricultural related activities (Department of community development, 1991; Ministry of Finance and National Planning, 2011). However, within this emphasis, there are some gaps that have remained inadequately unattended to for a while. For example, Zambia is a country with approximately 39 million hectares of arable land, but less than half of this land is cultivated. In addition, the country is endowed with abundant water resources which equally has largely remained untapped (Central Statistical Office, 2012; National Assembly of Zambia, 2014).

Although efforts have been made by both the previous and successive governments to develop the agriculture sector since the country's independence in 1964 to date, the agricultural sector has remained underdeveloped. Mainly, mining has remained the economic epicentre of the country and has been concentrated in the urban areas, leaving the rural population with less access to the possible socio-economic benefits of the Mining sector. Generally, the country has continued to be confronted with issues not limited to poverty among the rural population, which has often been largely attributed to lack of education (Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, 2003a; Ministry of Education, 2008, 2015).

Initial efforts to deal with the problem of poverty in the rural areas go back to the time after Zambian gained political independence. In 1965, UNESCO released a global report on what I refer to as presumed and exaggerated negative effects of illiteracy on the development of individuals and a country as a

whole. This is based on the unclear evidence in the literature that the mere acquisition of literacy skills have direct effects on the general well-being of the people. The report by UNESCO was based on a narrow view of literacy as simply school-based skills of reading and writing (UNESCO, 2013a). This revealed that the estimated population of the illiterate people in the world in 1964 stood at 700 million (UNESCO, 1965). Today, the total population of illiterate people in the world is estimated at 773.5 million (UNESCO, 2013). These figures on illiteracy and the associated negative effects on individual and national development have often been cited to fuel educational interventions particularly among the rural population in many developing countries.

For Zambia, the interventions involved the provision of functional adult literacy learning through community development. The Department of Community Development (1991) confirms that at independence, Zambia was faced with the challenge of 'illiteracy' especially among youths and adults; which I think the illiteracy been referred to here is the absence of school based literacies. Now, in an effort to improve the national adult literacy levels, the government introduced a countrywide basic literacy learning programme (BLLP) in 1965. Again the moment the issue of literacy levels comes up the obvious reference is school-based literacy because this is the only context of literacy which seems to be suited to discuss literacy levels. However, the foregoing intervention was followed by the adoption of the functional adult literacy approach in 1971, whose aim was to foster practical learning for practical solutions. This approach has continued up to this time, for the reason that it has been re-identified as one of the necessary approaches within the Education 2030 framework for action in realising the vision 2030 agenda for sustainable development (Robinson-Pant, 2016). In Zambia, functional literacy learning has been incorporated with the emphasis on

sustainable rural development through conservation farming practices (Ministry of Education Science Vocational Training and Early Education, 2012; National Assembly of Zambia, 2014).

However, despite the foregoing interventions, underdevelopment and poverty have largely remained a prominent feature of the rural communities in Zambia. In 2010, the rural population remained poor with overall poverty levels estimated at 77.9 per cent compared to the urban population at 27.5 per cent (Central Statistical Office, 2011). Though with a very insignificant improvement in the rural areas, the trend continued in 2015 as evidenced by the findings of the living conditions and monitoring survey which indicates that the incidences of poverty in the country were 76.6 per cent among the rural population and 23.4 per cent among the urban population (Central Statistical Office, 2016). In terms of school based adult illiteracy, 49 per cent of the rural adult population were believed to be illiterate compared to 7.4 per cent of the urban population (Central Statistical Office, 2012). In view of this, the rural population has continued to heavily depend on the central government to provide farming inputs such as seed and fertilizer for their agricultural activities and livelihood (Central Statistical Office, 2012, 2016).

Nevertheless, there has been inadequate research on the subject of functional adult literacy learning in the context of sustainable community development in rural Zambia. A few national evaluations conducted so far (Ministry of Education, 2008; Ministry of Education Science Vocational Training and Early Education, 2012; National Assembly, 2009), have concentrated on the challenges of functional adult literacy learning programmes in general, thereby leaving a knowledge gap on the possible contributions of functional adult literacy learning towards the attainment of sustainable rural community development.

Research Questions

- (a) How are the functional adult literacy learning classes conducted?
- (b) What are the functional adult literacy practices in the selected research sites?
- (c) How do the functional adult literacy learning programmes benefit the participants?
- (d) How do the functional adult literacy practices relate to sustainable rural community development?

Literature Study

Functional literacy is a concept associated with UNESCO's view of literacy and its origin was influenced by Paulo Freire's work on literacy and development. Rogers (1997) records that in the 1970s, UNESCO came up with an Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP) whose idea was teaching literacy with an emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge and skills. However, Freire working with other scholars, contested that this approach was going to produce the socio-economic changes of a magnitude big enough to affect the poverty and underdevelopment in developing countries. Consequently, UNESCO came up with functional literacy which meant that literacy should be useful (Rogers, 1997; UNESCO, 1990, 2013b). With the passage of time, the nature of functional adult literacy practices has changed. At one point, there was a dominant view that literacy was to be learned through other skills embedded in the daily work and activities of the adult learners. However, due to the overemphasis on the measurement of literacy skills, this approach was abandoned. Incidentally, came the view that functional literacy learning should be a process by which other skills should be learned through literacy learning programmes.

Arising from this background, the nature of functional adult literacy adopted in this study is that it should be situated in the learning context, focusing on local community practices and not the decontextualised skills of reading and writing. That literacy instruction should be based on the activities of the adult learners. For example, if the adult learners are farmers, then they have to learn based on farming practices, if they are weavers, similarly they have to learn based on weaving skills and practices. It would be beneficial to them if they learn new literacies and methods in the process of learning in this manner. However, the skills based approach shows that this is only possible after the learners have learned the literacy skills, an approach called literacy first. In reality, the view of functional literacy adopted here should focus on learning for transformation, both in principle and practice. It also means that both its learning content and pedagogy should be developed and constructed by the community in a collaborative and authentic manner.

However, its application to several rural communities in developing countries has concentrated on the acquisition of skills (UNESCO, 1999), as opposed to real individual and community transformation. For this reason, Freire (1973, 2014) has criticised functional adult literacy practices on its limitations to foster and enhance critical thinking. He has argued that it is not an ideal platform for emancipatory learning because its focus is on cognitive skills of learning by mere repetition of something, a skill or skills taught. Which is different from critical thinking for transformational or emancipatory learning (Avargil, Herscovitz, & Dori, 2011; Mezirow, 2003), in which the focus is on teaching the adult learners to think and reason in their own independent ways while remaining critical of other people and even their own thinking patterns. However, the literature shows that adult learning programmes with this focus are rare in many adult literacy classes in developing countries, particularly, in Africa.

Providers of Functional Adult Literacy Programmes in Zambia

The providers of functional adult literacy programmes in Zambia are in three categories; the Government of the Republic of Zambia, Non-Governmental Organisations and the Church. Among all these, the government of the Republic of Zambia is currently the major provider through different Government ministries (Ministry of Education Science Vocational Training and Early Education, 2012). These include the Ministry of Community Development Mother and Child Health (MCDMCH), Ministry of Sports Youth and Child Development (MSYCD), Ministry of Agriculture Food and Cooperatives and the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, Vocation and Early Education (MESTVEE). Although these ministries are recognised for the role they are expected to play, the functional literacy programmes they provide are literally insignificant, except for the Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare whose functional adult literacy learning programmes are dominant and pronounced in many parts of the country.

Besides the government, a selection of NGOs and Church institutions are equally involved in literacy work in Zambia. Their efforts are regarded as supplementary to those of the state. In my view, the community integrative ability and capacity of both the NGOs and the Church has possibly facilitated for these organisations to achieve some level of sustainability in some good practices among the rural communities in Zambia. Most NGOs have been using a people-centred approach in their efforts to transform and empower the rural communities. Based on the available literature at the time this paper was being written, the organisations involved included: Christian Children's Fund (CCF), Jehovah's Witness, Catholic Church, Seventh-day Adventist, the Bahai faith, World Vision Zambia (WVZ), PAVIDIA, Heifer International, Land-O-Lakes, Zambia National Farmers Union (ZNFU), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),

United National Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), District Farmers Association, Zambia National Education Coalition (ZANEC), Development Organisation for People's Empowerment, Oxfam, Plan International and People's Action Forum (PAF). In total, there were 270 institutions offering functional literacy and 148 offering integrated literacy programmes in Zambia.

Theoretical framework

The Brundtland sustainable development (SD) model of 1987 and Mezirow (1997), transformational learning theory (TLT) were applied as analytical lenses for this study. This choice was important for interpreting the participant's experiences and constructed narratives of their involvement in functional adult literacy classes, more importantly, to scientifically locate the functional adult literacy practices and possible contribution to the attainment of sustainable rural community development. The sustainable development model provides a comprehensive understanding of community development because it incorporates the three most important aspects of community development namely; economic, environment and the social (Bridger and Luloff, 1999; Phillips and Pittman, 2014). Transformational learning theory equally provides a holistic view of what I think is possibly the implied meaning of functional adult literacy, improved performance through applied reading, writing and numeracy (Bhola, 1995; Robinson-Pant, 2016).

Sustainable community development is anchored on three facets of development; *economic*, *environment* and *social* (Nuttavuthisit, 2017). The model postulates that each of these facets is embedded with the potential referred to as capital which is crucial for producing the intended development (Sachs, 2012). *Economic facet* comprises the financial capital assets which

support the economic activities of the community. The primary focus of this facet is economic growth for the well-being of the community. In the rural context of Zambia, this facet could relate to situated economic activities such as agriculture and small-scale trading. However, concentrating on economic development alone leads to an imbalance in the entire development paradigm, therefore, the environmental facet becomes critical.

The *environmental facet* represents both the natural and physical environment. The natural resources are its capital which is used to produce goods and services. This means that as rural communities engage in their agricultural economic activities, they should be mindful of the effects of such activities on the available natural resources. In this case, sustainable farming practices become crucial for the available natural resources to continue supporting human life effectively (Ellis and Sheridan, 2014).

Finally, the *social facet* is largely concerned with human capital as an important factor in the development process. Rooted in human capital are essential skills and knowledge for the desired sustainable community (Sichula, Luchembe, & Chakanika, 2016b). In instances where the community may feel incapacitated in terms of skills and knowledge, educational interventions become critical. In the context of this framework, functional adult literacy learning should be presumed to be playing this role. Therefore, the presupposition of this model as applied in this framework is that functional adult literacy learning should be instrumental to the attainment of a sustainable developed community. The interplay of the economic, social and environmental facets of the SD should influence community development based on their overlapping attributes and interconnectedness.

To further condense this framework, the transformational learning theory elaborates that everyday human activities are ingrained in meaning making. Which is responsible for how

we see and make sense of issues, circumstances and situations around us. According to Mezirow (2003), the meaning making experiences of our lives produce mental dispositions he referred to as frames of reference. These frames of reference become a collection of values, beliefs and assumptions that essentially determine the way we think, reason and behave (Mezirow, 1997). If these frames of reference are subjective (of which often times they are) and not beneficial to both individual and community development, they can be changed through a transformational learning process. Central to this form of learning is the change of our subjective orientations by critically examining our frames of reference (Hillier, 2005), that is if we are capable of doing so rationally.

Related to functional adult literacy learning, transformation learning theory would imply that learning has to be situated and task-oriented for purposes of improving practices. Secondly, it would also mean understanding the meaning of the practices the adult learners engage with based on their situated spaces. Thirdly, that the adult learners and facilitators should critically engage in a collaborative teaching and learning process. The main focus should be on the critical examination of their values, beliefs, and assumptions about themselves and about functional adult literacy learning. This is critical for the reason that evidence from research (O'Neill, Geoghegan, & Petersen, 2013; Papan, 2005; Zepke, 2015) shows that the way the adult learners perceive themselves and how the adult learners perceive their learners has a bearing on the entire teaching and learning process. This evidence should compel adult learners and educators to constantly question their meaning making, narratives and interpretations of life experiences. It is through this act of continuously reflecting and evaluating of our frames of reference that we may develop new knowledge and skills for sustainable community development.

Furthermore, functional adult literacy learning is typically based on the traditional deficit pedagogy. The implication of the shift to authentic transformational learning is that functional adult literacy learning pedagogy should equally change. This is because functional adult literacy may not be possible to produce adult learners with both transformational and sustainable development qualities through a deficit functional adult literacy learning approach. In view of this theory, it can be said that realising a functional and sustainable development community, would require a form of pedagogy which is situated, integrative, collaborative and above all transformational.

Methodology

The research methodology of this study was a qualitative multiple case study conducted in Mkushi, Kabwe, and Kapiri–Mposhi Districts. The idea was to develop a deeper understanding through a cross case analysis of the functional adult literacy practices in view of sustainable rural community development. The choice of these districts was purposive, and the research participants comprised both the adult literacy learning facilitators and the adult learners. The data was collected through in–depth interviews with the facilitators and class observations, and focus group interviews with the adult learners. Both the interviews and focus group discussions were audio recorded after been granted permission by the participants. The collected data was analysed through an inductive thematic analysis. It comprised transcription of interviews, observation notes and focus group discussions, coding the emerging themes and clustering them into similar themes. The interviews with the adult learning facilitators were coded as MF1 to MF6 for Mkushi District, KF1 to KF6 for Kabwe District, and KPF1 to KPF6 for Kapiri–Mposhi District. Similarly, the focus

group discussions with the adult learners were coded as MFGD1 to MFGD6, for Mkushi District, KFGD1 to KFGD3 for Kabwe District, and KPFGD1 to KPFGD6 for Kapiri–Mposhi District.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the key findings of the study based on each case study, Mkushi, Kabwe and Kapiri–Mposhi.

Case Study 1: Mkushi

The face-to-face interviews with the facilitators revealed that there were six active adult literacy learning centres in Mkushi central district at the time of the study. These centres had multiple embedded adult literacy classes of which the facilitators could not provide the numbers because they did not have complete information. The classes were mainly organised by the Department of Community Development, though incorporated with similar activities of a few NGOs whose primary interest was on women empowerment through agricultural production. It was also mentioned that they were non–formal adult literacy classes referred to as functional adult literacy classes. The specific focus was on teaching adult learners to learn how to read and write for farming purposes. The facilitators insisted that literacy skills were very important for helping the adult learners to improve their methods of farming. They explained with a strong conviction that the acquisition of literacy skills by the adult learners would further lead to increased food production, improved income generation and ultimately enhance their qualities of life.

However, when some of the facilitators were asked to point out the evidence for the foregoing claim, they responded that they had not yet seen much improvement in this regard but they were

hopeful of producing positive results as long as they continued providing the literacy lessons. When it comes to selecting the facilitators, there were no specific selection criteria followed, the only thing that mattered was the willingness to participate in teaching. The classes were meeting early afternoon, twice a week to allow the adult learners attend to other socio-economic obligations. All the six facilitators had no formal training and were volunteers.

During the focus group discussions, the adult learners shared that the reason for their joining the adult literacy classes was majorly premised on the need to access farming inputs. They indicated that occasionally, the government through the Department of Community Development helps them with farming inputs such as maize seeds and fertiliser. Similarly, joining the classes was voluntary and they were free to withdrawal at any time, though with implications. It emerged that ideally, the focus of the classes should be learning to improve their farming practices, but they often times learn the alphabet. And many of the adult learners wondered the connection between learning the alphabet and improving the farming practices.

The class observations revealed that the only teaching material they were using was an outdated primer entitled Grow More Grounds. This material was also irrelevant to the district because maize was a predominant crop grown. I noticed that they were more women participants than men in all the classes. The teaching was concentrated on learning the letters, vowels and syllables and was teacher-centred. Except in the two literacy centres where the teaching had partially integrated the everyday life activities of the adult learners, in the other four literacy centres, literacy skills were taught in a school oriented manner, incorporated with memory activities. Often the facilitators rubbed the lesson from the chalkboard and asked the adult learners to say or possibly go in front and write on the chalkboard whatever they could memorise

about the lesson. Based on how and what they concentrated on in their teaching, it was presumed that the facilitators in this case study had the challenge of linking the literacy content to farming practices.

Case Study 2: Kabwe

In this case study, permission was granted to access three adult literacy learning centres located around Chindwin and Mulungushi areas. The face-to-face interviews with the facilitators revealed a concentration on teaching literacy skills in the context of improved agricultural practices for the reason that this was the major economic undertaking of the rural population. However, it was mentioned that in some of the classes, they were also teaching selected commercial literacy skills such as buying, selling, and banking. They interpreted this practice as inclusiveness of the learning content. According to the facilitators, this was important because the adult learners needed knowledge and skills in commercial literacy, as their farming was not only for consumption purposes but also to earn an income. However, this was not something which was requested for by the adult learners themselves, it was the thinking of the facilitators. This was clearly confirmed by the facilitators themselves during the interviews although this was seemingly a worthwhile stance, in practice, none of the classes visited in this case study taught commercial literacy practices. The facilitators in this case study were all volunteers. The criteria for recruitment was based on their possessing a skill such as bee-keeping, and basketry, which was believed to be valued in rural daily life.

During the focus group discussions, the adult learners shared that their participation in adult literacy classes was motivated by their poverty and they needed help. They explained that since help from both the government and NGOs was no longer given

directly to individuals as in the past but through community groups such as cooperatives, community clubs and adult literacy classes. Therefore, they decided to join the classes to access the help their colleagues were receiving. However, they indicated that the literacy classes were mainly based on literacy skills of reading and writing. They expressed their negative emotions during the focus group discussion with this practice in the adult literacy classes they were attending.

In all the focus group discussions, the adult learners talked about bad treatment by some of the facilitators. Eight adult learners distributed as follows: three from KFGD1, two from KFGD2, and three from KFGD3 shared this opinion:

'our experiences of attending these classes sometimes have been bad, especially when we do not attend regularly we receive threats of being deregistered and often times we are treated like children. The only reason we keep attending is that we want to receive help through farming inputs, otherwise, we were not going to continue with these classes.'

Furthermore, the adult learners described the adult literacy classes they were attending as boring, because they were frequently taught the same things (syllables and vowels) which could not directly relate to their desire for some to learn how to write their names or read any other text apart from the letters and syllables they were being taught. They shared that many of them have been participating in adult literacy classes for more than three months but they were still not able to read fluently, not even simple primary school books for their children. They suggested that the literacy classes were going to be interesting if the facilitators could teach them how to write things like their names, names of

their children, teach them how to read the Bible and many other things they use on a daily basis. But the problem was that the facilitators had a tendency of exhibiting excessive control every time they were teaching.

During class observations, the teaching materials which were used were meant for agriculture extension services. The facilitators indicated that they were instructed by their area sub-centre supervisors to use these materials. A close examination of these materials revealed that their focus was on conservation farming practices and had no lesson on teaching and learning literacy skills. It was observed by the researcher that this material was not relevant to learners who may not know how to read and write because it was designed for improving farming practices. In addition, the material was written in the English language, different from the local language of the adult learners which was mainly Bemba.

During lesson delivery, the facilitators displayed excessive control over the lessons. This was evidenced by practices like shouting at the adult learners when asking them to pay attention, making learners to seat in a particular uniform manner and not disturb others, and asking the adult learners to repeat several times after the facilitator. What was clear regarding this practice was that the facilitators should have been convinced that their adult learners were illiterates who needed to be taught simple literacy skills. The lessons had no direct connection to agricultural practices. It was also observed by the researcher that in all the classes in this case study, the presentations of the lessons were characterised by the application of alphabetic, phonic and syllabic pedagogical strategies.

Case Study 3: Kapiri-Mposhi

In Kapiri-Mposhi, the classes were scattered and not as organised as in the above districts. Six adult literacy centres which were approximately in the ranges of three to eight kilometres apart were visited and in some instances, seven kilometres apart. It emerged out the face-to-face interviews with the facilitators that the classes were equally organised as functional adult literacy classes with a specific concentration on agricultural production. The literacy taught in these classes comprised skills of reading and writing, basketry, and bee-keeping. The facilitators indicated that the aim of these classes was to make the adult learners functional by living effectively in their communities. In other words what was taught in class was supposed to relate to the adult learners daily activities. The facilitators comprised agriculture extension officers and some volunteers who equally never required to have any formal training. Similarly, the criteria for joining the classes were based on someone's interest to teach.

During the focus group discussions, the adult learners expressed both their positive and negative feelings about the adult literacy classes. They shared that they were told by their senior officers from the Department of Community Development and from other NGOs on the importance of literacy. With regard to this information, their participation in adult literacy classes was directed at being empowered and then enjoying the benefits of literacy. Among the benefits they mentioned were that they will be empowered and not be cheated whenever they sold their maize; they were going to be confident and courageous to participate in different activities in the development of their communities.

To the contrary, none of the promises above has materialised in full and this was the source of their negative feelings about the adult literacy classes they were attending. Just like in the other cases, equally in this case study the adult learners remained

committed for purposes of benefiting from the distribution of farming inputs. Three adult learners from KPFGD2, KPFGD4 and KPFGD5 separately challenged the foregoing assumed benefits of literacy, and this is what they said:

‘...merely learning how to read and write cannot make a person to immediately, enjoy the benefits of literacy because many of us here have been participating in these classes for almost two years now. It is true others have learned how to read and write, but their lives are just like everyone else in the villages. For this reason, we are thinking that maybe the only sure way we can change our lives meaningfully is by joining formal schooling. We are not yet 50 years old, we are still in our late 30s and 40s, so we feel we can still join evening classes in Grade One.’

These views represent a real test of our assumptions about the benefits of literacy skills to the adult learners. It is often presumed that the acquisition of literacy skills will autonomously lead to improved well-being of the illiterates regardless of the circumstances around them. This is contrary to the views of the participants in this case study. However, other adult learners remained hopeful that participating in adult literacy classes was going to help them build their confidence and courage to participate actively in other community activities and projects.

During class observations, It was noticed that pedagogically much of the teaching concentrated on expository pedagogy both lecture and demonstration strategies. The lessons were in Bemba and the learners seemed happy with the way they were taught. It was noticed that there was not so much emphasis on crop farming practices, in this case, the study compared to the other case studies. In four centres they were using the outdated literacy materials

on both maize and groundnuts production. These materials were supplemented by the agriculture extension materials on conservation farming practices from the Ministry of Agriculture Livestock, Food and Fisheries. The classes were conducted twice a week and mostly during the day. The teaching of reading was focused on recognition of letters, syllables and words. However, there was not so much emphasis on teaching how to write. It was observed that some of the adult learners never even had books or pencils. It was further observed that in all the classes there was more listening involved than practising to write. This practice had the potential to negatively affect the learning especially that adult learners are known to learn better through experience. So when they are involved in practical learning, retention is better and learning is enhanced.

Cross-Case Analysis

A cross-case analysis at this stage was inevitable for developing an in-depth understanding of the similarities, differences and unique features among the cases. Four major themes emerged from the findings namely; the context of functional adult literacy learning; motivation for joining literacy classes; the pedagogy of functional adult literacy learning; and the sustainability of functional adult literacy learning.

(a) The Context of Functional Adult Literacy Learning

There was no correlation between theory and practice in the provision and teaching of functional adult literacy skills. During the interviews with the facilitators, it emerged that the context of functional adult literacy learning was agricultural production; which was consistent with the policy documents and recommendations by the Government of the Republic of Zambia

through the Department of Community Development (Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, 2003b; Ministry of Community Development Mother and Child Health, 2014; Ministry of Education Science Vocational Training and Early Education, 2012). However, in practice, the focus was on teaching school oriented literacy skills. Concentration was on letter sounds, vowels, and syllables, which could not be appropriately linked to agricultural or any specific farming literacy practice. Therefore, the farming context of functional adult literacy was rather idealistic than real and practical. Furthermore, it was theoretically found that *Case Study 2* had integrated the teaching of commercial literacies in their learning content which was not taught in reality. This means that in the absence of follow-ups and monitoring the learning activities in these classes, it remains doubtful that the content of functional adult literacy classes will always be genuinely and practically situated in the appropriated contexts. Consequently, the ultimate objective of creating sustainable rural communities will remain a nightmare.

Despite the foregoing, the facilitators and the adult learners felt that the literacy they were teaching and learning respectively, was relevant to their personal needs and the various respective communities. However, concerns arose from a few of the adult learners that despite years of these programmes running in their communities, very little improvement has taken place. They indicated that dependency on government warfare assistance has continued, communities still lack the necessary key infrastructures such as schools and health centres. More importantly, many of the people are still not able to read and write, and poverty at both household and community levels has continued to be a challenge. The most phenomenal concern was the challenge posed by the adult learners in *Case Study 3*, regarding the frequently cited benefits of the acquisition of literacy skills. This concern should make adult literacy practitioners question the long held

assumptions about the benefits of literacy and more importantly the responsiveness of the current practices in functional adult literacy learning. The main points of reflection should be, the objective, focus and pedagogical strategies of functional adult literacy learning in these cases studies.

The objective of functional adult literacy learning which is to produce an individual who should function effectively in his or her own community and society as a whole (Ministry of Community Development Mother and Child Health, 2014), is rather inappropriate and discriminatory because it represents the adult learner from a deficit perspective. This is contrary to research evidence which shows that every person is functional in their respective community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998; Wang, 2007), regardless of the status or level of education. In terms of the focus, functional adult literacy learning should focus on the situated and real functioning practices of the adult learners as opposed to assuming that everyone should learn how to grow maize and groundnuts even in places where such crops are not suitable. Even if the context and specific focus should be agriculture, it is important to further contextualise the focus to specific micro locations and contexts of the adult learners. This practice leads to the issue of the pedagogy of functional adult literacy learning.

(b) Motivation for Joining Literacy Classes

In all the three case studies, the findings show that the adult learners' motivation for participating in adult literacy classes were majorly based on the enticement by the literacy learning providers on the benefits of literacy. The adult learners indicated that they told that the acquisition of literacy skills would lead to improved well-being, they will protect themselves from being cheated, and give them confidence and courage to participate in different communities. To the disappointment of the adult learners, none

of these has significantly happened in their lives. Besides this their personal underlying reasons for joining literacy classes was hinged on household poverty; and that adult literacy classes were offering a safety net through farming inputs which included maize seed and fertiliser. For many adult literacy learners, this was the only reason they remained committed to attending literacy classes regardless of the treatment they received and what they were been taught.

(c) The Pedagogy of Functional Adult Literacy Learning

The final point of reflection is that the pedagogy of functional adult literacy learning should be socially situated, for the reason, that research evidence (Lave & Wenger, 1998; Moravec, Mokhtar Noriega, Heppell, Segovia Bonet, & Heppell, 2013; Prinsloo, 2013) shows that the social practices of every community differs from one another. Therefore, a standard approach to deal with every community cannot be used in regard to the pedagogical practices in the three case studies, the opposite was the case. This was also contrary to the researcher's assumption of the functional adult literacy learning pedagogy advanced earlier under the theoretical framework of the study.

The findings from all three case studies show a persistent application of the traditional deficit orientated pedagogy. The problem with this is that the deficit pedagogy has a negative characterisation of the adult learners as illiterates, ignorant and empty vessels that require being filled with skills of reading and writing. Sadly, this is the pedagogy which was applied in a facilitator dominated manner, with a primary concentration on direct teaching, incorporated with drills such as repetitions and memory-based activities. This practice was more pronounced in *Case Study 2*, in which the adult learners from KFGD 2, expressed their negative experiences for participating in adult literacy

classes. Similarly, the views of the adult learners suggested a need to rethink the entire pedagogical practices in functional adult literacy learning in these case studies. In support of this (Rogers (2009); Rogers & Horrocks (2010); Rogers & Street, (2012); Rutherford-Hemming (2012); Schweisfurth (2015); Stein (1998) have established that when implemented appropriately learner centred pedagogy is effective in enhancing learning and is particularly critical to adult learning. The implication of this is that a flexible approach based on the learning goals of the adult learners is likely to be effective in the ultimate realisation of a sustainable community.

In addition to the teaching strategies, the teaching materials were either outdated or irrelevant. The findings show that the predominant teaching-learning materials were outdated primers on groundnut and maize cultivation and material meant for agriculture extension. The focus of this material was majorly on farming practices and nothing on teaching literacy skills. Perhaps this is a confirmation of the practice of functional adult literacy that literacy skills should be learned from other literacy learning activities (Rogers, 1997).

(d) The Sustainability of Functional Adult Literacy Learning Classes

Based on the observation of Omolewa (2008); Radovan and Makovec (2015) and Temli Durmuş (2016) it is clear that the sustenance of any educational activities is dependent on good practices. Therefore, the researcher's interpretation of sustaining the functional adult literacy learning classes was different from that of the research participants. The findings show that both the facilitators and the adult learners understood sustainability as simply not closing down the adult literacy learning centres but continuing with the current practices. Both wished to be provided with the necessary material to keep the classes running

the way they think the classes should be run. However, the idea of sustainable development is premised on the understanding that the needs of the present generation should be met without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs (Bercu, 2015).

What is critical in this definition is the attribute of compromise, it is important that the beneficial situated practices in functional adult literacy learning should not be comprised to attain the desired sustainability. Furthermore, the phrase ‘sustainable development’ is widely used by different stakeholders (Bercu, 2015; Diduck et al., 2012; Fröhlich, 2007; UNESCO, 2015). In this context, it is used to mean two things: The first meaning is that functional adult literacy learning should be based on proper management characterised by the efficient use of the locally situated learning resources of the community. Secondly, it means that the attained sustainable development should stand a test of time, where the community would attain a status of self-sufficiency and reduced dependency on the state or help from other sympathisers.

However, related to the findings of the study, the current practices in functional adult literacy classes in the three case studies seem to resonate uncertainty. In reality, there seems to be no serious attachment and commitment particularly by the literacy learning providers to ensuring that functional adult literacy learning programmes have the real life focus suitable to their respective local communities. This was very clear from *Case Study 2*, in which the facilitator from KFGD 2, was quite authoritative and domineering in deciding the learning content and ignored the need to consult and listen to the views of the adult learners. Therefore, rather than thinking of sustaining functional adult literacy classes in the sense of merely keeping the classes

running, the concentration should be on rethinking and redesigning the focus. There is need to come up with something which is appropriate and meaningful for attaining genuine sustainability.

Summary

The aim of this study was to answer four research questions which were based on how the functional adult literacy learning classes conducted, the functional adult literacy practices in the selected research sites, how the functional adult literacy learning programme benefit the participants, and how the functional adult literacy practices relate to sustainable community development. In line with the first question, the study revealed that the classes were conducted in a formal school format. They comprised the use of school infrastructure such as classrooms and desks. There were only two instances where the classes were conducted in an open space. Again the functional adult literacy practices were rather too school based. There were two opposing views regarding the third research question, however, it later became clear that the programme had a lot of challenges in meeting the expectations of the adult learners and the respective communities as a whole. For the fourth and last research question, there is no doubt that in principle, the framework which is used for the functional adult literacy learning has the potential to foster the attaining of sustainable rural development. However, in practice, the programme did not seem to match the contexts and learning goals of the adult learners. It was decontextualised as evidenced by the concentration on teaching skills of reading and writing.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that the current functional adult literacy practices in the three case studies were not contextualised. The learning content, focus and pedagogy were not adequately and appropriately linked to the local environment. The application of a deficit pedagogy which has an obvious negative characterisation of the adult learners is not something which should be accepted in modern day teaching and learning. It is now known more than before that informal learning has more influence on all forms of learning. This means that there are loads of learning experiences taking place in the lives of the people on a daily basis and they bring these experiences with themselves whenever they come to class and should be a good starting point for learning. Sadly, this is something which has continued to be completely ignored by the adult literacy learning facilitators as evidenced by the practices in the case studies explored in this study. Furthermore, the current functional adult literacy practices lack a transformational character to demonstrate its ability and capacity towards a transformed and sustainable community. Therefore, owing to the above factors, the reality of sustainable rural community development through the contributions of the current functional adult literacy practices in the research sites explored is unlikely.

Recommendation

This study recommends that if functional adult literacy learning programmes have to attain the intended objectives in the research sites of this study, both the government and NGOs need to reflect on their practices in view of the findings of this study.

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