

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Aberdeen		
Unit of Assessment: 23 (Education)		
Title of case study: Shaping the Delivery of Adult Literacy Education in Rwanda		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Pamela Abbott Aileen Ackland Peter Mtika	Chair in Education Senior Lecturer in Education Senior Lecturer in Education	2010-present 2003-present 2010-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 10/2017-12/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Research led by the University of Aberdeen has shaped a social practices approach to adult literacies in Rwanda, combining expertise in adult literacies education with an in-depth knowledge of Rwandan everyday social practices. The research has led to the development of Rwanda's first-ever qualification aimed at adult educators, which, in turn, has enhanced the knowledge and skills of adult literacy practitioners, increased adult literacy levels and improved the quality of life for both tutors and learners. The work has also provided a valuable evidence base to inform government policy on adult education in Rwanda.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>In a country where only a third of adults have completed primary school, and nearly a third cannot read or write a short note [6], delivery of adult literacy classes depends heavily on untrained community tutors, many of whom have only completed primary school-level education themselves. The government also relies on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide literacy classes. Literacy centres in Rwanda are generally in churches, although some literacy classes are held in the open; these literacy centres are poorly equipped, with few learning resources and many do not even have a chalk board. As a result, few adult literacy learners develop skills that they can use in their daily lives including skills that would enable them to improve their quality of life, such as greater autonomy and problem-solving skills [6]. Without literacy skills, individuals cannot get paid non-farm employment and rely on day farm labouring or subsistence farming to make a livelihood and are denied opportunities to be local leaders, cannot help their children with schoolwork and often feel marginalised within their communities.</p> <p>The University of Rwanda is the only public university that provides a pre-service degree for training tutors for the 13 teacher training colleges. Districts are responsible for coordinating adult literacy tutors' training and the delivery of literacy classes with NGOs, religious institutions, and other development partners running literacy classes. The Rwandan National Adult Education Strategic Plan, designed as a tool for planning, coordination and monitoring the implementation of the Adult Education Policy (2014), has never been prioritised [6].</p>		
Curriculum design & pedagogy		
<p>Professor Ackland has examined the relationships between theory, policy and practice in a period of reform in adult education in Scotland on adopting the 'Social Practices Approach' (SPA) [1, 2]. The research [2] has illuminated the complexities of education reform and the challenges of transforming educational practices congruent with radical theory. The social practices approach is primarily a theory of literacies in society that emphasises inherent power relationships that influence the uses of literacies in social contexts, and the situated nature of literacies acquisition.</p>		

It requires an educational approach that draws on learners' interests and supports them to participate in the literacies practises that have meaning and value in their everyday lives.

Ackland's research showed the importance of challenging adult educators' understandings of literacy to enable them to transform their learning strategies and enable learners to participate in literacies practices that learners identify as being important for them. The research into the Scottish experience underpinned an approach to the professional development of adult literacies teacher educators, tutors and volunteers in Rwanda, which recognised the significance of local context, the barriers to change, the necessity of re-conceptualisations of practice and the collaborative methods required to affect transformation.

Understanding the Rwandan context

Research carried out by Professor Pamela Abbott, Director of the Centre for Global Development, School of Education, has provided a detailed understanding of everyday social practices in Rwanda – how people – including the poorest and most deprived – live their daily lives [3-5]. Abbott's body of work is comprised of a series of studies into lifestyles and living conditions in Rwanda carried out in collaboration with Rwandan colleagues (including Roger Mugisha, Co-PI) from the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research-Rwanda (IPAR-Rwanda, the leading think-tank in Rwanda).

Adult literacies in the Western Province (2018-current)

Combining these bodies of research has enabled the team of Aberdeen researchers (Ackland, Abbott and Mtika) to leverage funding worth nearly GBP1,200,000 from the Scottish Government to undertake a programme of applied research titled 'Fostering a social practice approach to adult literacies for improving people's quality of life in Western Rwanda' [P1]. Western Province, the focus of Aberdeen research, is the poorest province in Rwanda, with 69% of the population living in poverty and 88% of the population living in rural areas.

This project is the first of its kind in Rwanda, brings together a collaboration with the University of Rwanda and the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR-Rwanda), using a mixed-methods approach to answer 'what', 'why' and 'how' questions about the adult literacy education provision available in the Western province. The Rwandan lead, Associate Professor Wenceslas Nzabalirwa (IPAR-Rwanda), working closely with the Aberdeen team, is responsible for the implementation of the project by TTCs of Rubengera, Gacuba II and Mururu. The project objectives included; the validation of a Professional Diploma in SPA at the University of Rwanda; and the training of BEd students and tutors in TTCs qualifying them to train adult literacy tutors to use a SPA. As part of the project, an initial scoping study was undertaken by the Aberdeen team, [6] as well as a review of the 2014 Adult Education Policy (undertaken by Abbott). Based on interviews with regional and district stakeholders including six of the seven District Directors of Education in Western Province and Professionals in Charge of Adult Education, the Director of Planning in the Ministry of Education, the Deputy Director of the Rwanda Education Board, and representatives of NGOs delivering literacy classes [6], the team concluded that:

- The University of Rwanda and TTCs required support to build capacity to train the trainers, and train adult literacy tutors as set out in the 2014 Adult Education Policy and its strategic plan;
- A 'hybrid' rather than a 'purer' SPA approach was required to ensure that students cover the Rwanda Adult Education Literacy syllabus;
- To ensure sustainability, a cost-efficient model of training community literacy tutors, using an apprenticeship model and utilising cheap, locally available learning materials, needs to be put in place.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

The quality of the research is deemed to be of 2* quality as corroborated by the following peer-reviewed, international publications and the peer-reviewed and highly competitive international development grant awarded by the Scottish Government.

[1] **Ackland, A.** (2014). More...or less? Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Adult Numeracy. *Adults Learning Mathematics – An International Journal*: 9(2): 7-21: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1057429.pdf>.

[2] **Ackland, A.** (2013). At Play in the Space: The Concept of ‘the Social Practice Approach’ in the Scottish Adult Literacies Field. *Literacy & Numeracy Studies*: 21(1): 59 -84: <https://doi.org/10.5130/lms.v21i1.3330>.

[3] **Abbott, P.**, Sapsford, R. and Rwirahira, J, (2015). Overcoming Poverty and Inequality: Rwanda’s Progress towards the MDGs. *Development in Practice* 25(7): 921-934: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2015.1073691>.

[4] **Abbott, P.**, Mutesi, L. and Norris, E. M. (2015). Gender Analysis for sustainable livelihoods and participatory governance. Oxfam International, Kigali, Rwanda (peer-reviewed report): <https://bit.ly/2MHOYCO>

[5] **Abbott, P.** and Malunda, D. (2016). The Promise and Reality of Women's Rights in Rwanda *African Journal of International and Comparative Law* 24(4):561-581: <https://doi.org/10.3366/ajicl.2016.0173>.

[6] **Abbott, P.**, Mugisha, R., **Mtika, P.** and Nzabalirwa, W. (2020). Failing Adult Learners: Why Rwanda’s Adult Literacy Education is not Delivering. *International Journal of Educational Development* 79, p. 102288: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2020.102288>.

Grants

[P1] **Pamela Abbott, Peter Mtika, Aileen Ackland:** Fostering a Social Practice Approach to Adult Literacies for Improving People’s Quality of Life in Western Rwanda (Project RWA3). Scottish Government (2017-2022; GBP1,191,795). Link: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/rwanda-development-programme-2017-2022-grant-awards/>

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The ‘Fostering a Social Practice Approach to Adult Literacies’ project and building on established relationships within Rwanda, has enabled the University of Rwanda and TTCs to implement the guidance from the research and contributed to the Rwandan government’s mission to improve adult literacy levels and enhance wellbeing in the country. Specifically, Aberdeen’s collaborative work with the University of Rwanda and IPAR has introduced a new qualification for adult educators and has enhanced the knowledge and skills of adult literacy practitioners in Rwanda. Furthermore, the work has increased adult literacy levels, improved the quality of life of adult learners, and provided an evidence base to guide implementation of Rwandan government policy towards the sustainable delivery of adult basic education.

Introducing a new Professional Diploma qualification for adult educators in Rwanda

The Aberdeen research applying the social practices approach to adult literacy training in Rwanda has guided implementation of 2014 Adult Education policy and led to the country’s first-ever qualification aimed at adult educators, validated and delivered by the University of Rwanda [S1]. Abbott, Ackland and Mtika built capacity in SPA at the University of Rwanda by training five established academic staff members in the approach enabling the University to provide pre-service and in-service teacher training both in delivering adult literacy classes and in training community literacies tutors, who are untrained ‘volunteers’ [S1i].

The Aberdeen team adopted an apprenticeship model based on initial scoping interviews with key stakeholders and has continued to provide professional guidance, including tutor training materials [S1ii] enabling the team at the University of Rwanda to develop and validate a professional postgraduate diploma, in order to deliver a ‘train the trainer’, model. The diploma was validated by the University of Rwanda Senate and is now an approved element of the Rwanda National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (RNQFHE) [S1iii]. In order to support its embedding and implementation, two members of staff are now registered with the University of Aberdeen, studying for PhDs to enable the College to support the Rwandan Government in implementing the 2014 Adult Education Policy. Mayors from all districts have acknowledged the

benefit of the project, with the Major of Rubavu District, in particular, expressing appreciation, stating that in Rubavu:

The project has trained five community literacy tutors and 159 students in 2018-2019, 18 community literacies tutors and 343 students in 2019-2020, not to forget 20 community literacies tutors and 578 students recruited for 2020-2021. (The project) has tremendously supported the district in achieving its target by training not only adult learners but also the district professional in charge of adult education [S2i].

Similarly, the Mayor of Rusizi District confirmed that the project has introduced an approach that is helping the community to improve their quality of life while at the same time acquiring skills of reading, writing and numeracy [S2ii].

Enhancing the Knowledge and Skills of Adult Literacy Practitioners

The SPA model has enhanced the knowledge and skills of tutors working within TTCs and community literacies tutors. Tutors from the Gacuba II Teacher Training College have described the training as improving their competencies, enhancing respect and recognition from society, especially adult literacies learners, and helping them to contribute to the development of education more generally in Rwanda [S3]. Based on these enhanced skills, the apprenticeship 'train the trainer' model, enabling those who have completed the postgraduate diploma to train community literacies tutors (volunteers), has been successfully rolled out to teacher training colleges in Western province. The model has been adopted by the Association Rwandaise des Travailleurs Chrétiens Féminine (ARTCF Rwanda), a local NGO that, as part of its work, delivers adult literacy classes in Southern, Western and Northern Provinces. In 2019 ARTCF successfully applied for funding (GBP13,634) to implement the model. By December 2020, 215 community tutors had been trained [S4, S5, S6].

The community tutors have also confirmed the efficacy of the new approach. In interviews carried out as part of the regular project evaluations, tutors have described the approach as 'much better' than previous methods that 'did not work very well' because it supports adult learners to 'discuss their problems and come up with ideas as to how they can help themselves to overcome them'. Munyantore Peter, a community tutor at the Kabahire Adult Learning Centre, has described the benefits, both to himself and to his learners, in detail:

I thought that the training that the project was going to give me would mean that I would have more knowledge about teaching adult literacy and more skills in teaching and that this would make me a better teacher. However, apart from enabling me to improve my skills in teaching, reading, writing and numeracy, it has helped me to enable [my students] to understand how they can improve their daily lives [S3].

Increasing Literacies Levels Among Adults

This model, underpinned by the Aberdeen research, has meant that by December 2020, 6,190 learners had graduated from a programme using the SPA taught by a trained tutor and a further 6,132 were awaiting examination [S7]. The overall student satisfaction for the courses taught by tutors in teacher training colleges was over 90%. Adult learners say they have gained basic knowledge (writing, reading, counting and ICT) in a short time, learned how to collaborate and cooperate with others and feel more trusted by their communities. Aberdeen research has also raised awareness in national media of the importance of building critical infrastructure to ensure that adults have basic literacy capabilities [S8].

Improving the quality of life of community tutors and adult learners

Community tutors and adult learners have not only benefitted from the programme by gaining skills that they can use in their everyday lives, but their feedback also points to improvements in their quality of life. Besides reading, writing and counting, learners and community tutors point to improved knowledge and skills of planning and cooking a balanced diet, strategies to prevent HIV/AIDS, family planning strategies, health management and sanitation, environmental protection and crop management, and financial management. Many tutors and learners are accessing financial support [S3] to help them grow their food to improve their family diet and start income-generating projects. Community tutor Nyiraguhirwa Agathe has described how her students,

Share their ideas and discuss together under my guidance and come to decisions about what their main problems are. Then they discuss what they can do. They have decided to have a mutual fund (savings club) and to use the money they saved to purchase pigs and rabbits to rear, and to buy seeds so they can have kitchen gardens and give their families a balanced diet [S3].

Providing an evidence-base to inform Rwandan government policy

The Aberdeen research has influenced national (Ministry of Education, Rwanda Education Board) policy, and in turn informed approaches for implementation of adult basic education in three districts (Karongi, Rubavu, Rusizi) by demonstrating the importance of having trained tutors and of using a pedagogy that engages learners and gives them skills that they can use in their everyday lives. The Rwandan lead for the project, Associate Professor Wenceslas, was invited by the Rwandan Education Board to provide advice on educating adults through a four-week group workshop in October 2020 [S9i]. Acting Director-General, Rwanda Education Board confirmed that this contribution enabled the development of adult education syllabi for levels 2 and 3 and that his involvement enabled '*participants to adapt and embed the SPA in the Adult Education Curriculum*' [S9ii].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[S1 (group)] (i) Letter from the Principal, College of Education, University of Rwanda (proof of validation of the CPD in Adult Literacies, 2018); (ii) Scottish Government Int. Development Programme End-Year Report (2019-2020); (iii) Adult Literacies Tutors Training Guide (proof of development by Aberdeen-Rwandan project team); (iiii) CPD certificate approval letter from the University of Rwanda (2018) (proof of certification and approved element of RNQFHE)

[S2 (group)] (i) Testimonial from the Mayor of Rubavu District (2020), shows the value of the project to the district; (ii) Testimonial from the Mayor of Rusizi District (2019), shows the value of the project to the district

[S3 (group)] International Development Case Study, TTC Tutors, TTC Gacuba II, Rubavu District (details the knowledge and skills gained by literacy practitioners through the project). Photos also supplied with permission, of adult learners making learning supplies

[S4] ARTCF Evaluation of the First Delivery of the Programme, 2018-2019

[S5] Supporting letter from ARTCF dated 09/11/20, demonstrates uptake of model and implementation

[S6] Letter to ARTCF from the Swiss Embassy dated 16/10/2019 (confirms funding leveraged to support uptake of the 'train the trainer' model)

[S7 (group)] International Development Case Study, Learners from Rubavu District (highlights benefits of the Aberdeen-led project to learners in Rubavu District)

[S8] 'The New Times' news article (2019), highlighting the level of illiteracy in Rwanda and where the current seeks to intervene. The New Times is a registered Rwandan private media outlet

[S9 (group)] (i) Invitation to a training workshop, Aug 2020 from Director General, Rwanda Education Board; (ii) Testimonial from Acting Director-General, Rwanda Education Board (2020) (corroborates further development of the adult education syllabi and role of the project team in facilitating this)