

# WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES A SOCIAL PRACTICE APPROACH TO ADULT LITERACIES EDUCATION MAKE TO ADULT LEARNERS IN WESTERN RWANDA?

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## Abstract

In this presentation, we will focus on the outcomes of implementing a social practice approach to adult literacies education (SPA-ALE) project in Rwanda (2017 - 2023). The overall objective of the project was: “to develop, implement and embed a social practices approach for adult literacies education in Western Rwanda that can be managed and delivered by local institutions to support people’s livelihoods through poverty reduction and inclusive socioeconomic development.” The Rwandan Government recognizes that adult literacy education is essential for poverty reduction, improved health, and increased participation in community development (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning [MINECOFIN], 2013). While the Rwandan Government has an ambitious policy on adult education (Ministry of Education [MINECOFIN], 2014), this has not been satisfactorily implemented for a number of reasons, such as lack of training for adult literacy tutors and a prevalence of the use of an ineffective teacher-centred approach for teaching adult learners.

We implemented the SPA-ALE project to address some of the existing challenges affecting adult education in Rwanda. As part of our project, we adapted the existing Rwanda adult education curriculum and implemented a culturally responsive, learner-centred approach for adult education in three districts in Western Rwanda. The social practice approach (SPA) is considered more effective in comparison with the teacher-centred approach. The SPA promotes adult learners’ agency in the formulation of learning objectives and activities. It empowers learners to identify problems that matter to them as the basis of the adult classes. This enables learners to develop appropriate knowledge and skills for alleviating socio-cultural concerns in their daily lives (Street, 2016). The SPA adopts teaching approaches that are participatory, such as group problem solving, ethnographic walks, and role play.

As part of the implementation of the project, we trained community adult literacy tutors (CALTs), who, in turn, implemented adult classes at various adult education centres in the three districts in Western Rwanda. As part of the project implementation, we conducted qualitative interviews with a sample of adult learners who had graduated from the classes in 2021 and 2022 to investigate their life experiencing after completing the adult classes. Data was analysed using a thematic approach.

The findings indicate that learners had benefited in several ways from taking part in SPA-ALE. The benefits included better understanding of nutrition and hygiene, improved household income enabling them to save and pay health insurance, better understanding of the importance of kitchen gardens, and more involvement in community activities, among others. The adult learners retained the knowledge and skills they had developed during the classes and continued to use this to improve their quality of life. Insights gained from the implementation of the adult classes will be discussed.

**Keywords:** *Adult literacy, adult learners, social practice approach, quality of life, Rwanda.*

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