

THE DOMINANT TRADITION IN ADULT LITERACY – A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NATIONAL LITERACY PROGRAMMES IN BOTSWANA AND ZIMBABWE

STANLEY T. MPOFU and FRANK YOUNGMAN

Abstract – The article highlights the renewed significance of adult literacy for international and national educational policy as a result of the World Educational Forum in 2000, at which a new vision of literacy was advocated. The difference between the new and old paradigms of adult literacy is considered. The article argues that the traditional approach which has dominated the international discourse on adult literacy has profoundly influenced national decisions. This influence is illustrated through a comparative analysis of national adult literacy programmes in Botswana and Zimbabwe. The programmes exhibit a high degree of similarity despite differences in the national contexts. The analysis shows that the traditional approach has been relatively ineffective in improving adult literacy levels. However, proposals for change influenced by the new paradigm have not been taken into account. Thus the examples of Botswana and Zimbabwe indicate the difficulty in displacing the dominant tradition in adult literacy at the level of national policy-making.

Zusammenfassung – In diesem Artikel wird die erneute Bedeutung der Erwachsenenalphabetisierung für internationale und nationale Bildungspolitik als Ergebnis des Weltbildungsforums 2000, anlässlich dessen eine neue Vision der Alphabetisierung befürwortet wurde, hervorgehoben. Der Unterschied zwischen neuen und alten Paradigmen der Erwachsenenalphabetisierung wird beleuchtet. Die Autoren dieses Artikels argumentieren, dass der traditionelle Ansatz, der den in der Erwachsenenbildung beschrittenen internationalen Weg dominierte, nationale Entscheidungen grundlegend beeinflusst hat. Dieser Einfluss zeigt sich in einer komparativen Analyse nationaler Erwachsenenalphabetisierungsprogramme in Botswana und Zimbabwe. Die Programme weisen erhebliche Gemeinsamkeiten trotz einiger Unterschiede in nationalem Zusammenhang auf. Die Analyse zeigt, dass der traditionelle Ansatz zur Verbesserung des Grads der Erwachsenenalphabetisierung relativ uneffektiv war. Von dem neuen Paradigma beeinflusste Änderungsvorschläge wurden nicht berücksichtigt. Deshalb weisen die Beispiele von Botswana und Zimbabwe auf die Schwierigkeit hin, die vorherrschende Tradition in der Erwachsenenbildung auf der Ebene nationaler politischer Entscheidungen ausser Kraft zu setzen.

Résumé – Cet article met en lumière le regain d'importance de l'alphabétisation des adultes dans les politiques éducatives nationales et internationales, déclenché par le Forum mondial sur l'éducation en 2000, qui a préconisé une nouvelle conception de l'alphabétisation. L'auteur étudie la différence entre l'ancien et le nouveau modèle. Il constate que l'approche traditionnelle, qui domine le débat international sur l'alphabétisation des adultes, exerce une forte influence sur les décisions nationales. Il illustre cette emprise à travers une analyse comparative des programmes nationaux d'alphabétisation des adultes au Botswana et au Zimbabwe, qui dénotent une grande similitude, en dépit de contextes nationaux différents. L'analyse révèle que l'approche traditionnelle est relativement inefficace pour améliorer les niveaux des adultes en compétences de base. Les propositions de réforme suscitées par le nouveau modèle

n'ont cependant pas été entendues. Les exemples du Botswana et du Zimbabwe montrent donc la difficulté à remplacer la notion prédominante de l'alphabétisation des adultes au niveau de la conception nationale de politiques.

Resumen – Este artículo realza la renovada importancia que tiene la alfabetización de personas adultas para las políticas de educación internacionales y nacionales, como resultado del Foro Mundial de la Educación del año 2000 en el que se ha abogado por una nueva visión de la alfabetización de personas adultas. Este trabajo argumenta que el enfoque tradicional que dominaba al discurso internacional de la alfabetización de personas adultas ha ejercido una influencia profunda sobre las decisiones nacionales, e ilustra esta influencia realizando un análisis comparativo de programas de alfabetización de personas adultas en Botswana y en Zimbabwe. Los programas presentan un alto grado de similitud, pese a las diferencias que existen en los contextos nacionales. El análisis demuestra que el enfoque tradicional ha sido relativamente ineficaz en cuanto a la mejora de los niveles de capacidad de leer y escribir de las personas adultas. No obstante, no se han tenido en cuenta propuestas innovadoras, influenciadas por el nuevo paradigma. Así, los ejemplos de Botswana y Zimbabwe muestran lo difícil que es desplazar la tradición dominante en la alfabetización de personas adultas cuando se elaboran las políticas nacionales.

Резюме – В статье отмечается возобновленная значимость грамотности взрослых для международной и национальной образовательной политики как результата Всемирного образовательного форума 2000, на котором отстаивалось новое видение грамотности. Рассматривается различие между новыми и старыми парадигмами грамотности взрослых. В статье оспаривается тот факт, что традиционный подход, доминировавший в международном дискурсе о грамотности взрослых, сильно повлиял на принятие решений на национальном уровне. Это влияние проиллюстрировано в сравнительном анализе национальных программ по грамотности взрослых в Ботсване и Зимбабве. Программы имеют высокую степень сходства, несмотря на различия в национальных контекстах. Анализ указывает на то, что традиционный подход не был весьма эффективен в повышении уровня грамотности взрослых. Тем не менее, предложения, направленные на изменения в соответствии с новой парадигмой, не принимались во внимание. Таким образом, примеры Ботсваны и Зимбабве указывают на трудности в вытеснении доминирующей традиционной грамотности взрослых на уровне разработки национальной политики.

Revising the goals of Jomtien

The World Educational Forum in Dakar in 2000 reviewed international progress in education since the World Declaration on Education for All made in Jomtien in 1990. The data provided to the Forum through country reports and the global EFA 2000 Assessment showed that, despite progress in some

countries, the overall goals of Education For All had not been met. The Forum concluded that there were still unacceptable levels of primary school enrolment and adult illiteracy. With respect to adult illiteracy, a new goal was set of “achieving 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women . . .” (UNESCO 2000a). The significance of adult literacy for international and national educational policy was therefore re-emphasised by the Forum.

Within the Forum, the importance of adult literacy was promoted by a Strategy Session entitled “Literacy for All: A Renewed Vision for a Ten-Year Global Action Plan”, which sought to provide direction for a proposed United Nations Literacy Decade (UNESCO 2000b). The strategy session focused on how to accelerate efforts towards universal literacy. It advocated a “renewed vision” of literacy and of how to achieve literate societies, and it criticised as inadequate the “old vision” of illiteracy and its eradication. The contrast made between the new and old conceptions of adult literacy reflected the shifts in thinking which had occurred during the 1990s, when a new paradigm emerged to challenge the traditional approach. Proponents of the new paradigm argue that traditional literacy programmes have been relatively ineffective, therefore new approaches based on different assumptions are required if adult literacy levels are to be improved.

Two paradigms of adult literacy

There have been various ways of characterising the different conceptualisations of adult literacy which underlie the old and new paradigms that now influence literacy scholarship, policy-making and practice. A helpful characterisation is that of Al-Kahtany (1996), who distinguishes between the linguistic and socio-linguistic perspectives.

The traditional conception of adult literacy is derived from the linguistic perspective that views literacy as a technical process of acquiring reading and writing skills. This process is a purely linguistic activity which is independent of social factors. In acquiring literacy, an individual crosses the divide between orality and literacy, and thus achieves the new cognitive abilities and attitudes which are necessary to function in a modern, scientific society. Illiteracy is therefore considered a deficiency to be overcome at the personal level, and a problem to be eradicated at the societal level through action by the state. From this perspective, the consequences of literacy are beneficial for the individual, and important for national socio-economic development.

On the other hand, the socio-linguistic perspective sees adult literacy as embedded in a social context. Thus Street (1995) argues that literacy is not an autonomous set of skills but a variety of practices which are dependent on specific social and cultural realities. There is not a total dichotomy between oracy and literacy or a divide between the two in cognitive terms such as intelligence, logical ability or abstract modes of thinking. In fact, literacy is

not something which is absent or present but is a spectrum of knowledge and skills. There are many forms of literacy and a plurality of ways of using literacy skills. For example, there are different kinds of literacies involved in reading the Koran, writing a letter, filling in an election ballot paper or using an automated teller machine. Furthermore, literacy is not an independent variable but a set of practices embedded within the society's structures of power. Hence the individual and social consequences of literacy are not necessarily social and economic improvement. In particular, literacy will only have positive implications if it is linked to social action for change, to "reading the world" as well as "reading the word" (Freire and Macedo 1987). In this perspective, the emphasis is not simply on the classroom acquisition of literacy but on how the literacy skills are used in daily life.

The linguistic perspective has been predominant in the international discourse on adult literacy since the Second World War and has influenced national policy-makers and practitioners. It is therefore the source of the assumptions that underlie many national literacy programmes in the Third World. Wagner (1995: 353) has called these assumptions "myths about literacy and development" because, he argues, although they are pervasive they are not supported by strong empirical evidence. The socio-linguistic perspective provided the basis for the growing critique of these assumptions that arose during the 1990s. Criticism from this perspective challenges the linguistic conceptualisation of literacy and argues that it is the basis of the relative ineffectiveness of traditional literacy programmes. The new paradigm goes beyond critique to propose practical implications for literacy activities. One example of this is a recent article by Rogers (1999) that discusses the "real literacies" approach, which assumes that most adults already engage in some literacy tasks in their daily lives (like reading the destination on buses or counting their change). In this approach, literacy teaching is learner-centred and contextualised, being based on reading and writing tasks chosen by the learners, and on found materials from the local community, such as calendars, advertisements and election posters. The article argues such an approach leads to increased motivation of learners and greater application of new literacy skills in everyday situations.

The discussion at the World Educational Forum suggested that it is the new paradigm of adult literacy which should be adopted as the basis of plans to achieve the goal of literacy for all. For this to happen, the traditional approach, which has dominated adult literacy policies and programmes in the Third World, will have to be replaced. This is a complex task which will require a detailed analysis of national situations and realistic strategies for change. In this article, we consider the issue through an analysis of Botswana and Zimbabwe, where national literacy programmes have been in place since the early 1980s. The comparative study of these two Southern African countries illuminates what the dominant tradition in adult literacy means in practice, and it indicates the difficulties in bringing about change.

Adult literacy programmes in comparative perspective

Carron and Bordia (1985) and Lind and Johnston (1990) have shown that national adult literacy programmes undertaken by the state have similar technical components in their design. These components include: aims and target groups; scope and duration; organisational structure; recruitment and training of teachers; language, content and method; evaluation procedures; provision of post-literacy opportunities; and mode of financing. However, the way these components are actually formulated derives not only from technical decisions but also from choices that are influenced by the wider social environment. As the authors of a UNESCO bibliography concluded from their review of the literature on literacy in the Third World:

From all these ideas and examples it has emerged that differences of view about the purpose of literacy are intimately linked to the differences in political, social and cultural settings. This results in different approaches to action and to the organisational forms required to carry out and sustain this action. (UNESCO 1990: 83).

Thus the variations between literacy activities in different countries are largely contextual in origin. This is illustrated in a study of Mexico and Nicaragua by Arnove and Torres (1995). They show that whilst the two countries shared many characteristics typical of dependent capitalist states in Latin America, their adult literacy policies in the 1970s and 1980s had differences that derived from the contrasting corporatist and revolutionary nature of their respective political regimes. A similar conclusion was drawn by Bhola (1985) who analysed adult literacy in eleven countries of Southern Africa in terms of a theoretical model of the relationship between the development ideology of a nation and the state's choice of literacy approach. He discerned a clear linkage in the countries studied between the differences in national context and the differences in literacy approach.

However, whilst the nation is the unit of analysis for comparative studies, it is important to recognise that the 'national context' is subject to international influences. Thus analysis of a specific historical, political, economic and social milieu must include consideration of how external influences interact with this national environment. In the case of adult literacy, it has been shown that the international discourse about literacy has had notable effects on national decision-making since the establishment of UNESCO in 1946 (Jones 1988). Historically, UNESCO has been dominated by the linguistic perspective on adult literacy and has promoted a global model based on a universalised conception of literacy and a standardised approach to literacy policy and programmes, applicable to all countries. It is clear that the impact of external influences will tend to decrease the distinctiveness of national decisions about adult literacy programmes.

The guiding hypothesis of this study was that the variations in adult literacy activities between countries are produced primarily by contextual variables

in their national settings, whilst international influences have a homogenising effect. The purpose of the study was to undertake a cross-national comparison of literacy in Botswana and Zimbabwe in order to identify the extent to which the dominant tradition has shaped their national literacy programmes. The study collected information from published and unpublished reports, records, and research on the programmes. The methodology of comparative analysis was derived from the work of Titmus (1985; 1989) which stresses the importance of juxtaposing data from two countries within a common framework in order to enable interpretative comparison.

Background

Botswana and Zimbabwe are adjacent countries in Southern Africa. Although Botswana's land surface is 50% greater than that of Zimbabwe, it has a much smaller population – 1.5 million compared to 12.5 million. Both countries were colonised by Britain but their colonial heritage was very different. Botswana was granted independence in 1966 after eighty years as a Protectorate. The colonial administration had undertaken little development so that at Independence it was one of the ten poorest countries in the world – “worse off in terms of both social and directly productive infrastructure than any other ex-British territory in Africa.” (Colclough and McCarthy 1980: 28) On the other hand, Zimbabwe experienced white settler colonialism from 1890 and independence was only achieved in 1980 after an armed liberation struggle. The new nation inherited a relatively advanced economy and infrastructure. But the economy and society was highly unequal, with affluent, white-owned industrial, business and commercial agriculture sectors, and a large impoverished black peasantry and a small, weak working class.

In Botswana, the independence constitution made provision for multi-party democracy and elections have been held regularly. However, one party has won every election and civil society has remained weak. Popular participation in development has been low and the regime type has been characterised as one of “bureaucratic domination” (Molomo 1989). In Zimbabwe, there is also a multi-party constitution but throughout the 1980s and 1990s parliament was dominated by a single party and, after 1987, opposition politics was non-existent. However, during the late 1990s there was a marked deterioration in economic and political conditions. The popularity of the ruling party began to wane, and a period of political tension commenced. There is a large and active non-governmental organisation sector. In both countries, a dominant party, reflecting particular class interests, has sought to retain a central role for the state in the development process.

The Botswana Government after 1966 pursued a modernisation strategy of development within a framework of welfare capitalism but during the 1990s there was a slight shift towards neo-liberalism and the tenets of free market capitalism. The post-colonial period has been one of sustained economic

growth based on the development of diamond mining. GNP per capita in 1998 was US\$ 3,070 (World Bank 2000: Table 1.1). The strong economy has enabled significant provision of public services, such as health and education. In Zimbabwe the Government in 1980 proclaimed a commitment to revolutionary socialism. However, although the Government's ideological declarations and social development programmes promoted social equality, it became clear during the 1980s that the capitalist economy and society were not being transformed. Following an economic crisis, in 1990 the Government was forced by the International Monetary Fund to adopt a structural adjustment programme that advanced free market capitalism. The economy has continued to be very weak and the state has significantly reduced expenditure on social services, including education. GNP per capita in 1998 was US\$ 620 (World Bank 2000: Table 1.1).

Botswana and Zimbabwe share many of the problems of underdevelopment typical of countries in Southern Africa, such as poverty, unemployment and AIDS. However, they do exhibit important differences. In political terms, Botswana's development strategy is avowedly conservative and pro-Western, whilst Zimbabwe has presented its development path as radical and opposed to neo-colonialism. In economic terms, post-colonial Botswana has experienced exceptional economic growth whilst Zimbabwe has experienced economic crisis and decline. This is the political and economic background to the national literacy efforts undertaken in both countries.

In Botswana at Independence, the adult illiteracy rate was approximately 75% (Kann and Taylor 1988: 140). This high level reflected the neglect of education during the colonial era. Education policy after 1966 initially focussed on expansion of secondary and tertiary education, but after 1977 more emphasis was given to basic education. However, a large-scale government literacy programme was not started until 1981. In colonial Zimbabwe, the education system was racially segregated and very unequal, so that for African children there were low enrolments and high drop-out rates. As a result, at Independence in 1980, 63% of the adult population was illiterate (Central Statistics Office 1982). The new Government gave high priority to redressing the inequalities in education. It rapidly expanded enrolments at all levels of the education system, and it immediately commenced adult literacy work. Thus both countries started their national literacy efforts at the beginning of the 1980s.

Policy

The dominant tradition conceptualises literacy as a single set of linguistic skills whose acquisition brings significant consequences in terms of modern attitudes and increased involvement in development. Illiteracy is seen as a social pathology that can be eradicated by a national effort, which is the responsibility of the state. These assumptions provide the basis for developing

government national literacy programmes that have a unified approach nation-wide and which are justified in terms of national development goals. This perspective clearly underlies the policies followed in both Botswana and Zimbabwe.

In Botswana, after an experimental year in 1980, the Government launched the National Literacy Programme in 1981. The state's policy reflected the modernisation theory of development and it articulated adult literacy as an instrument for the creation of a modern society and the development of human capital for economic progress. In the words of the Minister of Education in 1979:

For the great majority of people, if life in modern society is to be lived to the full, they must be released from the bondage of illiteracy if they are to make their best contribution to their families, their communities and their nation. (Morake, cited in Youngman 2000: 258).

The aim of the programme was stated as being "To enable 250,000 presently illiterate man, women and youths to become literate in Setswana and numerate over the six years 1980–1985." (Ministry of Education 1979: 1) Although there was a short time-frame, the state rejected the label "campaign" because of its socialist connotations and emphasised the programme approach (Townsend-Coles 1988: 38–41). The conception of literacy was narrowly defined in terms of comprehension of "those written communications and simple computations which are a part of daily life" (Ministry of Education 1979: 1). The planners consciously rejected alternative approaches, such as the politicised Freirean conception of literacy.

The programme was unable to meet its original target numbers by 1985. However, the state recognised its importance as a social welfare programme, particularly for the rural population (Gaborone, Mutanyatta and Youngman 1988), and institutionalised the programme as a long-term educational provision. The revised policy formulated in 1985 set aims of stronger linkages with formal education and income-generating activities (Republic of Botswana 1985). There was a new emphasis on the programme's role in expanding educational opportunity. Increasingly from the late 1980s, literacy policy statements were articulated within the international discourse of access to basic education for all (Republic of Botswana 1993: 291). They also gave more prominence to the economic aim of enhancing participants' skills for work and self-employment. Although the policy evolved over the years, the underlying assumptions about literacy and development remained unchanged.

Government literacy work in Zimbabwe officially began in 1980 on a small scale. The Government launched a national literacy programme in 1981, which was guided by a limited conception of literacy as simply the ability to communicate in print. To this end, the relevant Government departments set about establishing literacy classes in primary schools throughout the country. Despite the Government's widely publicised intention to adopt a revolutionary literacy agenda that would transform and democratise society, the actual implemen-

tation of literacy by the state was consistent with the view that regards literacy as a factor in modernisation rather than socialist transformation (Mpofu 1997).

The national programme approach has prevailed to the present despite two conscious attempts to change it. The first attempt came in 1983 with the launching of the National Literacy Campaign whose purpose was to eradicate illiteracy in five years. However, the campaign concept was essentially rhetorical as there was no effort to mobilise significant resources and to motivate the illiterates to join literacy classes on a large scale (Mpofu 1997). Hence, the average annual enrolment for this period was 98,920, far short of the annual target of 500,000. The second attempt to change the programme came in January 1994 when the Ministry of Education and Culture launched a new five year literacy initiative that would “move away from the concept of a campaign” and include “programmes that are community owned and community funded” (Ministry of Education and Culture 1994: 1). However, the guiding principles reflected in the new policy actually constituted very little deviation from the original narrow conception of literacy and the central role of the state in its provision. Hence, the implementation of the new initiative did not depart from the national programme approach of the 1980s.

The policies adopted in the two countries were very similar. Botswana follows a conservative capitalist approach to development and the modernisation conception of literacy synchronised with the Government's political philosophy throughout the period. In Zimbabwe, in the first years after Independence, the Government adopted a socialist development path at the level of rhetoric, whilst in practice following a reformist political strategy that avoided fundamental socio-economic change. In 1990, the Government adopted a structural adjustment programme but tempered the neo-liberal reality of its programme with policy statements that continued to articulate goals of equity. In both periods, the modernising ideology of the traditional literacy approach fitted closely the actual political agenda of the dominant classes in Zimbabwe society. The dominant tradition in adult literacy has served the political interests of the elites in both countries, who wish to be seen to improve the welfare of the masses whilst avoiding fundamental social change.

Organisational structure

The linguistic perspective that literacy is a generalised set of skills leads to the assumption that it is appropriate for the state to organise a unified national programme. The traditional approach has usually been operationalised through the bureaucratic structures of government in a centralised and hierarchical manner. The top-down organisational structure aims to ensure a standardised provision of literacy tuition throughout the country. However, it tends to diminish responsibility lower down the chain of command so that management at field level is very weak, thus undermining programme effectiveness.

This mode of organisation is exemplified in Botswana and Zimbabwe, which both have a centralised state.

The Botswana National Literacy Programme is implemented by the Department of Non Formal Education (DNFE), which is a Department of the Ministry of Education. Policy guidance is provided by the National Literacy Advisory Committee, which includes representation from other ministries, non-governmental organisations and the University. The organisational structure is co-ordinated at the centre by the Division of Adult Basic Education within DNFE. Originally, headquarters managed directly the District Adult Education Officers (DAEO) based in each of the country's administrative districts and sub-districts. However, in 1996, 5 positions of Regional Adult Education Officer were created so that the 15 DAEOs are supervised by these officers. Spread out in the districts, there is a cadre of Adult Educators under the supervision of the DAEO and they in turn are responsible for supervising the Literacy Group Leaders, the part-time staff who actually teach the literacy classes. In 1997 there were 132 Adult Educators and 948 Literacy Group Leaders, who taught 1,640 groups (Department of Non Formal Education, 1998). This pyramidal organisational structure is very hierarchical and centralised. It provides a standardised national framework in which there is little discretion at the district level. For example, the budget is tightly controlled from headquarters. The Annual Reports on the programme over the years have consistently identified supervision at the field level as a major issue that causes a variety of implementation problems, such as payments for ghost groups and weak instructional support for the literacy teachers.

The organisation of the Zimbabwe literacy programme also has a pyramidal structure, although ministerial responsibility has changed several times since its inception in 1980. Between 1980 and 1982, the programme was managed solely by the Ministry of Education and Culture through the Non-Formal Education Unit. In the period between mid-1982 and mid-1988, the programme was jointly managed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the then Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs. The latter Ministry had overall responsibility for the programme. The Ministry of Education and Culture played a subordinate role, being responsible through the Non-Formal Education Unit for writing and producing literacy materials, training literacy personnel, and evaluation. The overall strategy for the programme was determined by the National Literacy Co-ordination Council (NLCC), which was chaired by the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs. The NLCC was composed of representatives of other ministries, and of political parties and voluntary agencies.

In each of the country's eight provinces, the programme was implemented and administered by the Provincial Literacy Co-ordinating Committee that was chaired by the Provincial Community Development Officer. In terms of composition, the Provincial Literacy Co-ordinating Committee was more or less a replica of the National Literacy Co-ordinating Council. The actual management of the programme was the responsibility of the Training Section

of the Department of Community Development, in the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs. This entailed the mobilisation of the illiterates, the organisation of classes and literacy training. To this end, in each of the 55 districts, two District Literacy Co-ordinators were charged with the responsibility for overseeing the programme. This included the recruitment, training and supervision of volunteer literacy tutors, the distribution of literacy materials and the co-ordination of literacy work in the district. Between 1983 and 1988, 15,000 volunteer literacy tutors were trained nation-wide.

Dual responsibility for the literacy programme led to a lack of co-ordination between the two ministries (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education 1989). The two ministries operated largely independently of each other. In order to resolve problems emanating from dual control, the Government in 1988 gave total responsibility for the literacy programme to the then Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (the successor of the Ministry of Education and Culture). Armed with a new and broader mandate for literacy, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education sought to revamp literacy work. To accomplish this, the Ministry created the Division of Adult and Non-Formal Education, headed by a Deputy Secretary. Nevertheless, the structure on the ground remained more or less the same. The only thing that changed was that the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs withdrew its involvement from literacy work. There was subsequently very little presence of literacy personnel outside Ministry headquarters. District Literacy Co-ordinators and volunteer literacy tutors left en masse: the former due to poor working conditions and the latter due to lack of payment (Mpfu 1995a).

Although Zimbabwe has a larger administrative system (reflecting its larger population), the organisational structure of the literacy programmes in the two countries is identical. It has three bureaucratic levels – Ministry headquarters, province/region, and district – and a centralised line of command. Little discretion is allowed at the district level and hence little initiative is taken. There is no encouragement in either programme to respond to local differences. Supervision at the field level is generally weak and there are problems around the quality of instruction. The literacy teachers are unpaid in Zimbabwe and are given an “honorarium” in Botswana, but in both cases the question of remuneration is the source of poorly-motivated and poorly qualified teachers. Whilst this organisational structure meets the need of the state in both countries for strong bureaucratic control, it leads to ineffective implementation of the programmes at the level of the literacy class.

Financing

The dominant tradition gives the state central responsibility for addressing the issue of adult illiteracy. However, illiteracy has also been seen as a question of international development and donor agencies have supported many

national literacy programmes in the Third World. The financing of literacy programmes is therefore typically a combination of domestic public funds and donor funds. The balance between the components depends on the relative strength of the national economy, the interests of particular donors, and the funding priorities of the government. There are no expectations of contributions by learners themselves, or by the community or the private sector. However, even with foreign aid, the state is seldom able to mobilise enough resources to meet the needs of the literacy programmes, so that they confront many finance-related problems which diminish their effectiveness. This has been the case in both Botswana and Zimbabwe.

The Botswana programme was originally conceived as a project of six years' duration and the Government obtained significant donor funding. This was before the post-1982 economic boom when Botswana was still classed as a low income economy and was a major recipient of foreign aid. In the period 1980/81 to 1985/86, 72% of the costs of the programme were provided by donor aid (Gaborone, Mutanyattta and Youngman 1988: 92). The major donors were the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) and the German Technical Co-operation Agency (GTZ) but contributions were also made by the Dutch Government, the German Reconstruction Loan Corporation and UNICEF. Following the policy decision to institutionalise the programme in 1985, the Government steadily took over an increasing proportion of the costs. Donor aid was subsequently targeted at specific activities, such as SIDA's support to post-literacy materials and a literacy survey, but later it came to an end. For example, UNICEF terminated its assistance in 1994 and SIDA in 1997, as part of a trend of donor withdrawal because of Botswana's economic success. The Government has taken responsibility for the programme's costs, though donor aid is still sought for particular activities, especially support to income-generating groups. No effort is made to generate financial inputs from learners, communities or non governmental organisations and only minor contributions are made by the private sector, even by companies participating in the Literacy in the Workplace Project.

The Government financing of the programme covers adequately the costs of the basic organisational infrastructure of offices and permanent staff. However, the operational costs of running the programme are chronically under-funded, so that there is insufficient transport for supervision, inadequate funds for honoraria for Literacy Group Leaders, and class meeting environments that are unacceptable (Reimer 1998: 5). The allocation to the programme within the Ministry of Education budget is both low in total and in unit cost per learner compared to other levels of education and it is clearly inadequate for an effective programme.

The Zimbabwe literacy programme has also been grossly under-funded when compared to formal education. Between 1980 and 1993, the total budget for the Ministry of Education and Culture increased nearly eight fold whilst the allocation for the Division of Non-Formal Education only doubled (Mpfu

1997). It should be noted that the Division is responsible for general adult education and distance education as well as adult literacy. Financially, education remains a priority of the Government and it continues to receive one quarter of the budget each year (Mpofu 1999). However, the Division of Non-Formal Education is neglected and since 1980 its financial allocation has never amounted to more than 0.82% of the total education budget (Mpofu 1997).

There are no figures pertaining to the financing of literacy work by the then Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs during its involvement in literacy (Mpofu 1994). The reason for this is that there was no specific allocation for literacy in that Ministry. It was envisaged that literacy would become part of its everyday work among women groups and communities but this was never the case in practice as literacy was not a priority for that Ministry.

Due to inadequate funding, the literacy programme has encountered a plethora of finance related problems. Two are worth mentioning here. First, the literacy programme has been characterised by low salaries for literacy personnel. This has resulted in a very high rate of turnover among literacy personnel. Mpofu (1995b) cites a case in Mashonaland East, where from a total salaries budget of Z\$36,000 allocated for May 1991, only Z\$11,000 could be paid out, because the majority of District Literacy Co-ordinators and voluntary literacy tutors had resigned without due notice. Second, there has been no provision for housing and office accommodation for District Literacy Co-ordinators. As a result, most work from their homes, some of which are far away from the district offices (Mpofu 1995b). This clearly places the work of the District Literacy Officers outside the supervision of the District Education Officers. Compounding the financial situation of the literacy programme has been the persistent diversion of its meagre resources to other programmes that are considered to be more deserving. For example, vehicles that were specifically acquired for literacy have hardly been used for literacy work. Instead, other educational departments have commandeered them for their own ends (Mpofu 1997).

The literacy programme has largely been funded by the Government. But there has been important technical assistance from UNICEF. Firstly, in 1985, UNICEF undertook a situation analysis of literacy among women which provided valuable baseline data. This information proved useful in the identification of female illiterates and in evaluating the programme's effectiveness among the female population. Secondly, in 1986, UNICEF entered into a programme of co-operation with the Government of Zimbabwe. This programme lasted from mid-1987 to the end of 1991, and UNICEF donated US\$250,000 for literacy work. Similarly, UNICEF provided financial support for literacy work under the Five Year Plan of Action, 1994-98 (Ministry of Education and Culture 1994). However, it appears as if the money provided by UNICEF for a given period became the only funds available for Department of Non Formal Education. Instead of using the donation from UNICEF to

complement the allocation for literacy, the Government diverted what would have otherwise been allocated to literacy work to other programmes.

To date there has been no attempt by Government to harness the resources of the private business, industrial, mining and commercial farming sectors for literacy work. There has been very little co-operation between the Government and non-governmental organisations, such as the Adult Literacy Organisation of Zimbabwe. Also, learners and community groups are not required to contribute to literacy activities in which they are participants.

The picture that emerges from both Botswana and Zimbabwe is similar. Both countries have received significant contributions from donor agencies but this has not compensated for their own levels of government funding, which have been relatively low even when, as in Botswana's case, the economy has been growing rapidly. Neither country has sought to diversify the funding basis of literacy by identifying other local sources and partners because of the assumption that responsibility for literacy is solely that of the state. This assumption has held good in Zimbabwe even since the adoption of the structural adjustment programme in 1990 which aimed to reduce the role of the state and levels of public expenditure. The concern of the state in both countries to retain control of the national literacy effort has restricted the possibility of alternative approaches to financing literacy.

Language, content and method

The unitary concept of literacy skills and their mode of acquisition in the linguistic perspective leads to national programmes which have a standardised curriculum developed at the centre. The traditional approach has a number of common characteristics. Firstly, there is a tendency to use a dominant language (or languages) as the medium of instruction even where there is a variety of different languages within the country. Secondly, the teaching materials are generalised and decontextualised. Literacy is seen as a single group of competencies and, typically, a set of primers is prepared with a common content for use nation-wide. Thirdly, literacy acquisition is centred around the teacher and the use of a standard method. The approach therefore fails to recognise the diversity of learners' socio-cultural situations. This contributes to problems of learner motivation and retention, and to low levels of learning achievement which are experienced in traditional literacy programmes.

Botswana's programme follows a single centralised curriculum which was developed in the late 1970s and has not been changed since the inception of the programme in 1980. The language of instruction is Setswana, the language of the politically dominant and most numerous ethnic group. This was an overtly political choice as the state's language policy prevented the use of minority languages for education on the grounds of national unity (Townsend-Coles 1988: 40). However, from the inception of the programme, non-

Setswana speakers have experienced difficulties in learning to read and write in another language. Although there has been a shift in national language policy since 1994, this has not yet been reflected in the programme by the use of other languages (Chebanne, Nyathi-Ramahobo and Youngman 2000).

The literacy tuition is centred on the five primers introduced in 1980. The primers use the analytic method based on key words and accompanying pictures. The key words provide the basis for a syllabic approach to learning how to construct words and sentences. The words themselves include topics such as health, agriculture and other development issues, and the original intention was that they should be the source of discussion on community problems to accompany to the learning of reading and writing. The content and method echo Freire's approach but lack the aim of social and political action embedded in the Freirean conception of literacy. In practice, very little discussion takes place and very few linkages are made to action in the community. The only external evaluation of the programme, which took place in 1986/87, identified at that stage the need to develop a more relevant curriculum and reinvigorate the teaching and learning process (Gaborone, Mutanyatta and Youngman 1987). However, this was never done and the curriculum has remained static, and the pedagogy routinised and teacher-centred. Thus even when a special effort was made after 1991 to organise literacy groups in the workplace, no change was made to the existing primers, which make no reference to the circumstances of formal employment.

Initially, the Zimbabwe national literacy curriculum was premised on the need to teach people how to read, write and calculate in their mother tongue (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education 1989). To this end, seven languages were identified, but in practice the two major languages (Shona and Ndebele) dominated basic literacy instruction even after literacy primers were developed in some of the other languages. Later, it was felt that the literacy programme was incomplete without English, the language of information. It was, therefore, decided that English be taught as part of the basic literacy programme (Government of Zimbabwe/UNICEF 1986). Today, the literacy programme is a replica of the primary school model whereby children of African origin are, for the first three years of school, taught in Shona or Ndebele, depending upon where the school is located. From Grade 4 onwards, the language of instruction becomes English, except when Shona and Ndebele are taught as subjects. Similarly, initial basic literacy instruction is conducted in either Shona or Ndebele until such time that participants are ready for what is termed Basic English for Communication. The literacy primer in both Shona and Ndebele served the purpose of a manual on how to construct words and sentences. The primers were first produced in 1983 and new improved versions were published in 1993. However, the actual teaching of literacy has remained purely mechanical. The recommendations in two external evaluations (Mpofu 1991; 1994) to base literacy activities on the realities of the everyday lives of the illiterate people have not been implemented.

The two programmes show strong commonalities in their curriculum and

pedagogy that derive from the dominant tradition. Thus both have concentrated on major languages and neglected to develop literacy in minority languages. In both programmes there is a primer-based standardised national curriculum, and a teacher-centred approach to literacy tuition has prevailed. A variation may be observed in the content of the primers developed in Zimbabwe for the National Literacy Campaign that started in 1983. These primers were developed by left-wing civil servants who took the Government's socialist rhetoric seriously and therefore included topics such as anti-imperialism and alternatives to the capitalist mode of economic organisation (Mudariki 1996: 234). Thus the socialist ideology that was prominent in political discourse in the early years after Independence had an impact on the literacy content. However, this content was not supported by political mobilisation and became increasingly irrelevant to the socio-economic reality. Overall, the dominant perspective on adult literacy has created a similar approach to issues of language, content and method in both countries.

Post-literacy provision

The linguistic perspective on literacy has tended to encourage the view that once people acquire basic literacy, they become literate permanently (Ouane 1999: 337). With their focus on the acquisition of skills rather than their use, national literacy programmes have therefore concentrated more on the initial acquisition of literacy skills than on their sustainability. However the problem of learners relapsing into illiteracy has led national planners to pay some attention to the post-literacy situation and adopt a number of strategies to support new literates. The approach has been for the state literacy agency to take responsibility for the provision of opportunities to help new literates retain their skills. One strategy has been to develop centrally a variety of special reading materials and make them available to new literates, for example, through village libraries. Another strategy had been to encourage new literates to form income-generating groups in which their new skills will be used in the context of economic activities. A more recent strategy has been to develop a structured programme that will enable learners to complete the equivalent of the basic level of formal education. However, these strategies have frequently been ineffective. For example, the pre-packaged standard readers for neo-literates have often attracted little interest, whilst learners have seldom used their new literacy skills in economic projects because what they have learned in class was unrelated. The lack of an integrated and learner responsive approach to basic education for adults has contributed to the failure of many literacy programme graduates to use their new skills regularly.

When the Botswana National Literacy Programme began in 1980, no preparations were made for post-literacy provision for learners who successfully completed the five primers. However, an internal evaluation undertaken in 1983 identified the need for follow-up Setswana reading materials and training

in productive skills (Ministry of Education 1984). Two reading series were started in 1984 and 1986 and a Village Reading Room project began in 1986. By 1998 there were over 70 Setswana booklets for neo-literates and 67 reading rooms. From 1991 to 1997 there was a monthly pull-out for neo-literates in a private newspaper. The persistent request by learners from the early 1980s for tuition in English was finally met by the introduction of a basic English course in 1995, albeit on a small scale because of the problem of the lack of suitable teachers.

The revised policy aims of 1985 included the commitment to provide skills for income generating activities. The establishment of income generating groups subsequently became an operational component of the programme. DNFE staff encourage group formation and organise training in business management and production skills for projects chosen by learners, like bakery, piggery, poultry, knitting and sewing projects. However, by 1999 there were only 23 groups across the country (Department of Non Formal Education 1998). The performance of the groups has been generally poor and very few have been viable (Manowe 1997), a common problem for such projects in Botswana's economy, which is dominated by mass-produced imports from South Africa.

The most recent post-literacy policy development came in *The Revised National Policy on Education, 1994* (Republic of Botswana 1994) which stated that DNFE should introduce an Adult Basic Education Course to provide an adult equivalent to the primary school certificate. The course is currently being piloted. In all of these activities, DNFE has been slow to respond and implementation has been weak. It is widely acknowledged that providing for the post-literacy phase has been a major defect of the National Literacy Programme (Maruatona and Legwaila 1998).

In Zimbabwe, post-literacy provision did not become a concern of literacy programmers till 1985 when the Situation Analysis conducted by UNICEF revealed that lack of post-literacy materials made "retention and improvement of literacy and numeracy skills virtually impossible for new literates" (Government of Zimbabwe/UNICEF 1985: 149). To correct this anomaly, post-literacy provision was incorporated into the literacy programme in 1987, as part of the Government's Programme of Co-operation with UNICEF (Government of Zimbabwe/UNICEF 1986). Firstly, post-literacy materials were developed in Primary Health Care, Agriculture, Workers' Education, Women's Education, and Civic Education. Secondly, literacy newsletters were established throughout the country in each of the 55 districts. It was hoped that these would create opportunities for new literates to effectively apply their skills by reading about development related issues, and thus prevent a significant number from relapsing into illiteracy (Mpofu 1995b). However, in 1988 the transfer of the responsibility to produce newsletters from the then Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs to the then Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education dislocated the machinery that had been set up to produce these documents. The acquisition of printing

facilities by Regional Education Offices in 1989 was not, as expected, followed by the resuscitation of district newsletters (Mpofu 1995b).

Thirdly, after 1990, new literates were encouraged to either engage themselves in income generating projects or to proceed with their primary education under the Zimbabwe Adult Basic Education Course programme (ZABEC). It was hoped that by engaging in income generating projects, neo-literates would find some use for their newly acquired literacy skills and, thus, retain them. The ZABEC programme was designed for the academic oriented neo-literate who did not want to join income generating projects. It is essentially a primary school equivalent course whose curricular content (consisting of English, Shona or Ndebele, Mathematics and Development Studies) is considered suitable for adults. Whereas the formal primary school programme takes 7 years to complete, ZABEC can be completed by adults in 3 years after basic literacy. It was presumed that most of those who complete the ZABEC programme would proceed with their education to the highest level of formal education possible. Income generating projects and ZABEC came into being as post-literacy activities in 1990. By 1993, the total cumulative enrolment of the two programmes had absorbed 12% and 16%, respectively, of all those that had been declared literate since 1980. However, enrolment for these two programmes has been on the decline since that time.

Both countries have followed the same pattern of post-literacy provision. In both programmes, no plan was initially made for those who would complete the first stage of literacy acquisition. Once the problem of the lack of follow-up opportunities was recognised, each programme followed the standard strategies promulgated by the dominant tradition. Thus the state produced a restricted number of reading materials for new literates. It encouraged new literates to develop income-generating projects. In Zimbabwe, a primary-school equivalent course was developed, whilst Botswana is currently piloting such a course. Thus the response to the problem of post-literacy was exactly the same in each country. But in both countries the strategies were of limited effectiveness.

Possibilities of change

The two national programmes discussed above are remarkably similar in their key features, given the differences between the two countries in terms of political and economic factors. This similarity illustrates the strength of the traditional approach to adult literacy, which has largely effaced national differences. The strength of the tradition is also demonstrated in both countries by the lack of change that has taken place over the twenty years since 1980. In terms of each of the technical areas considered above, both programmes have changed very little since their inception. In particular, suggestions for change in the 1990s that were influenced by the new literacy paradigm were not taken into account.

In Botswana, *The Revised National Policy on Education, 1994* (Republic of Botswana 1994) proposed a comprehensive evaluation of the National Literacy Programme, which might have opened the door to recommendations based on new approaches. However, by mid-2000 the evaluation had still not been commissioned. It seems that the expectation of an evaluation deterred possibilities of change. For example, in 1997, a University of Botswana academic in a keynote address to the Botswana Annual National Literacy Forum outlined the new literacy paradigm and its implications for the National Literacy Programme (Youngman 1997). He identified three important areas of change, namely decentralisation and diversification, participatory curriculum development and learning, and the inclusion of social development issues and linkages to social action. These ideas were adopted in the final recommendations made by the Forum participants (Nyirenda 1997: 8) but there has been no change in the National Literacy Programme.

In Zimbabwe, there has never been a comprehensive evaluation of the national literacy programme commissioned by the Government. However, a University of Zimbabwe academic in a series of publications during the mid-1990s (Mpofu 1994; 1995a; 1995b; 1997) analysed the limited effectiveness of the national literacy efforts and proposed changes which were influenced by the new paradigm. In particular, he suggested a "new deal" (Mpofu 1997) based on a new conception of literacy and its mode of organisation that would address the motivational needs of illiterate adults. His proposals articulated a community-based approach which would be responsive to the demands of the intended clientele, so that literacy would fit into their varied contexts and priorities. He emphasised that literacy learning should be linked to the use of the literacy skills in the everyday activities of the learners, for example, in economic projects. However, these proposals have not led to changes.

The experience of Botswana and Zimbabwe shows that the dominant tradition is very entrenched and that the arguments of academics have been unable to exert influence for change. In our opinion, the possibility for major change in both countries will only arise if there is a high-profile evaluation commissioned by the Government. To result in fundamental changes influenced by the new paradigm, such an evaluation will have to demonstrate that lack of effectiveness in the existing programmes is not simply a problem of implementation and resources but rather a problem of conception. It will have to marshal persuasive arguments that an alternative organisational and pedagogical approach to the traditional national literacy programme has a stronger conceptual and empirical basis. In particular, it will have to show that an alternative approach can address the issue of adult literacy on a national scale, and meet the various political goals that the state has sought through the traditional approach. Only if the results of such an evaluation are able to gain the support of key policy-makers will change be possible.

Conclusion

The national literacy efforts in both countries have had a relatively low impact. In Botswana, whilst the adult illiteracy rate dropped from 46% in 1981 to 31% in 1993, this was largely due to the extension of formal schooling. The national literacy programme only reached 19% of the illiterate adult population between 1981 and 1993 (Republic of Botswana 1997: 40). The most recent Annual Report has expressed alarm about the declining participation rate (Department of Non Formal Education 2000). In Zimbabwe the literacy rate has not been calculated since 1982. However, only about 100,000 neo-literates have resulted from the Government's literacy work and this is a small proportion of the country's illiterate population. The two programmes are clearly ineffective in terms of their own objectives. Yet there have been no high-level initiatives for change and the discussion above shows that the dominant tradition is entrenched.

The new paradigm that emerged in adult literacy scholarship in the 1990s has significantly influenced the literature, as exemplified by a recent international handbook on literacy (Wagner, Venezky and Street 1999). It has provided the basis of some experimental projects in the Third World (Rogers 1999). It has also begun to have an impact on international policy statements, as shown by the World Educational Forum. However, the examples of Botswana and Zimbabwe show that it may have difficulty in displacing the old paradigm at the level of national policy-making.

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