

The role of the adult literacy organization of Zimbabwe (ALoz) in the implementation of literacy programmes in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out between October and December 1999. It looks at the nature of the literacy activities, successes and problems faced by the Adult Literacy Organization of Zimbabwe (ALoz) in its efforts to spread literacy activities in the country. Data was collected by means of interviews and consultation of literature at the ALoz offices. The study established that, while some successes have been scored, the organization faces various problems. This study makes recommendations that could redress these difficulties.

1. Introduction

LITERACY AND DEVELOPMENT are concepts that have been interpreted in different ways. Gray, in ALoz (1994:9) sees literacy as "the ability to read, write and calculate". Thompson identifies functional literacy as aspect of literacy that "prepares the individual for his/her social, civic and economic role that goes far beyond the rudiments of literacy training" (Thompson 1981:228). For Freire (1985) literacy is a liberating and empowering process that should take the revolutionary form of seeking to transform the *status quo*. Literacy should help solve problems of learners, their families, their community and society at large (Thompson 1981, Mundy 1985). Guided by these views about the role of literacy in

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society many governments in developing nations have set aside sizable fractions of their national budgets specifically for mass education, in the belief that mass education leads to mass literacy and that mass literacy leads to social, economic and political development.

Todaro (1985) sees development itself as a multidimensional process involving changes in structures, attitudes and institutions. To him development is the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty. Thus he sees development as having three basic functions, to sustain life, to develop self esteem and to free individuals from servitude (Todaro 1985). The assumption of a positive association between literacy and development is confirmed by Medlin, Ford and Fisher in ALOZ (1994), who point out that it is generally accepted that literacy increases food productivity, raises per capita income and improves family health, family nutrition, life expectancy, home management and child care. The supposed link between literacy and these improved aspects of life comes from the assumption that literate individuals are able to read and follow instructions on how to improve their living conditions.

2. The Problem

THE PROBLEM OF nonliteracy among adults in Zimbabwe can be traced as far back as to the period before independence. Statistics show that between 1970 and 1985 illiteracy, especially among women had risen from 764,000 to 779,000 while that of men had decreased from 565,000 to 419,000 (AL0Z 1994). The 1982 population census for Zimbabwe revealed that 37.2% of the adult population in Zimbabwe were nonliterate (CSO 1985). UNESCO puts the figure at 31.2% , which is about 2.6 million people out of the total 7.5 million people at that time (CSO 1985). Ten years later the 1992 census showed that the adult illiteracy rate had dropped to 19.62%, the highest drop being in urban centres and among men (CSO 1994). The overall picture in 1992 of men and women nonliterate in both rural and urban areas of Zimbabwe is summarized in Table 1 (a).

Table 1 (a): Distribution of Men and Women Nonliterate in Urban and Rural Areas: Zimbabwe, Year: 1992

Area	Year	% Men	% Women	% of Total
Rural	1992	19.17	32.6	25.88
Urban	1992	5.72	8.7	7.21

SOURCE: ALOZ HEAD OFFICE, 1999

Adult participation in the National Literacy Campaign introduced by government in 1982 had, up to 1994, shown a downward trend in adult participation in literacy programmes as Table 1(b) below shows.

Table1(b) Adult Literacy Enrolments: 1985–1994

Year	Women	Men	Total
1985	24236	4284	28520
1987	19017	4052	23069
1989	18715	3391	22106
1990	13953	3226	17179
1991	9295	1899	11194
1992	9089	1424	10513
1993	5985	1317	7302
1994	7991	1745	9736
TOTAL	108281	21338	129619

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SUMMARY SHEET, 1995

This was and is still a worrying situation because it does not mean that by 1994 there were fewer nonliterate people, but that fewer were enrolling in these programmes. Secondly, it shows that nonliteracy is highest among the rural population, especially women, and yet it is they who bear the greatest burden of the anticipated development process. If the supposed positive relationship between development and literacy is

correct, then it is important that efforts be made to engage the nonliterate members of society in literacy programmes. It is even more important that the rural population in general and women in particular be encouraged to participate in literacy lessons since these are the areas that are least developed.

Following from this and from suggestions from Bataille (1976), ALOZ recognizes that there is a link between literacy and development and that literacy is a necessary prerequisite for development. It is with these ideas that, ALOZ has, since its inception, undertaken to implement adult literacy programmes throughout the country.

3. The Adult Literacy Organization of Zimbabwe (ALOZ): background information

3.1 Formation

ALLOZ HAS ITS ROOTS in the late 1950s when a group of concerned women began to tackle the problem of how to teach the nonliterate. There was no suitable material available and it was not possible to draw on wider experiences of teaching adult nonliterate. At this time two women, Stella Greenway and Margaret Carmody, had been making fruitless enquiries worldwide seeking to draw on the experience of others in teaching literacy to adults. Finally, in 1960, contact was made with two other women who were using a system known as "Each One Teach One", evolved by Frank Laubach, an American missionary in the Philippines and founder of Laubach Literacy International. This proved to be a turning-point. Following an invitation by Greenway and Carmody, Louise d'Oliveira in the Congo and Helen Roberts in Kenya visited Harare (then Salisbury) and provided charts, copies of primers and encouragement to form the Adult Literacy Organization (ALO).

But it was not until Roberts returned to Salisbury in 1963 with her friend, Alice Sanderson, that the fledgling ALO was able to provide material and training for volunteer tutors. Alice Sanderson's interest in adult literacy had been influenced by Dr Frank Laubach whom she had met in 1936 (Forster 1994). By 1965 Sanderson had trained 715 volunteer teachers in this country. Some of the staff recruited and trained in the 1960s and 1970s are still with ALOZ today. Much of the work was in

mining and subsistence farming communities where the majority of people were nonliterate. Her courses included family and farm budgeting. In 1974 the organization expanded to include industrial and commercial training. By 1975 about 57 adult literacy tutors from Botswana and Namibia had also gone through training programmes in this country. During the war of liberation in the 1970s the Adult Literacy Organization of Rhodesia (ALOR) carried on with their rural programmes on budgeting, toilet-building, agricultural methods and record-keeping, in spite of the disturbances caused by the war.

In the urban African high density townships (suburbs) the emphasis was on food self-sufficiency through the use of intensive cultivation techniques in the residents' tiny backyards. In the refugee camps ("protected villages") of the then Rhodesia the organization designed programmes to meet the needs and desires of the people, such as basic literacy skills, homecraft training for women, farming and education, all in preparation for the time when people would return to their land after the war of liberation (Forster 1994).

After 1980 the organization was renamed the Adult Literacy Organization of Zimbabwe. Alice Sanderson had resigned as director in 1974 but remained a literacy consultant until the late 1980s when she returned to America, where she died in 1994. At present ALOZ works with 32 other interested organizations who sometimes provide resource persons during seminars and workshops on adult literacy. However, there is need for improved communication between these organizations and ALOZ as sometimes there is duplication of activities between them.

3.2 Aims

THE WORK OF ALOZ, like its predecessor ALOR, continues to be among the poor who need to be empowered through literacy. The main aim of the organization is to contribute to the attainment of universal literacy in Zimbabwe through the training of literacy tutors and the provision of other high quality and effective literacy services to nonliterate adults. This, it is hoped, will improve the quality of life of individuals and communities. ALOZ recognizes that adults are better motivated to learn when skills acquired in the basic literacy lessons are used to solve their day-to-day socioeconomic problems. Thus the organization aims at

incorporating practical projects that are of direct economic value to the lives of participants and their families as an addition to its basic literacy activities.

3.3 Objectives

THE ORGANIZATION'S OBJECTIVES are to identify nonliterate groups in society and to promote their social, economic, cultural, intellectual and political development through the provision of literacy programmes in which these nonliterate groups are expected to participate. The organization trains adult literacy tutors who teach basic literacy skills to the disadvantaged nonliterate groups in society, especially girls and women. Lastly, it aims to teach practical skills so that adults apply their newly-acquired literacy skills and knowledge to their immediate circumstances.

3.4 Structure

THE ORGANIZATION is divided into north and south regions. The two Matabeleland provinces and part of Midlands make up the south region while Mashonaland, Manicaland, Masvingo and part of the Midlands make up the north region. There is a regional literacy manager in charge of the literacy centres in each region. At the time of this study in the northern region there were 24 centres while the southern region had 37 centres, making a total of 61 centres throughout the country.

4. The study

THE PURPOSE OF this study was to try to find answers to the following questions with specific reference to the present activities of ALOZ:

- What are the organization's current activities?
- What activities are offered in the centres covered by this study?
- To what extent have these activities been able to achieve the goals of the ALOZ?
- What are the problems faced at these centres?
- What recommendations can be made as possible solutions to these problems?

5. Methodology

DATA PRESENTED IN THIS paper were collected through open-ended interviews with officials of ALOZ, the Ministry of Education and Culture (Non-Formal Education Sector), literacy participants and literacy tutors at the centres covered by the study. Six literacy centres were visited, five in Mashonaland East and one in Mashonaland Central (Bindura). Visits to the centres were facilitated by ALOZ who provided transport and other essential services. Thus the selection of the six centres was limited by the distance from the organization's headquarters and the time available. Information was also collected by consulting various documents at ALOZ headquarters and field observations on literacy activities were made by the researcher during visits to these different literacy centres. Further information was sourced through the researcher's participation in seminars on other development issues for the marginalized communities in Zimbabwe. Table 2 provides information about the people who were interviewed.

Table 2: Groups of Interviewees Involved

Organization	No. and designation of people consulted
ALoz	Acting Director, Treasurer, 3 Literacy Officers
Chitandara Literacy Centre (Chihota)	Literacy Tutor, 14 Literacy Learners
Pasipamire Cooperative(Chihota)	7 Cooperative Members
St Peters LiteracyCentre (Chihota)	13 Literacy Learners, School Headmaster
Kandava Literacy Centre and Regazvipore Cooperative (Chihota)	Literacy Tutor
Chipindura Literacy Centre (Bindura)	City Council Representative, Literacy Tutor, Literacy Officer; 14 Literacy Learners
Ivanhoe Farm (Juru-Goromonzi District)	Literacy Officer, Literacy Tutor, 14 Literacy Learners
Ministry of Education, Non-Formal Education Sector	3 District Literacy Coordinators
TOTAL	78

SOURCE: FIELDWORK DATA: NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1999

Table 3: Tutors trained between 1996–1999.

Year	Tutors
1996	170
1997	218
1998	213
1999	136
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TOTAL	737
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SOURCE: ALOZ HEAD OFFICE, 1999	
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6. Summary of findings

THE RESULTS OF THESE interviews, observations and discussions are presented in mainly descriptive form under each of the questions raised in section 4 above. This covers information collected from the various centres that were visited.

6.1 The organization's current activities

EACH OF THE 61 centres trains tutors for adult learners, imparting to them skills on the teaching of literacy to adults in basic literacy, that is, reading, writing and arithmetic. Table 3 shows the number of tutors who successfully went through the ALOZ tutor training programme between 1996 and 1999.

In addition different projects (practical activities) are implemented in the different centres. They include the following activities: gardening, poultry, sewing clothes for sale, carpentry, knitting, oil-pressing, soap-making, buying and selling groceries, crafts such as clay pots, sculpture, basketry and curios; cattle-fattening, baking, dairy farming and savings clubs. These projects motivate the learners. They also generate money used by participants to pay for their children's education. Thus projects meet the economic and health needs of participants. Projects also encourage co-operation among participants during the process of project implementation. However, the primary area of focus for ALOZ is the teaching of basic literacy skills.

Table 4: Participants in basic literacy programmes in the centres covered by this study

Centre	Men	Women	Total
Chitandara	0	14	14
St. Peters	0	13	13
Chipindura	0	14	14
Ivanhoe	0	14	14
TOTAL	0	55	55

SOURCE: FIELD OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEWS BY RESEARCHER, NOVEMBER–DECEMBER 1999

The organization has recently added a leadership training course to its programmes. This is directed at community leaders such as headmen, councillors and co-operators. One example of this is the Kajiwa Development Co-ordinating Association (KDCA) in Mutoko District. Literacy programmes enable community leaders who are not literate to read about leadership and improve their leadership skills. The literature on leadership training is translated into the vernacular to make it more accessible. The course takes one week, and the association pays for the course through funding from a non-governmental organization, the German Development Service.

The literacy programme is divided into two stages:

Stage I: basic literacy

This involves learning basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic.

This is the primary area of focus for ALOZ.

Stage II: primary education level (to be covered in three years)

This stage is divided into three levels; level 1: equivalent to Grades 1–3 (year 1), level 2: equivalent to Grades 4–5 (year 2), and level 3: equivalent to Grades 6–7 (year 3). It is during the second stage that the practical projects discussed in this study are undertaken, with or without the Grade 1–7 academic content outlined above. In this study only one centre, Ivanhoe Farm, had a total of 45 literacy participants who were at Stage II, made up of 15 men and 30 women. Table 4 shows the numbers of participants in the basic literacy programmes. I list below the centres covered by this study and a summary of activities offered at each.

Centres and activities

Chitandara Literacy Centre and Pasipamire Co-operative

- Basic literacy lessons for 14 women learners.
- Purchasing for resale items such as door-frames, cement, nails, groceries, paraffin and fertilizer. Seven co-operative members are involved in the project (See Table 2). The co-operative is also of immense benefit to the whole community including members of this literacy centre. Items that the community needs are now produced within the neighbourhood and thus people do not have to travel long distances to purchase them.
- Gardening projects: Growing groundnuts, maize and vegetables. All 14 women who are at the basic literacy stage here take part in these projects, apart from the basic literacy lessons they have to attend. Profits realized from the sale of these products are used to purchase primers (textbooks for literacy learners), stationery and other requirements for their basic literacy lessons.

St. Peter's Literacy Centre

Basic literacy lessons to 13 women learners who are all at Stage I. Participants learn the three basic literacy skills (3Rs) as outlined above.

Kandava Literacy Centre and Regazvipore Co-operative

- Basic literacy lessons to members of the co-operative.
- Carpentry co-operative—making and selling beds, chairs, coffins, wardrobes and kitchen units.
- Extraction and sale of cooking oil from sunflower seeds.

Unlike the other centres where projects were introduced as a means for consolidating skills learnt in the basic literacy programmes (the 3Rs), participants here started with the co-operative which manufactures the above items. However, because of difficulties faced by members in determining the required measurements of items, a need for the teaching of basic literacy skills arose which was subsequently introduced. Members of the co-operative benefit from the profits realized from the sale of the products. The co-operative has also benefited the surrounding community as it is now able to buy these items within the neighbourhood, unlike in the past.

Chipindura Literacy Centre

- Basic literacy lessons to 14 learners.
- Gardening projects—vegetable growing. The 14 members of this centre take part in this project in addition to learning basic literacy skills. This helps them consolidate the skills that they learn in the basic literacy lessons as they apply these in the practical activities during gardening such as measuring fertilizer quantities and reading instructions on how to use these. Secondly, they benefit from the sale of vegetables as they use the profits to purchase stationery and other requirements for their lessons.

Ivanhoe Farm

Basic literacy lessons to 59 learners; 14 of whom are at Stages I and 45 at Stage II (15 men and 30 women).

The data presented above show that all centres conduct basic literacy lessons for participants since this is the primary area of focus for ALOZ. Nonliterate members of the communities who join the co-operatives realize that they cannot be successful in their projects unless they are literate. They need basic literacy skills to be able to measure the lengths and widths of the seams of materials they sew. These measurements are expressed in centimetres which learners cannot read or measure unless they are literate. For participants in the carpentry co-operatives, members need to determine the different measurements of the items that they manufacture. In gardening projects basic literacy skills enable participants to read pesticide and fertilizer instructions. Thus these practical projects act as consolidation exercises for the basic literacy skills that the participants learn in the Stage I of the literacy programmes.

Besides being an important prerequisite to successful participation in these projects, basic literacy is appreciated by learners as an end in itself. This is supported by the nature of responses to the following question directed towards learners:

“What prompted you to join literacy classes?”

Responses to this question were varied, as the following statements show:

Literacy helps us to read instructions on how to use chemicals such as fertilizer.

Literacy is useful when travelling since it enables us to read bus destinations, road names and bus names.

When we visit hospitals we do not face problems in finding the wards here our relatives are admitted.

We used to find it difficult to make and follow bank transactions but now it is easy.

Being literate is useful when looking for a job.

Literacy enables me to work out my family budget.

Our children used to lie to us about school requirements such as school fees, examination fees, and subjects that they do at school.

Now we can tell whether they are telling the truth or not because we can read for ourselves.

Other participants said that because they are now literate they are able to read newspapers, to make transactions at post offices, banks and money-link machines and to process papers when their relatives die. Basic literacy programmes have enabled one pioneer participant at Chipindura Literacy Centre to read and write in English. The approach used in teaching basic literacy skills is problem-centred, focusing on problems which participants themselves are likely to have. At Chitandara Literacy Centre, for example, themes such as the unavailability of water and shortages of grinding mills, which are common problems in the area, were selected as a basis for literacy lessons.

6.2 To what extent have the activities covered in this study been able to achieve the stated objectives of the organization?

One achievement of the basic literacy programmes in these centres was confirmed by an official of the Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe (FCTZ) who had helped in setting up the Farm Development Committee (FDC) at Ivanhoe Farm. The official pointed out that because some farm workers were now able to read and write authorities were now taking less time paying their salaries because now there were fewer quarrels and complaints concerning calculations. Workers also said they were now capable of managing their family budgets. Basic literacy programmes have also made it possible for the co-operators to carry out their projects with confidence in spite of these co-operatives not

being central to the activities of ALOZ. The incorporation of projects as consolidation exercises for skills learnt in the basic literacy lessons encourages attendance. This is because participants worry about their day-to-day needs which they believe can be met by their involvement in these projects.

The projects have enabled members of the co-operatives to be self-reliant to some extent. For instance, a carpentry co-operative at Kandava Literacy Centre is now able to sell coffins to local people instead of their having to travel long distances to buy them. Some graduates from Chitandara are now working as community health-workers, pre-school teachers and as community development leaders. Others have been able to start their own projects. This has become a source of motivation and encouragement to those members who are in the literacy programmes. Positive working relationships have been established with the local authorities. At St. Peter's School, for example, learners are using one of the classrooms for their lessons.

Similar positive relations were observed at Chipindura Literacy Centre where the city council has assigned one of its employees to the literacy group to act as a link person between the council, ALOZ and the learners. The same council has allowed learners to use the council hall and furniture for lessons and another room which is used as a library. The council pays the tutor as well. At Ivanhoe Farm, in addition to sponsoring the training of the tutor, the farmer pays for his literacy services and has constructed a classroom for the group. The farmer also encourages workers to enroll by insisting that they sign for their salaries using proper signatures rather than the inked thumb-print. He provides them with furniture, stationery, lamps and fuel and he gives them time off from work so that they may attend literacy lessons.

However, ALOZ and its centres face a number of problems which have made it difficult for both the implementers and literacy programme recipients to achieve some of the organization's stated goals.

6.3 The problems faced at the centres

MANY OF THE PROBLEMS that the literacy centres face are a result of the financial difficulties that they and the organization as a whole face. These include problems of transport, which limit the frequency of visits

to and supervision of the centres by literacy officers. The organization has only one vehicle which is heavily used for all the various activities. Thus many of the visits made by ALOZ officers to the centres is by frequently unreliable public transport. Visits and supervision by literacy officers are critical to the success of literacy activities since they are needed to evaluate the progress made by learners and tutors. Financial difficulties have also negatively affected the frequency at which refresher courses for literacy tutors are held. These refresher courses keep tutors up-to-date and should ideally be held once a year. Without money everything is bound to come to a standstill. Money is needed for the provision of stationery, the construction of classrooms, for improved levels of tutor pay and for buying teaching aids and reading materials; all of which directly and indirectly affect literacy activities.

The other problem has to do with shortage of irrigation water for the practical projects. Pasipamire Co-operative has introduced a gardening project as part of its activities. Its success depends on the availability of a constant supply of water. At this centre, as at most others, the borehole dries up in the dry season. This becomes a major setback for the garden. When participants are faced with such difficulties they are bound to be demotivated. Tutors interviewed pointed out that attendance at the basic literacy lessons, which are the core activities of these programmes, goes down or becomes erratic in such circumstances. Some participants drop out completely. This shows that it is important to link basic literacy lessons, which are the main area of focus for ALOZ, with practical activities. Others, however, drop out for other reasons, as the following statements from the participants confirm:

I feel embarrassed when my friends discover that I am attending these classes. They will know that I am not able to read and write.

When you are a lodger and you move to another landlord sometimes you are very far away from the literacy centre and it becomes difficult to continue to attend class.

If you are a domestic worker it all depends on the attitude of your boss. Most bosses do not want you to go away and come back late in the evening. Daytime lessons are out.

In addition, participants who have families have other commitments to attend to. This results in a conflict of interests on the part of the adults who need to commit themselves to their family responsibilities than undertake literacy programmes. The participant has to decide when to attend literacy activities and how long lessons will keep them away from home. At one centre learners suggested that if only they had electricity they would be able to extend their lessons into the evenings since they would be able to do their own work during the day. Asked what problems made it difficult for them to write formal Grade 7 examinations, participants complained that the insistence on the need for birth certificates before writing examinations was a barrier to taking examinations. They suggested that this requirement should be dropped, because many of them do not have birth certificates. Instead, they suggested the use of National Identity cards, which most of them have. Old age was cited as another limiting factor for writing Grade 7 examinations. Reading and preparing for examinations was thought to be quite demanding on their energy, considering the age of some of them.

Lastly, networking and communication with other organizations has also not been as effective as expected. At the time of this study 32 different organizations were networking with ALOZ in various ways. The success of the attempts made at networking have been limited by infrequent communication. An improvement in this area would greatly benefit all parties who could share ideas and avoid the duplication of activities which is often the case where networking does not occur.

7. Recommendations

THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS are based on the above observations and findings.

1. While it is recognized that basic literacy is the main focus of ALOZ, practical projects in place should continue to be part and parcel of basic literacy activities. These practical projects are the main reasons why learners wish to join basic literacy classes. Beside those projects that are already in place, different projects should be suggested in order to add variety and income. Learners come from very poor

backgrounds and some cannot even raise the small fee required for purchasing stationery for basic literacy lessons. The success and prosperity of these projects would, in fact, help solve the problem of fees as it is hoped that centres will sustain themselves from profits raised through the sale of products from these projects.

2. Refresher courses for literacy tutors and on the running of projects should be held regularly . This will assist both literacy tutors and co-operators in the management of their businesses. Success motivates: thus further successes will encourage others to join the existing groups of literacy learners.
3. For some communities progress in practical activities is hampered by the non-availability of important resources such as irrigation water, especially during the dry season; transport services and machinery for carpentry and sewing machines. Efforts should be made to acquire these.
4. Co-operation and links must be established and sustained between the various non-governmental organizations, government and ALOZ to enable communities to benefit equally from the resources made available by these different organizations.
5. More permanent classrooms should be put in place. Alternatively, co-operation with existing nearby schools could help solve the problem of classroom accommodation for learners.
6. Remuneration of tutors: While some tutors have generously offered their services voluntarily and for free, it should be observed that because of the present economic problems very few are now willing to come forward to offer this important service for free. It is suggested here that, as they are providing an important national service, as a matter of policy all literacy tutors be paid by government. Thus, in determining the national education budget, consideration should be given to these important issues irrespective of whether programmes are run by government or not. In addition, funds from donors could be sourced and channelled to these important activities that benefit the poor.
7. Funding is urgently needed to provide transport for regular visits by ALOZ officers to these centres. Such visits are a source of

- motivation to both the literacy learners and tutors and they help organizers to identify problems that need immediate attention. These visits are hampered by the unavailability of transport and finance. With enough funding ALOZ can also step in and help literacy centres and tutors who are no longer funded by government and other organizations and provide supervision for adult literacy activities.
8. Potential learners are absent from the programmes, not because they are all literate, but because some are too shy to join while others face problems in joining. They will be encouraged to join only if they see others already in the programmes succeeding. Former literacy participants who have been successful and are already employed, whether on farms or in factories, should be given posts of responsibility, together with better salaries as incentives, and for them to act as role models for other learners to emulate. Certification occasions held at the literacy centres can also provide inspiration for others to join the programmes.
 9. A nationally recognized certificate has to be designed and awarded to successful literacy learners after the Stage I level. This is because few learners go beyond this stage to do Stage II which goes up to Grade Seven. Such a certificate would enable graduates, to some extent, to market themselves after that stage of the course.

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