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AFRICA LEARNING TOGETHER



Implementing the Child-Centered Methodology in the Catch-Up Program in Zambia

[In the first edition](#) of the ADEA Africa Learning Together (ALT) Knowledge series published in March 2023, we delved into the unique implementation of the Catch-Up program in Zambia. This program, a modified version of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) methodology, is being implemented in Zambia with resounding successes. Unlike traditional methods, catch-up targets learners from Grades 3 to Grade 5 and groups them according to their levels of literacy and numeracy instead of their age or grade, providing instruction tailored to the learners' ability.

In our January edition of the ADEA Africa Learning Together knowledge series, we recorded a [podcast with colleagues](#) from the Ministry of Education Zambia and the VVoB Country Office in Zambia. The podcast with *Mrs. Faith Mwamba*¹ and Mr. Charles Zulu discussed experiences and insights on implementing the child-centered approach of the Catch-Up program.

This lessons learning document provides a comprehensive summary of the learner-centered approach, a contributing factor to the success of the Catch-Up program and improving learning outcomes. By emphasizing the benefits of this approach, we aim to provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers interested in literacy and numeracy interventions in African countries.



¹ ADEA recently learned of the demise of Mrs. Faith Mwamba in April 2024. We extend our deepest condolences to her family, the Ministry of Education, and the entire Zambian education community. Her contributions to teaching and learning in her country and Africa will remain evergreen.

Implementation of the Child-Centred Methodology in the Catch-Up Program

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Child-centered learning is a teaching method that focuses on each learner's individual needs and interests. The teacher helps and guides learners to explore and learn in their own way, making learning fun and helping children become confident and independent learners. It personalizes the learning experience to ensure all the learners are engaged. The child-centered methodology thrives based on four fundamental values:



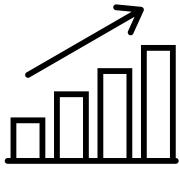
1. Values all learners and the experiences they bring to the classroom.
2. Believes that all children can learn given the right support.
3. Values the range of skills and competencies.
4. Teachers are facilitators of learning.

How did Catch-up integrate the child-centered methodology?

The first step to ensuring that the child-centered approach is effectively executed is training teachers. VVOB supported this process by training the teachers and providing technical assistance to ensure proper integration. Catch-Up recognizes the critical role of teachers. Hence a continuous professional development plan was used to equip teachers to implement the child-centered approach and incentivize them to ensure a motivated and energetic workforce.

Other aspects of the Catch-Up program that promote the child-centered approach include the following:

1. **Assessment of learning levels:**



In this phase, learners are evaluated on their current proficiency in foundational skills rather than their grade level. This allows for a more accurate understanding of each learner's learning needs, helps identify gaps in learning, and informs the design of customized learning experiences.

2. **Level-based activities:**



Based on the assessment results, level-based activities are implemented to match the instructional content aligned to learners' current learning levels. This approach acknowledges learners' diverse abilities and knowledge gaps. By aligning activities with learners' specific levels of understanding, teachers address individual needs, avoid underestimating or overestimating learners' capabilities, and facilitate learning progression. In short, level-based activities under the Catch-Up enable teachers to meet learners where they are in their learning, fostering a supportive and adaptive educational environment.

3. **Classroom Process:**



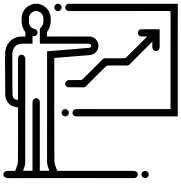
Each lesson starts with a whole-class activity, transitioning into small groups and individual activities. The transition is designed to address the diversity of learners' learning needs. Whole-class instruction begins with a common activity, which ensures a foundational understanding of the topic for all the learners. The small groups allow teachers to provide more targeted and differentiated instruction, focusing on specific learning needs within each small group.

4. **Individualised instruction**



Working with individuals, attention addresses the unique learning gaps of the learners. This ensures that each learner receives personalized support, promoting a deeper understanding and mastery of the material. This tiered approach recognizes that learners have varying levels of readiness and awareness. Tailoring instruction at different levels helps maximize learning outcomes for all.

5. Customised Instruction:



Using the child-centered approach, instruction is tailored to the needs of each group of learners. Teachers focus on addressing the specific learning gaps identified during the assessment phase. Customized instruction may involve different teaching materials, methods, and resources based on each group's learning level.

6. Active Learning Strategies:



The child-centered approach promotes active learning strategies to engage learners in learning. Hands-on activities, iterative exercises, and collaborative learning are often employed to make the learning experience more dynamic. Learners are encouraged to participate actively in their learning, fostering a sense of ownership and motivation.

7. Continuous Assessment and Feedback:

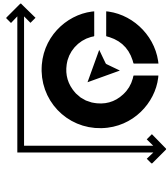


Continuous assessment is a key component of the child-centered approach. Regular assessments are conducted to monitor learners' progress, and timely feedback is provided to both learners and teachers. The feedback loop helps identify areas for improvement, celebrate successes, and guide adjustment to instruction as needed.

8. Use of Local Context and Resources:



This emphasizes using locally available materials and resources to make learning more relevant and meaningful for learners. This includes incorporating local examples, stories, and cultural references into the curriculum. Catch-Up seeks to create more contextualized and learner-centered educational experiences by leveraging local resources. This reduces the reliance on expensive textbooks and allows for more flexible adaptation to the specific needs of learners.



9. Flexibility and Adaptability:

Catch-Up was designed to be flexible and adaptable to different contexts. The approach recognizes that learners can vary, and teachers must be prepared to effectively adjust their strategies to meet those needs. Ongoing professional development for teachers supports their ability to implement the learner-centered approach in diverse settings.



Conclusion

Zambia's Catch-Up has remained the most successful case study for TaRL and has a resounding reputation across Africa. It demonstrates the value of adapting programs to local contexts, considering the cultural, linguistic, and existing learning nuances. The Zambian government is now scaling up the Catch-Up program across the country.

Zambia's experience underscores the importance of advocacy efforts to show what works, building understanding and commitment towards what works within Africa's context. By creating awareness about the benefits of the Catch-Up program, policymakers, parents, and communities can share insights on how best to approach education based on the experience of others. Through this, Zambia has contributed to the foundational learning conversation in Africa and helped other countries adapt and enhance their approaches to focus learning delivery on the learner.