

## The significance of using the Cuban method in Literacy Learning

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The number of illiterates is high in Timor-Leste. From the Portuguese period up to the end of Indonesian colonialism, illiteracy was reduced but not by a significant number. The total population according to the 2004 census was 923,198 people. Of this total 520,265 are aged 15 and over. Forty-six percent (46%), close to half, identified as illiterate with the illiterate women estimated to be 52% compared with 40% of men. Therefore the biggest literacy problems are found with women. People over thirty are much more likely to be illiterate than those under, 62% compared with 25%. In rural areas, many of the more remote sub-districts and *sucos* had illiteracy rates of 70% and higher; and youth illiteracy was highest in the rural districts which experienced the most serious disorder during the political and social crisis in 2006/2007. (Boughton 2008:5)

During the period of Portuguese colonization there was no adult literacy campaign or even literacy program. Conversely in 1975 FRETILIN, the newly formed political party advocating national independence, implemented a literacy campaign as one way to mobilize people to struggle for independence. According to the Journal *Libertasaun*

‘FRETILIN developed the education to serve the people. The Education and Cultural Committee (a department of education) of FRETILIN led by Antonio Carvarino alias Malear, prioritized adult literacy for Maubere people. FRETILIN started their program in the area which was speaking Tetun language. One objective of this program was to define as learning to be a new citizen whom is to be liberated from all kinds of oppression and ready to understand aspect of history and exploitation politics and the oppression of the people. All the programs were made to improve people capacity and help their struggle for needs One of the organizations inside FRETILIN was Organizaçao Popular Mulheres de Timor (OPMT), a women’s organization which had a big role in running education. The activity of this organization was to develop a method to teach illiterate adults with the objectives to liberate the Maubere people from colonialism and to liberate people from being illiterate. This program was not continued because of the Indonesian invasion in 1975 of Timor Timur.’ (SAHE 2003)

Hill explains FRETILIN’s rationale as follows:

‘The attitudes which FRETILIN want to overcome in Timor were the same ones which Paulo Freire and his colleagues in the Northeast of Brazil had found among the peasant they worked with, namely that they had accepted the officials’ definition of themselves as lazy, ignorant, and uncultured, and held what Freire calls ‘a naive view of the world’, i.e. they tend to superstition and believe that their poverty and powerlessness was given and could not be changed’. (Hill 2002:110)

Later the Indonesian government provided many schools and scholarships for Timorese peoples in advanced studies. However the school system was a general system with the purpose to advance nationalism among youth with an ideology called Pancasila. The old colonial teaching method limited transferring skills. Many Timorese people have been taught by that system during Indonesian colonial times. Colonized people lost the opportunity to develop literal, creative or critical ways of thinking, in which social conditions and culture were not able to move forward into modern ideas. For example most women were not educated which led to today’s high illiteracy problems. The social environment during colonial times also did not allow people to value a quality education. Many parents said, ‘You want to study for what? To be a president? We already have a president!’ Because of those things, the illiterates were victims of an unequal schooling system and cultural influences.

Pinto (2009), explains:

‘..feto Timor barak mak seidauk hatene lee no hakerek ida-ne’e tamba laiha inan-aman ida mak haree didiak edukasaun labarik feto sira nian, dala barak labarik feto sira lahetan oportuniade atu eskola ho razaun ajuda inan halo servisu iha uma. Inan-aman balun halo tuir kustumi hanesan viza avo nian ne’ebe hateten katak labarik feto sira di’ak liu lalika eskola, eskola mos hanesan de’it, iha loron ikus sei la lori buat ida ba familia’.

(A lot of women are illiterate because their parents did not pay attention to their daughters, sometimes girls did not get the opportunity to go to school because they were needed to help their mothers at homes. They believe it was better for girls not to go to school. It is just the same if they go to school or not because in the end they will contribute nothing to the family). Pinto 2009:7

Therefore in 2005 the government decided to promote adult literacy as a national campaign in the country to ensure people’s participation in the development process. The high illiteracy rates in Timor-Leste reflect the unequal structure of the society. Illiteracy is an enormous problem for progress as it prevents people from participating effectively in political and economic development and building democracy. The concept of a national adult literacy campaign is the focus of this paper based on my research for my undergraduate thesis.

### Objectives of the research study

- To identify whether the current literacy campaign method is appropriate.
- To know the advantages and disadvantages of the method and approach in national literacy campaign.
- To find out the positive impact of using the method in the national literacy campaign.
- To recommend and contribute to government in particular the Minister of Education to use the method and develop a concept of adult education which reflects the Timor-Leste context.

### Theoretical Background

Aphanumeric method (Ortega, Rodriques and Miguel (2005))	The ‘Yo! Sí Puedo’ method builds on the fact that non-literate individuals are often familiar with numbers by asking students to identify unknown letters with known numbers’ (p. 4).
Contextual and based on the reality and learner experience (Leonela Really Diaz (2008))	‘The word home should be the first one, he (PR. Fidel Castro) explained, because it could easily be translated into other languages and, because the illiterate somewhat knows what it is. If the person doesn’t have it (a home ), he knows how important it is, and, if he has it, he fights very much to keep it’ (p.3).
UNESCO (1997)	‘Literacy’ is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning to enable an individual to achieve his or her goals, to develop his or her knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in the wider society.’ (p. 13).

## **Design and Methodology**

Utilized a descriptive qualitative research design. Employed a triangulation of research methods:

- (1) Observation
- (2) Key informant (KI), in-depth interview
- (3) Document review

## **Analysis and Discussions of Findings**

### *Using Yo! Si Puedo Method in National Literacy Campaign*

The Timorese national literacy campaign adopted the Cuban global method known as Yo! Si Puedo. This method is known as the alphanumeric campaign method. This means that Sim! Eu Posso (Portuguese) or Los! Hau Bele (Tetun) method is composed of letters, words, syllabus and numbers. It combines the alphabet with numbers.

This method is also contextualized because it introduces words that are meaningful to people's daily lives. The method uses audiovisual resources to teach. The method consists of 65 lessons. The 65 lessons are based on Timor-Leste's context. The lessons end within 13 weeks. So, the monitors (local teachers) teach 6 lessons per week. This means that students attend 3 classes per week with 2 lessons per class. One class takes between one and a half to two hours.

Each lesson starts with a picture and some of the material which is supposedly based on the local reality of the learners - addressing social and economic issues.

The learners are expected to discuss these pictures and then a key word (or phrase) is given to them that relates to the picture. That word is then often broken down into syllables and the learners practice writing them and make new words.

## **The advantages and disadvantages of the Cuban method**

### *The advantages*

My research findings of the Yo! Si Puedo (Los! Hau Bele) method is that there are many advantages including:

- The use of audiovisual equipment such as TV, VCR, and the generator and chairs and some of the support materials such as the manual for the monitor, the 'kartila' (workbook), pencils,
- The campaign has active on-site control by Cuban technical advisors and the local sub-district Coordinators.
- The method is using combination of letter and numeric or alphanumeric method
- The content is based on Timorese reality because the materials have been adapted to reflect the Timorese conditions so the learners recognise the content and their reality.
- The method is also contextualized, problematizing and includes discussion. When the monitor teaches a letter it is combined with numeracy acquisition to learn the basic letters of the alphabet, then building from this to construct simple words, phrases and sentences by putting in the syllabus. For example when learning the word mango, they talk about how to prepare the fruit for the family and how often the family consumes the fruit in their everyday life.
- All materials are simple easy to use by the learner and monitor and are produced at a low cost.
- The use of audiovisual learning teaches the students about the importance of technology in the globalizations era.
- The monitor (teacher) is open to criticism by the learners. For example when using Los Hau bele (Tetun) method there is some difference with Sin Eu Posso, because Tetun has only 20 letters with six letters missing: C, Q, V, W, Y and Z. However the reality in Timor-Leste is still we mostly use Portuguese language for names and places, such as Cesaltina, Liquisa and so on.
- The method gives the learners the chance to participate actively in class. By choosing some words to develop in the discussion, automatically all students will participate in the discussion.
- The schedules and places to teach can be flexible, since it only requires a TV set with a video player and generator. The monitor demonstrates that he/she values the knowledge of the learners by consulting with the students about the best time for them to learn.
- The learners feel energetic and enthusiastic to participate in the class because they understand the reasons for attending the campaign classes.

- The method builds good relations between the monitor and learners and learners with learners.
- Learners feel that their new knowledge has value for other people in their family and community.

### *Disadvantages*

The research found that there is a very small number of disadvantages in using this method. However my findings show that some of the difficulties faced by the campaign are having a big impact on the method itself as follows:

- The Timorese adaptation of the method into Tetun (Los! Hau Bele) means they are only teaching 20 letters of the alphabet because they are using the Tetun alphabet.
- There is no planeaficasaun de aulas (lesson plan). This makes it difficult when doing the final evaluation.
- It is difficult for those sucos without access to electricity to hold their class in the evening because some of the adults have poor eyesight.
- When using Portuguese, the learners and even some of the monitors have difficulty understanding.

### **The Result of using the method**

Between February – April 2009, I started to collect data on the national campaign. According to the data provided by the Cuban advisers, classes were running in four hundred of Timor-Leste's four hundred and forty two *sucos*.

At this time, classes were running in 35 sucos of 5 sub districts in Viqueque district. Some classes were already up to their third intake of students (Etapa III); while others have had two intakes, and some only one. There is a total 19,448 graduates to date. Current enrolments were 20,842, of whom 6022 had actually received certificates. In my district of Viqueque, there is a total 544 graduates and current enrolment is 561 of whom 50 had got a certificate. The adult students in the 2 classes I studied can write their names and sign it.

My research validated the Cubans' data on classes and enrolments, using the database which is maintained by the Timorese Ministry of Education, Non-formal education directorate staff in the Office of the National Campaign Secretariat. This validation is important because the participation rate and successful outcomes of the campaign is very high. Previous efforts to eradicate illiteracy, both the FRETILIN campaign in 1975 which was interrupted by a military invasion, and the Indonesian literacy program known as paketA had no significant results recorded.

In order to analyse the comprehensive data collected on classes in Viqueque district, I undertook fieldwork observations of classes and held discussions with the Cuban advisers, sub-district and district coordinators, monitors, participants, and graduates. Working closely with the National Campaign Secretariat and Sub district coordinator, observed 2 classes in progress, both in Tetum, and held discussions with the participants, numbering 16 in total.

When discussing the positive impact of the campaign, it is important to consider several aspects. Positive impact does not only mean that the learner knows how to write and read. It also means that the campaign brings new light, new experience for the adult learner. Every learner, every monitor, coordinator, every class and advisor interviewed expressed great appreciation and happiness with the campaign and of course the class. Students are motivated to participate in the campaign

The role of each campaign component such as the role of sub district coordinator, monitors, the Cuban advisor and local authority as well as the students themselves all play an important function in mobilizing the population to participate in the national literacy campaign. The research identified that each component of the campaign have carried out very hard tasks. As it stated in the 'Manual ba Mobilizasaun' (2007:12) the sub-district coordinator (SDC) has a critical and important role in making the campaign successful. They keep talking with the local authority and the people about the importance of the campaign. They are monitoring every class to keep the student records and to guarantee the quality of the process. They are also trying to make sure there is full participation of students in the class. Most sub district coordinators argued that the important thing in running the campaign is to liberate our people from illiteracy. They stated that during the Resistance era, everyone talked about self determination. Now the liberation of the nation is already in our hands. But now there is still another fight, a fight against

illiteracy. To guarantee the participation of all citizens in all aspects of national development firstly all should work together to struggle for the literacy campaign.

As stated by the President of Republica Democratica de Timor Leste (RDTL), Jose Ramos Horta:

‘Devia analfabetismu ne’e sai hanesan kauza nasional iha ita nia nasaun. Iha tinan barak nia laran ita nia povu analfabetu, ida ne’e hanesan deve ida ba povu (Timor Post, 24 April 2009). (Our illiteracy debt is a national cause. For many years our people have been illiterate, we owe this [literacy] to the people).

## Conclusion

‘Perang melawan buta huruf adalah perjuangan yang nyata’ (Fighting against illiteracy is a real struggle) (Carla Brunei, Diario Nasional, 27 April 2009).

Self-determination and independence does not mean only to liberate our land from colonialism but it is also refers to the liberation of people or society.

The national literacy campaign helps the government in its aim of redressing the imbalance of educational opportunities between men and women. The overwhelming majority of participants are women, and the curricula address many issues relevant more to the condition of society. The participation of such a high proportion of women makes a strong case for the programs’ potential for bringing about socioeconomic transformation.

After the 1999 Referendum many Timorese still could not write and read. To achieve the human development goals set for Timor-Leste, adult literacy must also be part of the Education for All (EFA); as a learning tool, as a learning process and as a learning outcome.

My conclusions from this study are:

- To guarantee the success of the campaign it needs the participation of all institutions.
- The population needs to be motivated to participate in the campaign literacy classes.

When first established in 2007 the Office of the National Campaign Secretariat was independent and reported directly to the Minister of Education and through her to the National Campaign Commission and Sub-Commissions. However the IV Constitutional government dismantled the Campaign Commission structure and the National Campaign Secretariat is now part of the Literacy Program division inside the Non-formal Education Directorate of the Ministry of Education.

The national literacy campaign is no longer integrated across all government ministries and institutions working together for the eradication of illiteracy. Illiteracy is related to agriculture, health, and environment and stops the people from having access to information. As stated by President Horta, illiteracy is the national cause. This means that to combat it, it is the responsibility of not only the Minister of Education but of all government institutions and of all the people.

## Recommendations

As a result of this study I make several recommendations that might be useful for the effective implementation of the national literacy campaign in Timor-Leste. The recommendations are as follows:

1. That the Government allocates sufficient budget for the national campaign to reach all illiterates.
2. If all people are to realize that illiteracy is a national cause, the state needs to lead the campaign including through the direct involvement of members of the Government in the socialization and mobilization process. The Minister of Education should initiate a national discussion on a national system of integrating the adult literacy campaign into each ministers work and provide other program or activities as post literacy, a critical component of the Campaign
3. The national Literacy Campaign Secretariat must investigate how best to enhance existing literacy materials for post literacy given that the quality of the learning materials currently available and used by NGOs widely varies.
4. The Government, particularly the Minister of Education needs to create good conditions for the campaign components to operate according to the Campaign process using the Cuban method.
5. UNTL students during break time should be invited to participate in the national literacy campaign.

6. At the level of research and study, there is more to be gained from further study of adult education organizations and groups in Timor-Leste. The information provided in this academic study is just the beginning and further study will provide essential information for the public as well as the government.

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