

# Contributions of a dialogue-based ALE approach to community empowerment in Jordan

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## Abstract:

This paper presents the *Tafakur* approach – an innovative, dialogue-based adult learning model developed by DVV International in Jordan in response to the country's socio-economic challenges and limitations within its formal and non-formal education systems. Grounded in Paulo Freire's emancipatory pedagogy, Malcolm Knowles' andragogy, and Robert Chambers' participatory methods, *Tafakur* integrates theory with practice to empower marginalized communities through transformative, needs-based learning. Central to the approach is the *Daily Urgent Needs Education* (DUNE) framework, which anchors learning in the learners' lived realities and fosters critical reflection, self-awareness, and active participation.

The paper outlines the theoretical foundations of *Tafakur*, its methodological tools, and the facilitator's role in cultivating participatory, learner-driven environments. Drawing on over a decade of implementation, it analyzes the outcomes of the "Adult Education Project for Community Development and Empowerment," which engages community-based organizations and development centers to deliver participatory learning tailored to local needs. The approach has demonstrated measurable impact at individual, institutional, and community levels – enhancing critical thinking, employability, and social inclusion.

Findings from a 2023–2024 case study by the European Training Foundation underscore *Tafakur*'s effectiveness in fostering personal transformation and addressing structural barriers such as unemployment and social marginalization. The paper concludes by identifying the need for continued research, institutional partnerships, and policy integration to ensure the model's sustainability and scalability as a replicable strategy for adult learning and community empowerment in the Global South.

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Further appreciation is extended to the European Training Foundation (ETF) for conducting a comprehensive case study on the Tafakur approach and highlighting its impact. Their analysis has provided valuable validation and strategic direction for future expansion.

Finally, we thank the Jordanian Ministry of Social Development for their institutional collaboration and ongoing support, which have been vital in reaching communities across the country.

## Introduction

In response to growing demands for community development, dialogue-based learning emerges as a vital approach for individual empowerment and effective learning processes. Rooted in participatory, horizontally structured exchanges, it fosters equitable dialogue among educators and learners as well as among learners themselves, encouraging a shift from passive knowledge intake to critical self-reflection and reinterpretation of reality. Such dialogic processes promote awareness of personal and social conditions, enabling individuals to identify genuine needs and recognize their marginalization – key drivers of transformative change. As Freire asserts, "Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education."<sup>1</sup>

In the Jordanian context, the adult learning and education (ALE) system is confronted with multifaceted challenges, stemming from the country's economic conditions, the rigid structure of the formal education system, and the design and implementation of non-formal learning environments, all of which significantly impact individual development and societal outcomes.

These challenges underscore the need for an alternative educational model. This is why the Institute of International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (DVV International) in Jordan developed an educational approach later termed "Tafakur" based on Daily Urgent Needs Education (DUNE). Philosophically rooted in Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" and Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) tools, the approach stimulates learning in a dialogic environment, transforming daily needs viewed by learners as core issues causing tension and pain into educational materials while reconnecting individuals to their communities.

This paper aims to present the theoretical foundations underpinning the Tafakur approach, outline the DUNE conceptual framework and the Tafakur methodology, and present the project model developed and implemented by DVV International in Jordan. It further offers an analysis of the transformative impact of dialogic learning, drawing on experiences from the Jordanian context, with a view toward its potential as a replicable model.

## The Emergence of the Tafakur Approach: Connecting Theory with the Jordanian Reality on the Ground

### *Theoretical Foundations of the Tafakur Approach*

At the heart of the Tafakur approach lies dialogue-based learning, rooted in a transformative pedagogical philosophy that seeks to challenge and move beyond traditional rote-learning models. In this context, Paulo Freire's theories of popular and emancipatory education have served as a key intellectual foundation. In his work "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", Freire analyzes how the education system supports mechanisms of marginalization and oppression. Freire coined the term "banking model of education", describing the prevalent education system in which teachers deposit ready-made knowledge into learners who become mere passive participants in the educational and social process. Freire emphasizes the necessity of transitioning to dialogue as a liberating tool, where learning becomes an interactive process enabling participants to discover themselves and their reality. Dialogue serves as the catalyst in the evolution of consciousness, guiding individuals from a naive awareness toward a critical, reflective understanding, thereby empowering them to take ownership of their learning and to engage meaningfully with social and economic transformation.

The Tafakur approach has also drawn significantly on Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy as a foundational framework for adult learning. Knowles identifies assumptions and principles of adult learning that have guided the development of the Tafakur approach, in particular the need to involve adults in the planning of their learning as well as to use learning content that has direct

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<sup>1</sup> Freire, P. (2014). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*. <https://www.amazon.com/Pedagogy-Oppressed-Anniversary-Paulo-Freire-ebook/dp/B00M0FQHQO>

relevance to their personal life. Knowles also highlights an inherent readiness to learn, a heightened awareness of the needs and a certain autonomy and self-direction that guides the learning process of adult learners. In the context of Jordan, these assumptions didn't meet the reality on the ground, necessitating a refinement of the DVV International approach.

### ***The Tafakur Approach as a Response to the Jordanian Context***

ALE is a relatively new and unknown concept in Jordan. Since 2010, DVV International has been promoting ALE in Jordan through engaging diverse stakeholders in education and development. These continuous discussions and collaborations have informed the development of the Tafakur approach that takes into consideration the specific features and challenges of adult learners in Jordan.

Jordan is a relatively young state, established in 1921 under the British Mandate for Palestine. It achieved independence in 1946 and has since been known as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. As with all state-building processes, the formation of a cohesive national identity has been a central objective for Jordanian leadership – a task complicated by entrenched tribal structures and the integration of successive waves of refugees, initially from Palestine and later from Iraq and Syria.

The Jordanian education system is comparable to Freire's banking system; traditional rote-learning is at the center of the education process, leaving no room for the development of analytical and critical thinking skills. In addition, Jordan is characterized by a weak economy and high unemployment rates, especially among young adults. Data from the Jordanian Department of Statistics indicate an unemployment rate of 21.4% in 2024<sup>2</sup>. Especially among marginalized groups – such as women, people living in rural areas, and refugees – access to education and employment opportunities is extremely limited.

Within this context, DVV International recognized the need to develop a learning approach tailored to the specific needs of Jordanian adult learners. Although originally designed for implementation in marginalized areas, the approach is adaptable to a range of settings, including among students and recent graduates. When developing and implementing the Tafakur approach, it became obvious that Knowles assumptions of adults being self-directed, autonomous, and motivated to learn did not apply in the specific Jordanian context. Adult learners – particularly those from marginalized communities – often lack awareness of their own needs and interests, struggle to articulate their experiences, and face difficulties linking these needs and experiences to their lived realities. This disconnect frequently results in passivity and a diminished capacity for action.

DVV International also identified a further challenge in the structure and orientation of prevailing non-formal learning and training programs offered to participants. These programs often emphasize self-development within a framework that promotes an individualistic conception of leadership, rather than one rooted in collective action. This often resulted in barriers between participants and their surrounding reality, limiting community participation and subsequently fostering social alienation – where individuals no longer perceive themselves as integral members of their society or as active agents within a meaningful, development-oriented educational environment.

The unawareness of inherent needs of marginalized communities as well as the societal alienation revealed the importance of including Robert Chambers' participatory rural appraisal into the Tafakur approach which he described as "a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act"<sup>3</sup>. Motivation to learn often stems from daily challenges like economic hardship or limited

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Statistics. (2025, August 25). *21.4 unemployment rate for 2024*. [https://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/unemployment\\_2024/](https://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/unemployment_2024/)

<sup>3</sup> Chambers, R. (1992). *Rural appraisal: rapid, relaxed and participatory*. <https://www.ids.ac.uk/download.php?file=files/Dp311.pdf>

social mobility. ALE must address these realities, helping learners reflect critically and develop practical solutions. Participatory, dialogue-based learning fosters self-awareness and a deeper understanding of real needs, leading to an awareness of marginalization of learner – an essential driver of change.

### **Tafakur Approach for Learning Based on Daily Urgent Needs Education (DUNE)**

Against this backdrop, DVV International adopted the Daily Urgent Needs Education (DUNE) model as both an entry point and a conceptual framework for facilitating learning among marginalized communities in Jordan. Building upon DUNE, the Tafakur approach was developed, employing a range of participatory, dialogue-driven methods and tools to actively engage learners in the educational process.

#### ***The Conceptual Framework: Learning Based on Daily Urgent Needs Education (DUNE)***

Learning based on daily urgent needs focuses on analyzing the reality from learners' own perspectives by identifying their daily most pressing challenges, deconstructing their structural causes, and transforming these challenges into learning opportunities. Anchoring learning in learners' daily needs enhances its impact, as it is grounded in their socio-economic realities – an approach particularly effective within communities experiencing marginalization and poverty. By enabling learners to test and re-evaluate their perceptions and analytically address their problems enhances their intellectual autonomy and critical consciousness. To identify the most pressing daily challenges and needs, the Tafakur approach was developed offering adult educators concrete methods and tools to organize a participatory and dialogue-based learning process.

#### ***Tafakur Approach: Concept and Tools***

Tafakur refers to deep, culturally rooted reflective thinking. It is an interactive process analyzing current realities and its contradictions. Tafakur relies on exploratory questions (often Socratic in style) that begin with lived experience and move toward conceptual understanding, stimulating cognitive transformation without imposing ready-made frameworks.

Dialogue opens spaces for questioning and discovery. The intention of dialogue as such is, however, not sufficient. As Paule Freire once said: “What is really essential in this process is that both the teacher and the students know that open, curious questioning, whether in speaking or listening, is what grounds them mutually – not a simple passive pretense at dialogue”<sup>4</sup>. This is why the pedagogy of question as well as the text-based pedagogy build essential elements of the Tafakur approach.

This enables learners to deconstruct their reality, crystallize priorities, and design learning paths connected to their daily lives and developmental aspirations.

#### ***The Role of the Adult Educator – Facilitation rather than Teaching***

The Tafakur approach is based on interaction on eye-level between the adult educator and the learner. This approach demands a high degree of openness and flexibility on the part of the adult educator responsible for guiding the learning process. Within the Tafakur framework, DVV International accordingly refers to the adult educator as *facilitator*, emphasizing their role in supporting rather than directing learning. Facilitators must be adept at cultivating an environment that encourages learners to engage in critical reflection, identify the knowledge and skills necessary for their goals, acquire relevant information and training, and formulate actionable plans. Consequently, a predetermined curriculum is not imposed. Instead, learners

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<sup>4</sup> Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of Freedom: ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. <http://catalogue.cdeacf.ca/Record.htm?record=19278408124910966809>

assume an active role in shaping their own curriculum, with the facilitator serving as a guide and support throughout the process.

The Tafakur approach helps facilitators build collaborative learning environments that enable both learners and facilitators to rethink themselves and their reality and engage in socially and economically meaningful learning projects. Within this framework, learning is conceptualized as a transformative force – an engine of structural change with the potential to reshape societal configurations across economic, social, and political domains. A competent facilitator – one who possesses a clear understanding of their role within the learning process, along with the appropriate methodologies and tools to unlock the latent capacities of individuals and communities – is therefore essential to achieving meaningful and lasting learning outcomes.

### ***The methods and tools of Tafakur***

Based on this understanding, the Tafakur approach relies on several key tools and methods:

- Exploratory questions: Used to stimulate deep thinking and encourage learners to analyze reality rather than receiving ready-made information.
- Participatory analysis: Discussing and analyzing daily issues in groups to enhance interactive and collaborative learning.
- Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) tools: Methods like ranking, social mapping, timeline analysis, and group self-evaluation to help learners critically understand their environment.
- Interactive facilitation techniques: Including brainstorming, role-playing, and group activities that stimulate interaction and active engagement in learning, guiding groups toward collective thinking and discovery rather than delivering knowledge vertically.
- Case studies: Analyzing real experiences to help learners see how acquired knowledge applies to their daily reality.

## **The Tafakur Approach in Practice: Adult Education Project for Community Development and Empowerment in Jordan**

Taking into consideration the theoretical framework, the Jordanian context and the developed Tafakur approach, DVV International has been implementing since 2013 the "Adult Education Project for Community Development and Empowerment" in Jordan. The project primarily targets marginalized groups, including unemployed youth and women in rural areas.

Within the framework of the project, local non-governmental community-based organizations (CBOs) and Community Development Centers (CDCs) affiliated with the Jordanian Ministry of Social Development receive comprehensive training in adult education concepts, the Tafakur approach, and institutional capacity development. DVV International, through its team of expert trainers, provides continuous support to both staff and facilitators throughout the implementation of the project.

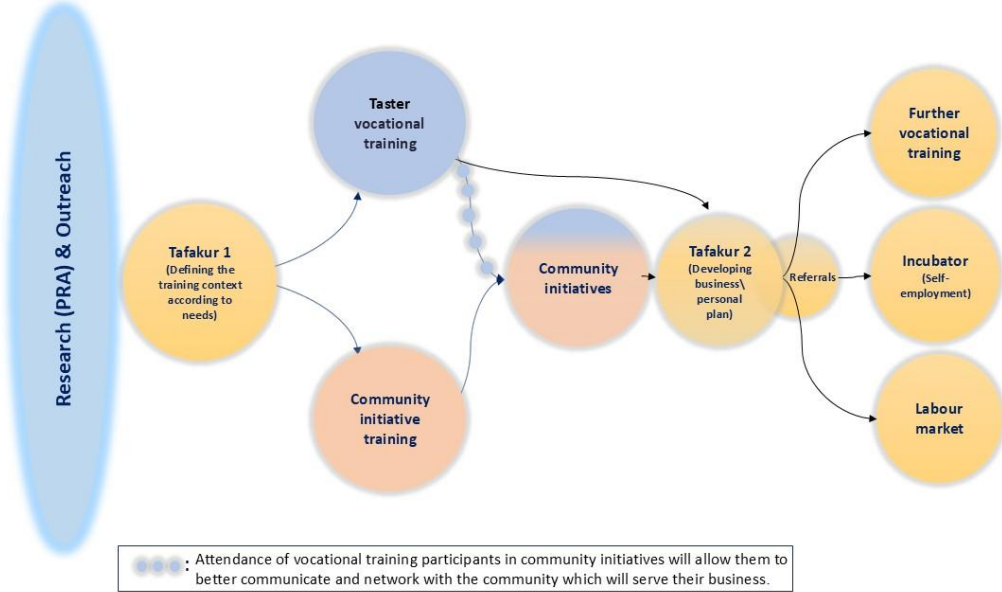
The learning journey at CBOs and CDCs begins with a participatory diagnosis of the community context employing Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) tools. This process facilitates the joint identification of local needs in collaboration with CBO and CDC staff, community leaders, and representatives from diverse social groups, thereby ensuring a grounded and inclusive understanding of the community's lived realities.

Following this initial assessment, the first stage of the Tafakur approach is implemented, engaging the project's target group in a series of interactive dialogue sessions (Tafakur 1) that draw directly on the findings of the PRA. This stage plays a critical role in cultivating participants' critical consciousness, enabling them to engage in reflective analysis of their social and economic realities.

The insights gained from these sessions are transformed into preliminary vocational training programs or community initiative training, tailored to participants' needs and the local labor market. This training serves as a bridge, allowing participants to transition from critical analysis to practical application. They are given opportunities to implement community initiatives, which often evolve into sustainable economic projects.

The learning cycle concludes with the second stage of Tafakur (Tafakur 2), focusing on personal and professional planning. Here, participants develop practical livelihood plans with support from facilitators through innovation hubs and entrepreneurship incubators. This phase includes training on résumé writing, job search techniques, and referrals to further training opportunities, employment services, microfinance institutions, digital marketplaces, etc.

Project Model: Adult Education Project for Community Development and Empowerment in Jordan



**Results and Impact**

***Changes on the Individual, Institutional and Community Level***

The mentioned interventions have generated measurable outcomes across multiple levels. At the individual level, project managers and facilitators have reported notable enhancements in participants’ critical thinking, practical competencies, self-confidence, and decision-making capacities. At the community level, the project has contributed to strengthened social cohesion and a more positive perception of marginalized groups. At the institutional level, CBOs and CDCs have integrated key components of the project – particularly the Tafakur approach – into their ongoing programming, indicating a degree of institutionalization and sustainability.

In addition, a national informal network of facilitators – the "Community of Practice" – was established and connects practitioners using collaborative adult learning methodologies. The network enables knowledge exchange through workshops, seminars and peer discussions while building valuable connections among field experts. Members develop both their facilitation skills and practical tools, particularly for needs-based and reflective learning approaches, while continuously adapting methods to local cultural contexts.

***Case Study Assessment through the European Training Foundation***

From 2023 to 2024, the European Training Foundation (ETF) conducted a case study on the Tafakur Approach developed by DVV International in Jordan. As part of its Partnership for Innovation in Adult Learning and Education (PIALE), ETF examined learning practices and

prepared peer-learning case studies that were published in 2025<sup>5</sup>. The results demonstrate that dialogue-based approaches focused on participants' needs enhance learners' self-awareness and understanding of their realities, stimulate motivation for learning and career development, enhance social inclusion and provide strong support for both learners and DVV International's partner network, serving as key enablers for transitioning to diverse employment opportunities and community development.

Concretely, 93.5% of learners gained ability to identify own strengths/educational needs, 92% reported improved communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills and 90.4% boosted their employability skills (CV writing, interviews). Furthermore, 91.9% of the participants better understood their work/education rights and 79% showed increased motivation for continuous learning. Community initiatives implemented by participants in their communities contributed to improving social issues such as reduced school dropout rates, improved citizens' health and nutrition or higher awareness and action for cultural preservation.

The findings of ETF confirm that the dialogic Tafakur approach can effectively address unemployment and poverty in marginalized communities. The methodology demonstrates strength in creating measurable personal transformations while generating ripple effects across social and economic dimensions. Future implementation would benefit from longitudinal studies to further validate the sustainability of outcomes.

## Conclusion

The significance of the Tafakur approach lies in its rare integration of theoretical depth and practical adaptability. On one hand, it is grounded in a robust educational philosophy, while on the other, it possesses the flexibility to adapt to local specificities. Most importantly, it offers a practical model for transforming socio-economic challenges into genuine opportunities for learning and empowerment.

Furthermore, community partnerships played an important role in developing and testing the approach and project model, continuously redefining them in collaboration with DVV International's CBO and CDC partners. They emerged as essential partners in ensuring project continuity and reaching out to target groups. These partnerships also enhanced the community ownership of the program.

Despite the strength of this approach, its implementation in Jordan faces challenges linked to three main factors: the dominance of rote-learning culture in educational institutions, limited resources allocated to ALE programs, and difficulties in measuring long-term impact. Subsequent research must develop evaluation tools that capture qualitative shifts in community awareness, also supporting advocacy for educational reform and improved funding.

Sustaining and expanding the Tafakur model requires continuous critical reflection, strategic planning, and broad-based collaboration. Partnering with universities can enhance the theoretical depth of content and boost academic credibility, while coordination with government ministries ensures alignment with national policies and access to institutional support. Piloting the model across diverse regional contexts will refine its adaptability, supported by continuous exchange among facilitators, researchers, and practitioners.

Empirical research remains essential, particularly studies on the transformative impact of dialogic learning and its integration into formal education systems. Embedding Tafakur within national adult education strategies and teacher training programs will be key to its long-term relevance and institutional sustainability.

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<sup>5</sup> *Tafakur - A dialogue based adult learning approach in Jordan.*  
[https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/system/files/2025-01/TAKAFUR%20Case%20study%20PIALE%20Jordan\\_final.pdf](https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/system/files/2025-01/TAKAFUR%20Case%20study%20PIALE%20Jordan_final.pdf)

Ultimately, Tafakur's continued success depends on a multidimensional strategy that integrates programmatic innovation, academic and governmental partnerships, research, and policy engagement – ensuring it remains a dynamic tool for emancipatory education and community empowerment.

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