

Exploring Issues Hindering the Implementation of Adult Education in Open Distance Learning System in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the barriers hindering the implementation of adult education through the Open Distance Learning (ODL) system in Tanzania, focusing on the Mbeya region. As part of the global Education for All (EFA) initiative, adult education is recognized for its role in promoting equitable access to learning, fostering social inclusion, and enhancing socio-economic development. Tanzania's adoption of ODL for adult education aims to support lifelong learning, yet numerous obstacles limit its effectiveness. This study utilized a mixed-method approach, incorporating interviews, observations, document reviews, and surveys with 56 participants, including adult learners, facilitators, and program coordinators. Key findings indicate that financial limitations, lack of political commitment, cultural perceptions, and technological challenges significantly impede ODL's reach and effectiveness. Financial constraints restrict the availability of essential resources, while inadequate political support reduces policy attention and prioritization for adult education. Additionally, societal attitudes often devalue adult learning, affecting engagement among learners. Technological limitations, particularly in rural areas, further hinder access to ODL resources. This study underscores the need for improved funding, policy reforms, cultural awareness, and learner involvement in program design to maximize ODL's impact in Tanzania. Recommendations target enhancing resource allocation, political backing, and public awareness to optimize adult education through ODL.

Key words: Adult Education, Open Distance Learning (ODL)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Education for adults has become central to the global Education for All (EFA) agenda, aiming to provide equitable access to quality education. For countries worldwide, particularly those with emerging economies like Tanzania, adult education is a means of creating social capital, fostering social inclusion, and reducing social and economic inequalities. In Tanzania, a need exists to advance adult education, specifically through ODL, to engage adults in lifelong learning and support them as active citizens who can contribute meaningfully to national development. This study will thus provide insights into the factors hindering adult education in Tanzania's ODL system, supporting strategies to increase adult participation in education and, consequently, socio-economic development.

Globally, ODL systems have been employed effectively to widen access to education and allow flexible learning opportunities, especially for adults. In developed countries, the focus on ODL for adult education has grown with advancements in information and communication technologies (ICT) (Howell, Williams, & Lindsay, 2003). As a result, many educational institutions offer courses tailored for adult learners, ensuring the continuity of learning even beyond retirement age. This model aligns with the EFA agenda and

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all, promoting lifelong learning opportunities. This study is relevant because it explores how Tanzania, like many other nations, can effectively use ODL systems to expand adult education access and participation.

Despite the promising role of ODL, there are challenges unique to low- and middle-income countries, such as limited resources, technology infrastructure, and socio-economic constraints that hinder adult learning initiatives (UNESCO, 2014). Many adults in low-income countries like Tanzania enter old age having faced economic hardships, lack of access to healthcare, and inadequate educational opportunities, which exacerbate social exclusion and poverty (WHO, 2021). The study will explore these challenges, focusing on how they impede the uptake of ODL by adult learners. Findings will help identify solutions to improve the effectiveness and reach of adult education programs in Tanzania's ODL system, reducing inequalities and enhancing the quality of life for adults who have not had access to traditional educational opportunities.

Adult education also has significant implications for family welfare and community development, especially in Tanzania, where adults often play critical roles within extended families. Adult education equips older individuals with the skills to better manage family and community responsibilities and actively engage in economic activities, which is particularly vital in rural and economically disadvantaged areas. This study will reveal how adult education, particularly through ODL, can be optimized to empower older adults in Tanzania to become agents of socio-economic change, reinforcing the idea that learning should be a lifelong endeavor. Furthermore, by identifying the barriers that restrict adults' engagement in ODL, the study will contribute to strategies that support adult learners in overcoming socio-economic and technological challenges that hinder their educational pursuits.

Previous initiatives in Tanzania demonstrate the positive impact of adult education on socio-economic well-being. During the 1960s and 1970s, Tanzania launched multiple campaigns to eradicate illiteracy and improve basic life skills through community-centered adult education programs. For instance, the "The Choice is Yours" campaign of 1970 and the "Man is Health" campaign of 1973 focused on literacy, health education, and agricultural practices, significantly reducing illiteracy levels among Tanzanian adults (Mushi, 2009; Mollel, 2019). These efforts positioned Tanzania as a model for effective adult education practices in the region. However, since the 1980s, several socio-economic factors, such as reduced funding, poverty, and disease (including the HIV/AIDS epidemic), have eroded these gains, increasing illiteracy and social exclusion. Given these historical challenges, this study seeks to understand how similar or new barriers continue to impact adult learning and how ODL could revitalize adult education in the current Tanzanian context.

In Africa, including Tanzania, education for adults is essential as it addresses the social and economic needs of communities that rely on older adults for stability and survival. Adult education enhances skills, literacy, and knowledge, enabling older adults to contribute more effectively to the economy and family well-being. Therefore, understanding the issues impeding adult learning in Tanzania's ODL system can help formulate policies and programs that address these obstacles. It will also highlight how ODL, by its very nature of flexibility and accessibility, can be better adapted to suit the learning needs of older adults who may face challenges with traditional educational methods due to work and family responsibilities, limited access to resources, and sometimes mobility restrictions.

Moreover, there is limited research focusing on the practical challenges that adults in Tanzania face in accessing education through ODL. This study will bridge this gap, providing a nuanced understanding of the specific issues hindering adult education within Tanzania's ODL framework. Studies from other regions, such as Europe and Asia, reveal similar challenges, such as a lack of relevant resources, minimal technological training, and motivational barriers among adult learners (Friebe & Schmidt-Hertha, 2013; Pliatsikas et al., 2018). By identifying the particular challenges within Tanzania's unique socio-economic context, the study will contribute to the development of targeted solutions and adaptations to the ODL model, ensuring it meets the needs of adult learners.

The study's findings will be of value to policymakers, educators, and stakeholders involved in adult education and ODL programs in Tanzania and beyond. Recognizing the demographic shift in Tanzania's

population, where a larger proportion is reaching older adulthood, calls for policies that address the educational needs of this demographic. As observed, by 2050, a significant portion of the global aged population will reside in developing countries like Tanzania (Mwaikokesya & Mushi, 2017). Therefore, this study will emphasize the urgent need for policy frameworks that prioritize adult education, enabling the elderly population to continue engaging in lifelong learning and contributing to socio-economic development.

Finally, this research is justified as it will support Tanzania's vision of achieving a knowledgeable and skilled society, as outlined in its National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP) and Vision 2025. By exploring the barriers to adult education in the ODL system, this study aims to inform strategies for inclusive education and socio-economic improvement, thereby supporting Tanzania's overall developmental goals.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Adult Education (AE) in Tanzania began in 1960 as an extra-mural studies section of Makerere University College under the University of London, later evolving into an autonomous institution by 1975 under the Ministry of Education. Currently, the Institute of Adult Education offers Certificate, Diploma, and Degree courses, reaching the grassroots level across 26 regional centers to provide accessible, quality lifelong learning. However, changing demographics, social complexities, and economic pressures have made expanding adult education challenging, leading to questions on its effectiveness in promoting socio-economic development. This study, therefore, explores the challenges in adult education within Tanzania, particularly focusing on its impact in Mbeya city.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study employs Human Capital Theory as a guiding framework due to its relevance in examining adult education's impact on Tanzania's development. Schultz (1971) originally proposed the theory, which asserts that education significantly boosts a population's productivity by enhancing human capital—an essential driver for economic growth. By raising cognitive capacities, education transforms human resources into economically productive entities, making them invaluable compared to physical capital. This theory suggests that education's macro- and micro-level economic returns justify investments in adult education as a means to uplift overall productivity and economic development.

In support of this theory, historical examples illustrate how nations that invested in adult education, such as Turkey and Indonesia, experienced transformative national growth. For Tanzania, applying Human Capital Theory supports the need for substantial investment in adult education, aiming to increase literacy, improve employment opportunities, and drive sustainable development. Such investments can also help achieve broader national goals like poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals. Therefore, Human Capital Theory not only frames this study's objectives but also justifies prioritizing adult education within Tanzania's domestic budget for long-term social and economic benefits.

2.2 Challenges facing the implementation of adult education

The implementation of adult education within Tanzania's Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system faces significant challenges, primarily rooted in societal attitudes and perceptions. Education for adults is generally viewed as secondary to the conventional education systems (basic, secondary, and tertiary), with many considering it as leisure or solely related to literacy. This negative perception has led to adult education receiving minimal policy support and resources, as it is often not recognized for its potential contributions to the country's socio-economic and cultural development. Additionally, Friebe and Schmidt-Hertha (2013) found that adults often view learning as more relevant for younger individuals, negatively affecting their own engagement and self-perception as active learners.

Furthermore, adult education programs in Tanzania frequently overlook the needs and input of the adult learners themselves. Mushi (2012) highlighted that adult education initiatives are often designed without adequate consultation with the intended learners, which affects their relevance and effectiveness. This lack of engagement contributes to poor sustainability of adult learning innovations, as adults feel disconnected from the programs meant to benefit them. Including adult learners in program design, implementation, and evaluation could improve engagement and ensure the programs meet their unique needs and interests, thus fostering a more positive outlook on adult education.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the study was guided by a pragmatic paradigm, allowing flexibility in design, sample selection, and methods, emphasizing practical, context-specific results. A mixed-method approach predominantly qualitative was employed to integrate and balance strengths across qualitative and quantitative data. The multiple embedded case study design facilitated a detailed examination of adult education within its natural context.

The study area was Mbeya City, Tanzania, chosen for its established adult education programs. The target population comprised adult learners, facilitators, and program coordinators in Mbeya City. A sample size of 56 was selected using purposive, snowball, and simple random sampling techniques to address specific participant categories for qualitative and quantitative data.

For data collection, semi-structured interviews, observations, document reviews and questionnaires were utilized. Thematic analysis, as per Braun and Clarke (2006), and descriptive statistical analysis via SPSS were employed for data analysis. To ensure trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability were systematically addressed. Reliability and validity were checked through pre-testing, expert review, and a translation-back-translation method for the Kiswahili instrument.

Lastly, ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, securing institutional permissions and conducting member-checking to guarantee participant privacy and accurate data representation

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Issues Facing the Implementation of Adult Education

The study on adult education in the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system in Tanzania's Mbeya region highlights several significant issues that hinder its effective implementation. These issues impact various aspects of the program, from financial and technological constraints to social and cultural influences. Key findings are discussed below:

Insufficient Funds

One of the primary barriers identified was the lack of adequate funding. Insufficient financial resources limited the overall operation of adult education programs, restricting the provision of necessary materials, fair compensation for facilitators, and suitable learning spaces. Interviews with facilitators and administrators, such as a regional resident tutor, indicated that government funds were often delayed or insufficient to meet program needs. For instance, facilitators received only a minimal amount per session, which demotivated them from effectively supporting adult learners. This financial constraint impacted the quality of education, with classes often held in secondary school facilities due to a lack of funds for dedicated adult education spaces. Thus, the scarcity of funds significantly impeded the effectiveness of the learning experience.

Shortage of Time

Time constraints emerged as a significant challenge for adult learners who needed to balance work, family commitments, and education. The condensed timelines for diploma and degree programs limited the depth and

quality of learning, as adult learners were expected to cover the same content in a shorter period than students in traditional settings. This fast-paced structure raised concerns about the quality of education, especially as students struggled to manage multiple responsibilities alongside their studies. Facilitators noted that the rapid pace of these programs often overwhelmed learners, making it difficult to achieve the intended learning outcomes within the limited time available.

Political Will

The study also highlighted a lack of political will to prioritize and support ODL initiatives. Interviews with stakeholders indicated that limited support at village, district, and regional levels restricted the program's growth and acceptance. Political support was seen as essential in promoting adult education, and without it, initiatives lacked momentum and necessary resources. The absence of advocacy from political leaders reduced awareness and engagement in these programs, potentially discouraging prospective learners from participating.

Technological Barriers

Technological limitations posed further challenges to the effective implementation of ODL programs. Many adult learners lacked access to reliable internet and modern devices, both critical for engaging with distance learning materials. Additionally, limited digital literacy among learners and some facilitators hindered their ability to use the ODL system effectively. Interviews revealed that most learners, especially those from rural areas or backgrounds with minimal technological exposure, faced challenges adapting to the ODL format, affecting their progress and satisfaction with the program.

Motivation and Engagement

The motivation and engagement of learners were also impacted by the challenges of self-direction and isolation that are inherent in ODL systems. Many adult learners struggled to maintain the intrinsic motivation necessary for success in self-paced programs. The lack of in-person interaction led to a sense of disconnect from peers and instructors, further diminishing motivation. Data collected through questionnaires showed that, while flexibility was a valued aspect of ODL, it often led to procrastination and disengagement without structured guidance. This highlighted the need for better strategies to foster motivation and engagement to enhance learners' commitment and performance.

Cultural and social factors further influenced the effectiveness of ODL programs. Adult learners in Mbeya came from diverse educational and cultural backgrounds, which impacted their learning experiences and perspectives toward education. Societal attitudes towards adult education and lifelong learning varied, with some learners more receptive to ODL programs than others. This variability in cultural attitudes affected participation and the perceived value of adult education. Addressing these cultural barriers and promoting a positive view of lifelong learning were seen as important steps to improving participation and outcomes for adult learners.

Generally, the study identified critical barriers to the effective implementation of adult education in the ODL system in Mbeya, Tanzania. Insufficient funding, time constraints, lack of political support, technological barriers, and cultural factors significantly hindered learners' engagement and educational outcomes. Addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of adult education programs. By securing adequate resources, fostering motivation, and promoting positive cultural attitudes toward lifelong learning, stakeholders can improve participation and overall success in adult education initiatives.

5.0 RESULTS

The exploration of issues that hindered the effective implementation of adult education through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in the Mbeya region of Tanzania revealed several significant barriers. Key findings identified financial constraints, lack of political will, cultural and social factors and technological challenges as primary obstacles.

Financial constraints have emerged as a significant barrier to the availability and accessibility of adult education programs. Limited funding restricts the development of necessary infrastructure and resources, ultimately hindering effective program delivery. Additionally, a lack of political will has been highlighted as a critical issue, with insufficient political commitment resulting in diminished prioritization and allocation of resources for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) initiatives. This neglect at the political level contributes to the overall marginalization of adult education compared to more traditional educational systems.

Cultural and social factors also play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of adult education. In Tanzania, the public generally prioritizes basic, secondary, and tertiary education, relegating adult education to a lesser status. Studies by Oppong (2006) and Topalã (2014) suggest that adult education is often perceived as a leisure activity rather than a vital component of lifelong learning, further diminishing its value. Many adults associate education primarily with literacy, reinforcing this perception. Furthermore, attitudes toward adult education significantly impact its implementation. Research by Topalã (2014) indicates that many adults' personal views negatively influence their willingness to engage with learning opportunities, as they tend to adopt a mindset focused on traditional education models that cater to children and young adults.

The inadequate policy attention afforded to adult education exacerbates these issues. As noted by Mushi et al. (2017), adult education is often overlooked due to its inferior status, leading to a lack of consideration for its role in the country's social, economic, and cultural development. This neglect results in programs being developed without sufficient consultation with adult learners, creating a disconnect between educational offerings and the actual needs of the target audience. Mushi (2012) pointed out that older adult learners are typically only consulted during the mobilization phase, rather than being involved throughout the entire program development process.

To address these challenges, Mushi (2010) emphasizes the importance of including learner perspectives in program design, implementation, and evaluation. This approach ensures that educational offerings align with the needs and interests of adult learners, ultimately enhancing their engagement and the effectiveness of ODL initiatives. The findings suggest that addressing financial, political, cultural, and technological barriers, alongside improving attitudes toward adult education, is critical for the successful implementation of ODL in Tanzania. Enhancing the perception of adult education as a valuable component of lifelong learning is essential for fostering greater participation and investment in this sector.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

The study highlighted several critical barriers affecting the effective implementation of adult education through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Tanzania's Mbeya region. Financial constraints, limited political commitment, cultural and social perceptions, and technological challenges all contribute to restricting access to adult education. These factors not only hinder the development of necessary infrastructure but also limit resources and prioritization, relegating adult education to a marginalized status within the broader education system.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach. Financial investment is essential to build sustainable ODL programs, and stronger political will is needed to support policy changes that recognize adult education as an integral component of national development. Additionally, shifting cultural perceptions to view adult education as a valuable form of lifelong learning is crucial to enhance engagement and societal investment in this sector. Integrating adult learners' perspectives in program design and implementation can also ensure that educational offerings meet their unique needs, furthering ODL's potential as a tool for personal and community growth. By prioritizing these changes, Tanzania can create an inclusive and responsive adult education system that promotes lifelong learning and social development.

6.2 Recommendation for Action

To address the barriers affecting the implementation of adult education through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Tanzania's Mbeya region, immediate action is needed to boost financial investment, political commitment, and cultural support. Government and international partners should prioritize funding to create sustainable infrastructure and resources that ensure the accessibility and quality of ODL programs. Strengthening political will is equally important to position adult education as a key element in national development policies, ensuring it receives adequate prioritization and budgetary support. Additionally, public awareness campaigns could help shift societal perceptions, demonstrating the relevance of adult education for social and economic progress. Involving adult learners in program development is essential, as it can tailor these programs to better meet learners' needs and encourage their engagement, enhancing the effectiveness and reach of ODL initiatives.

6.3 Recommendation for Further Studies

For further research, studies could examine the impact of regional disparities, particularly between urban and rural areas, on access to ODL programs to inform location-specific solutions. Investigating cultural attitudes toward adult education could provide insights into how to reshape perceptions and increase adult learner participation. Research on the potential of emerging, cost-effective technologies tailored to resource-constrained settings could help expand ODL accessibility, while longitudinal studies assessing the socioeconomic impact of ODL on income levels, employment, and community development would underscore its broader benefits. Additionally, evaluating learner-centered approaches in ODL would offer valuable insights into how involving adult learners in the design and implementation stages could improve satisfaction, retention, and program outcomes.

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