

# Assessing the Challenges Faced by Adult Learners' Academic Performance in Basic Education in Tanzania.

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges faced by adult learners' academic performance in basic education in Rukwa region, Tanzania. Andragogy and Social cognitive career theory applied. The study employed mixed methods and convergent design. The target population was 506 respondents. The study used a sample of 230 respondents. The adult learners were randomly selected while adult Learning center coordinators were purposively sampled from Rukwa region adult learning center included in the study. The data were collected through Questionnaire administration with predominantly closed-ended questions conducted to 222 adult learners. In-depth interviews were conducted with an interview guide to 8 adult learning center coordinators. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics in terms of percentages and frequencies with the aid of IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences v26. Thematic analysis was also conducted for qualitative data. The findings revealed that adult learners in Tanzania face a variety of challenges that impact their academic performance and overall educational achievements. Key issues include inadequate funding, which affects infrastructure, teaching resources, and educator training; technological barriers, Family obligations, Time constraints, and Language barriers. The study concludes that challenges faced by adult learners on academic performance in basic education in Tanzania not only diminish the learners' confidence but also undermine the broader goal of empowering individuals through education to improve their socioeconomic status. The findings suggest a need for government interventions that accommodate adult learners' unique social, economic, and psychological needs. A comprehensive support system should be employed in addressing time constraints, family responsibilities, language instruction, adequate facilities, and financial support that can significantly enhance adult learners' experiences in Tanzania, aligning them with international standards and goals for inclusive education. Further studies should be developed focusing on evaluating the impact of implemented strategies and exploring new pathways to support adult education across diverse contexts.

**Keywords:** *Basic education; challenges; adult learners; academic performance; andragogy.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Adult education plays a key role in creating social capital, fostering social inclusion, and eradicating both immediate and less apparent social exclusion expenses (Mustapha, 2024). To enhance active citizenship, adult learning is a significant underpinning. Basic skills and key skills are now recognized as essential unmet requirements for many individuals in both advanced and poorer parts of the globe (Benavot & Williams, 2023; Kuzior et al., 2023;). The world we live in is changing socially, politically, and economically on an ongoing basis; as a result, challenges emerge. To deal with these emerging issues and difficulties, people need continuous learning to acquire new knowledge, skills, and attitudes to address the challenges. Education is essential for improving knowledge and skills for job growth, according to the Sustainable Growth Goals 2030 global agenda (Kufloglu, 2022). Career development for adults is a first step toward the Africa Development Agenda 2063, which aims to restructure the economy through entrepreneurship and decent work for all (African Union, 2015). Likewise, the goal of the South African Development Community Vision 2050 is to boost employment in the area by providing decent work possibilities for full and productive employment. For adult learners to be able to create jobs, career development is crucial in this pillar (SADC, 2020).

Similar to this, the International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII), held in June 2022 in Marrakech, Morocco, emphasized that adult education is essential to development and that it can only take place in an educational setting that is free, democratic, and respects each person as an individual. Therefore, adult education is a right, not a favor. Adult education is a human right that is essential to achieving other rights and, more broadly, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), according to the Marrakech Framework for Action. To assist folks in "catch up, stay up, and keep ahead of the rapid technological advancement," continuing education could be crucial. Determining attitudes about adult education is therefore an important field of research (Hanson and Jaffe, 2020; Mwakyambiki, 2023). Africa has 155 million "illiterates," of which 66% are women because they face a greater danger of being excluded from the educational system than males do. (UNESCO, 2022b; Mwakyambiki, 2023). Equatorial Guinea (87%), Congo (83%), South Africa (81%), Sao Tome and Principe (79%), Gabon (71%), and Cameroon (68%) are among the nations with the greatest rates of illiteracy (Mustapha, 2024). Inadequate finance, which makes up less than 2% of national budgets, is one of the many obstacles Africa has when implementing adult education programs. For instance, the government of Kenya invests 0.3% to 0.4% in adult education, and Zambia spends 0.3 percent. South Africa invests 1%, whereas Malawi spends 0.3% (Mlekwa, 2022). Other challenges include the slow declaration of adult education policies and legislation and a focus on adult education that is still limited to functional adult literacy (Mustapha, 2024).

Tanzania has made great efforts to reduce the country's illiteracy rate, which dropped from 85% in 1961 to 9.6% in 1986 before increasing to 31% in 2022 (Gasuku, 2024; Hall et al., 2022; Mwakyambiki, 2023). It is urgent to reduce illiteracy in Tanzania for the sake of the country's well-being and assurances as well as to improve capability among illiterate Tanzanians (Mustapha, 2024). However, the country's implementation of adult education still faces several obstacles, such as a lack of time, and resources, family issues, poor working conditions, and a lack of teaching and learning materials (Kimaro et

al., 2022). As a result, Bhalalusesa (2022) observed that even though the government was responsible for the majority of adult education programs at the time, there are still many obstacles to implementation, including the accuracy of how adults may be transformed and learn skills to support their development. These challenges not only impede the quality of education but also contribute to high dropout rates and limited skill acquisition among adult learners which lead to low academic performance. Consequently, many adult learners fail to achieve the academic competence required to improve their livelihoods and participate effectively in the labour market. For example, Tanzanian adult learners are particularly weak in mathematics and English competencies (World Bank report, in 2023). Furthermore, the circumstances in Rukwa region, Tanzania, NECTA results indicated that the academic performance of adult learners in the Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE) for the year 2022/2023 was notably low across most subjects, with pass rates ranging from 9% in mathematics to 77% in Kiswahili. Overall, the average performance across subjects was just 29%, meaning that 71% of learners did not pass, thereby losing opportunities for career advancement (NECTA, 2023). While the government and international organizations have initiated interventions to address these issues, the persistent low academic performance of adult learners as indicated above highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the underlying challenges faced by adult learners' academic performance in basic education and the development of targeted solutions. This study aims to assess the challenges faced by adult learners' academic performance in basic education in Rukwa region, Tanzania, identifying specific barriers and proposing actionable strategies to improve outcomes. Additionally, the current research addressed the lack of evidence in Rukwa region adult learning centres, as in previous studies (Kimaro et al., 2022; Sarafina, 2022; Katete, 2023) none of them were done in Rukwa region. By addressing this gap, the research seeks to contribute to the effective implementation of adult education programs and support the broader goal of achieving inclusive and equitable quality education in Tanzania. The study aimed to answer the following broad question: What are the challenges faced by adult learners that affect their academic performance in basic education in Rukwa Region?

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a literature review focusing on theoretical literature and studies related to challenges faced by adult learners' academic performance in basic education.

### 2.1 Theoretical Literature

The concept of **andragogy**, or the theory of adult learning, was popularized by **Malcolm Shepherd Knowles** (1913–1997), an American educator (Knowles, 1980). Andragogy emphasizes that adults learn differently from children due to their life experiences, self-directedness, and readiness to learn, while The **Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)** was developed by **Robert W. Lent**, **Steven D. Brown**, and **Gail Hackett** in 1994 (Lent et al., 1994). The theory was developed as an extension of Albert Bandura's **Social Cognitive Theory**, integrating its principles into the domain of career development and decision-making.

Andragogy and SCCT intersect in addressing the challenges faced by adult learners. Andragogy provides insights into the learning environment and methods that are most effective for adults, emphasizing the need for flexibility, relevance, and respect for learners' experiences. SCCT complements this by focusing on the psychological and social factors influencing learners' motivation and career aspirations. Together, these theories suggest that improving adult education outcomes requires addressing both systemic challenges and individual factors. For example, creating flexible learning opportunities and integrating vocational skills into the curriculum align with andragogical principles, while fostering a supportive environment that builds self-efficacy and aligns with SCCT. Addressing external challenges such as poverty, gender inequities, and digital divides is critical to ensuring that adult learners can realize their potential both academically and in their careers.

## **2.2 Studies related to challenges faced by adult learners' academic performance in basic education**

The global situation of adult learners in basic education highlights both progress and persistent challenges, which have implications for local contexts such as Tanzania. Globally, many countries have embraced the importance of adult education as part of lifelong learning goals, aligned with initiatives like UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Programs in developed nations, such as Germany and Canada, have established strong lifelong learning systems that integrate adult education with skills training, fostering career development (Espinoza & Martinez-Yarza, 2023; Kuzior et al., 2023; Li, 2023). Also have demonstrated strong frameworks for adult education, with extensive funding and infrastructure. However, disparities persist, particularly in low-income and developing regions. For example, Germany's "Volkshochschule" model provides adult learners with courses tailored to labor market demands (OECD, 2023). However Cultural stigma around adult education in the UK, especially among older populations, discourages participation in lifelong learning initiatives (OECD, 2023(Wulff & Lassen, 2024), also adult learners often struggle to access programs due to bureaucratic hurdles and language challenges in Germany (OECD, 2023) (Thomas et al., 2024). In North America, online and blended learning models are increasingly used to provide flexible education opportunities for adults balancing work and study (World Bank, 2022). However, access to adult education is limited in rural and economically disadvantaged communities, where funding for such programs is often insufficient (National Coalition for Literacy, 2022).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, according to UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2023), just 4% of eligible adults are enrolled in learning programs, indicating that adult education participation is still extremely low in this region. The status of adult learners in basic education in Africa is a reflection of both ongoing difficulties and development, influenced by institutional, cultural, and economic variables. Adult education is acknowledged as a vital instrument for combating illiteracy and enhancing lives throughout the continent. Strong adult education initiatives have been put in place in nations like South Africa and Kenya to promote skill development and lower poverty (UNESCO, 2023). While the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) initiative has made progress in South Africa, issues like outdated teaching materials and insufficient teacher training hinder its effectiveness (Akintolu et al., 2023; Akintolu et al., 2022;

Daniels, 2023) Furthermore, there are still disparities in access to education, especially in underserved and rural areas with limited resources and infrastructure. For instance, limited finances, a shortage of trained teachers, and a lack of educational resources impede adult education initiatives in nations like Ethiopia and Chad (World Bank, 2022). The difficulties in adult education in Africa are exacerbated by gender inequality. Traditional gender roles and cultural norms restrict women's access to education in many African nations. As shown in nations like Somalia and Nigeria, early marriage, domestic duties, and cultural perceptions frequently deter women from pursuing adult education programs (UN Women, 2023). Nevertheless, with focused policy and community involvement, progressive efforts in countries like Rwanda have raised women's participation in adult education despite these obstacles (UNESCO, 2022). In Uganda Literacy programs under the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) initiative have enabled adults to improve their livelihoods through enhanced entrepreneurial skills (Rogers & Gizaw, 2022), while giving access to adult education in Uganda, often face overcrowded classrooms and insufficient resources in refugee settlements (Mugerwa-Sekawabe, 2022) (UNESCO, 2022).

Technological barriers also pose significant challenges to adult education in Africa. The digital divide is pronounced, with limited access to internet services and digital tools, particularly in rural areas. For instance, in Uganda, many adult learners cannot access online learning platforms due to poor connectivity and high costs (World Bank, 2022). Also (Flam et al., 2024; Mwalongo, 2023)(UNESCO, 2022) revealed that Sub-Saharan African countries (e.g., Kenya, and Malawi) have Limited internet penetration and lack of access to digital devices hinder adult learners from benefiting from online and blended learning programs. These challenges are exacerbated by the lack of digital literacy among learners, further restricting the integration of technology in adult education programs hence poor academic performance of adult learners. Furthermore, Brown (2022) and (Katete)2023 report that African nations' Adult educational environments are braided together with a variety of socioeconomic issues, languages especially in in multilingual countries like Nigeria, and cultural obstacles. This linguistic disconnect leads to poor comprehension and reduced academic performance among adult learners. Similarly, (Mlungisi & Sandra, 2020) conducted a study on opportunities and challenges for adult learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Zimbabwe. The study noticed some challenges including lack of institutions' policies on manpower training. The study recommends that adult learning and academic advancement are essential despite their challenge.

In Tanzania, the situation of adult learners in basic education reflects a blend of opportunities and persistent challenges that significantly impact academic performance and career development. The country has made notable strides in promoting adult education, guided by policies such as the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 2014, which emphasizes the importance of lifelong learning and skills development. The government has also established adult education programs, such as Integrated Community-Based Adult Education (ICBAE) and Folk Development Colleges (FDCs), aimed at improving literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills among adult learners (URT, 2023). Despite national efforts to improve access to education and adult learners' academic performance, the provision of adult education faces significant barriers such as Insufficient funds, shortage of time for studies, lack of political will, language barrier, family

problems, contextual misinterpretation of the term adult education and societal attitudes that devalue adult learning (Francis, 2023; Kimaro et al., 2022; Mwakyambiki, 2023; Sarafina, 2022). A major issue affecting adult education in Tanzania is low funding (Kimaro et al., 2022). Most of the adult education programs are underfunded, leading to shortages of teaching materials, poorly maintained facilities, and low salaries for Teachers. As a result, many adult learners are taught in overcrowded classrooms or under informal arrangements that lack structure and consistency (World Bank, 2022). Additionally, the absence of trained educators further undermines the quality of education. Many adult education instructors are volunteers or community members with limited pedagogical training, which affects the delivery of the curriculum and the learners' academic outcomes (UNESCO, 2023). This was supported by (Bhalalusesa, 2020) as he recommended that there is a need for strengthening and reinstating the adult education section to become a self-governing unit under basic education with adequate staffing and an independent budget line. This signifies the inadequate staff and funding problem for adult education units which affect adult learners' academic performance.

Technological challenges also hinder the progress of adult education in Tanzania. While the global shift towards digital education has opened up new learning opportunities, the digital divide in Tanzania remains a significant barrier. According to recent reports, only 25% of the population has access to reliable internet, and even fewer have access to digital learning devices such as laptops or smartphones (World Bank, 2022). This limits the ability of adult learners, particularly those in rural areas, to participate in online or blended learning programs, leaving many reliant on outdated teaching methods. Gender disparities are another critical challenge. Women, who make up the majority of adult learners in Tanzania, face numerous obstacles, including cultural norms, early marriage, and household responsibilities that limit their ability to attend classes regularly. These issues are especially pronounced in rural areas, where traditional gender roles are more deeply entrenched (UN Women, 2023). Despite efforts by organizations to address these disparities through initiatives such as women-focused literacy campaigns, the participation rate of women in adult education remains lower than desired.

Furthermore, Language barriers further complicate the adult learners academic performance in Tanzania (Francis, 2023; Kimaro et al., 2022). While Swahili is the national language and is widely spoken, adult education programs often incorporate English as the medium of instruction for certain subjects. This dual-language approach can be challenging for adult learners who are not proficient in English, particularly those from rural and underserved communities where adult learners often struggle with instruction delivered in colonial languages such as English or French, which are not their native tongues (MOEST, 2023). Consequently, learners may struggle to grasp key concepts, leading to poor academic performance. For example, according to a World Bank report, in 2023, Tanzanian adult education students are particularly weak in mathematics and English competencies, two important skills that lay the foundation for critical thinking, and further learning, which can lead to poor comprehension and reduced academic performance among adult learners and global communication which jeopardize the country's goals and aspirations to become a modern industrialized nation and. Likewise, the situation in Rukwa region, the academic performance of adult learners in

basic education in the Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE) remains questionable as Overall, the average performance across subjects was just 29% (NECTA,2023).

Evidence on studies related to the challenges faced by adult learners' academic performance in basic education in Tanzania is limited and highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the underlying challenges and the development of targeted solutions. Thus, this study contributes to the filling gap by assessing the challenges faced by adult learners' academic performance in basic education in Rukwa, Tanzania, which is one of the key actors among the adult centers in promoting adult education toward sustainable development in Tanzania. Moreover, no studies have been carried out about the challenges faced by adult learners' academic performance in basic education in Rukwa, Tanzania. Hence the study was designed to assess the challenges faced by adult learners' academic performance. More specifically examined the challenges faced by adult learners' academic performance in basic education in Rukwa region, Tanzania.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a pragmatism philosophical paradigm and mixed methods and used a convergent design to examine the challenges faced by adult learners' academic performance in basic education in Rukwa region, Tanzania. Andragogy and Social cognitive career theory were used which emphasize adult learning principles and provide a framework to understand how adults learn effectively. The mixed-methods strategy facilitated the collection and analysing of qualitative and quantitative data within a comparable timeframe. The researcher employed this method to verify and validate the information obtained from qualitative and quantitative data. The targeted population had a total of 506 respondents in adult learning centres, Rukwa region. The sampling procedures employed in selecting the required sample for the study were probability and non-probability. The 222 adult learners were simply randomly selected from public adult education centers included in the study and 8 adult learning center coordinators were purposively sampled. Hence the study used a sample of 230 respondents based on Yamane formula. The data were collected through Questionnaire administration with predominantly closed-ended questions conducted to adult learners. In-depth interviews were conducted with an interview guide to school adult education center coordinators. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics in terms of percentages and frequencies with the aid of IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences v26. Thematic analysis was also conducted for qualitative data.

The study used content validity and Cronbach Alpha (with a reliability coefficient of 0.8) to assess the validity and reliability of the research tools. One public primary school that was not included in the sampling schools—where different kinds of respondents were included to ensure validity was the site of the pilot test. To adhere to ethical guidelines, the researcher asked the Rukwa Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS) for permission to collect data from the target demographic. Additionally, the researcher enrolled the participants in the study with their free and informed consent. The participants' worries about their privacy, secrecy, and anonymity were also taken into account.

## 4.0 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### 4.1 What are the challenges faced by adult learners that affect their academic performance in basic education in Rukwa Region?

The respondents provided their responses on the five-Likert scale on the question asked about the challenges affecting the academic performance of adult learners in basic education. Their responses ranged from strongly disagree, disagree, moderately agree, agree, and strongly agree.

#### 4.1.1 Time constraints for adult learners in basic education

Adult learners were asked if time is among the constraints against their participation in basic education. Their rating is presented in Table 1

**Table 1 Time constraints for adult learners in basic education**

Responses		Frequency	Percent
	Strongly disagree	27	12.2
	Disagree	57	25.7
	Moderately agree	93	41.9
	Agree	42	18.9
	Strongly Agree	3	1.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field Data (2023)

The findings reported in Table 1 majority of respondents 138 out of 222 (62.2%) positively agreed from moderately to strongly on the item referred to time as a hindrance towards the academic performance of adult learners in basic education. The finding suggests that, as adult categories, they have social, political, and economic obligations; therefore, time is constrained by those non-academic roles and responsibilities. When the time for a certain activity is minimal, it is expected to affect concentration and achievement as well hence poor academic performance.

#### 4.1.2 Family obligations among adult learners

Adult learners were asked if family obligations are among the constraints against the academic performance of adult learners in basic education. Their rating is presented in Table 2

**Table 2 Family obligations among adult learners**

Responses		Frequency	Percent
	Strongly disagree	32	14.4
	Disagree	66	29.7
	Moderately agree	90	40.5
	Agree	26	11.7
	Strongly Agree	8	3.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field Data (2023)



Table 2 reveals that the majority of respondents about 124 out of 222 (55.8%) agreed moderately to strongly that family obligation is a hindrance towards adult learners' academic performance in basic education. One adult learner answered in response to the follow-up interview question on how family obligations are a challenge,:

I have to breastfeed my young baby, prepare meals for the family, wash clothes at the same time supervise the farming before class hours (Adult Learner 6, September 2023).

That means, most of the family obligations are daily, weekly, and monthly hence non-stop. This implies that most adult learners have different roles and responsibilities at the family level, which reduces their academic schedules resulting in poor academic performance.

#### 4.1.3 Fear of failure among adult learners

Adult learners were asked if fear of failure is among the constraints against their academic performance in basic education. Their rating is presented in Table 3

**Table 3 Fear of failure among adult learners**

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	.5
Disagree	20	9.0
Moderately agree	65	29.3
Agree	104	46.8
Strongly Agree	32	14.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Filed Data (2023)

Findings in Table 3 reveal that the majority of 201 out of 222 (90.5%) respondents agreed moderately to strongly that fear of failure is a hindrance to adult learners' academic performance in basic education. The finding implies that adult learners have a fear of failure in the examination in basic education which in turn influences their poor academic performance.

#### 4.1.4 Language barrier among adult learners

Adult learners were asked if language is among the constraints against their academic performance in basic education. Their rating is presented in Table 4

**Table 4 Language barrier among adult learners**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	5	2.3
Disagree	33	14.9
Moderately agree	85	38.3
Agree	77	34.7

	Strongly Agree	22	9.9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field Data (2023)

Table 4 indicated that about 184 out of 222 (82.8%) respondents agreed moderately to strongly that the language barrier is a hindrance to adult learning in basic education. The findings inform that respondents were aware that language of instruction was a major barrier to achieving learning outcomes among adult learners. Triangulating the adult learners' responses, an interview was conducted with coordinators of the adult learning centre, who said:

The use of the English language is a problem for most of these learners. In most cases, we had to code switch with Swahili (Coordinator, adult learning centre August 2023).

The results indicate that the English language as the medium of instruction is a factor in poor academic performance among adult learners in basic education.

#### 4.1.5 Poor teaching and learning facilities

Adult learners were asked if poor teaching and learning facilities are among the constraints against adult learners' academic performance in basic education. Their rating is presented in Table 5

**Table 5 Poor teaching and learning facilities**

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	2	.9
Disagree	20	9.0
Moderately agree	64	28.8
Agree	104	46.8
Strongly Agree	32	14.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field Data (2023)

The findings in Table 5 indicated that about 200 out of 222 (90%) of respondents agreed moderately to strongly that, poor teaching and learning facilities are hindrances towards adult learners' academic performance in basic education. The findings imply that poor teaching and learning facilities were imposing difficulties on adult learners' academic achievements in basic education hence failing to meet their career goals.

#### 4.1.6 Financial constraints among adult learners

Adult learners were asked if finance is among the constraints against their participation in basic education. Their rating is presented in Table 6.

**Table 6 Financial constraints among adult learners**

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	37	16.7
Disagree	77	34.7

Moderately agree	54	24.3
Agree	32	14.4
Strongly Agree	22	9.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field Data (2023)

The findings in Table 6 disclosed that the majority, about 114 out of 222 (51.4 %) respondents did not support that financial constraint is a hindrance to academic performance among adult learning in basic education. The findings indicated that few of the adult learners face financial challenges that impend their academic performance in basic education. The findings were supported by an interview with coordinators of adult centres. She said:

Some of these learners fail to pay their tuition fees in time as a result they miss some classes which affects their academic performance (Coordinator, adult Learning centred, August 2023).

The results reveal different challenges associated with adult learning in basic education. If an adult faces most of these challenges, she/he is unlikely to achieve his or her academic goals. Therefore, the poor academic performance of adult learners in basic education is influenced by personal, social, structural, and institutional factors.

## **Discussion of the findings.**

### **Challenges associated with adult learning in basic education**

Adult learning in Tanzania's basic education system aims to equip individuals with skills and knowledge that improve their quality of life and employment opportunities. However, adult learners face numerous challenges that impact their educational progress. Time constraints are particularly significant, with 62.2% of respondents identifying it as a hindrance. Balancing various social, economic, and familial responsibilities limits the time available for study, negatively affecting concentration and achievement (Kimaro et al., 2022). Interviews with adult learners confirmed this, highlighting the high demands of their multiple roles at home and work. These findings align with the research by Kimaro et al. (2022), who emphasized that time remains a core barrier in adult education due to conflicting responsibilities. Internationally, UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning (2016) notes that adult learners globally struggle with time-related obstacles, suggesting the need for flexible learning schedules that adapt to adult learners' diverse roles. In Tanzania, policies such as the Education and Training Policy (ETP, 2014) have emphasized lifelong learning but have yet to implement specific provisions that ensure adult-friendly schedules, as recommended by UNESCO.

Family obligations also present a major barrier, with 55.8% of respondents agreeing that household responsibilities hinder participation in education. In particular, women cited managing childcare, meal preparation, and farming as daily obligations, leaving limited time for studies. One learner noted in an interview that she often struggles to balance household responsibilities with classes, underscoring the conflict between family and academic commitments (Mollel, 2019). This observation aligns with Mollel's (2019) study,

which highlighted that family obligations in the Maasai community are a substantial barrier to adult education, especially for women.

These findings are reinforced by a UNESCO report (2016), which identified family support as crucial for women's participation in education. The Tanzanian government recognizes these challenges in its National Policy on Adult Education (2016), which emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive environment for adult learners, particularly women. However, the policy lacks specific provisions for family support services that could alleviate some of the burdens faced by adult learners (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2016). Additionally, Circular No. 2 of 2018 highlights the need for educational institutions to develop strategies that support adult learners in managing their dual roles (Tanzania Education Circular, 2018). Internationally, UNESCO advocates for family-friendly policies, such as day-care provisions and flexible schedules, to enable adults, especially women, to continue their education effectively (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016).

Fear of failure emerged as a significant deterrent for adult learners, with 90.5% of respondents indicating it affects their studies. Many adults, having been away from formal education for extended periods, experience self-doubt and fear of academic underperformance (Kyando, 2020). Interviews with adult learners revealed that this fear often leads to reluctance in class participation and negatively impacts attendance. Kyando (2020) highlighted similar psychological barriers among adult learners, noting that low self-confidence often discourages adults from fully engaging in academic programs. This psychological challenge aligns with findings from the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), which advocates for counseling and academic support programs to enhance adult learners' confidence. The Tanzanian government acknowledges these challenges in its Adult Education and Non-Formal Education Development Plan, emphasizing the importance of creating supportive learning environments. However, there is a need for more robust support systems that align with the ILO's recommendations to ensure that adults have access to mental health resources and academic counseling. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (2019) also highlights the role of community support in fostering adult education, suggesting that local initiatives can be instrumental in reducing fear and enhancing participation. Thus, integrating psychological support within educational frameworks is crucial for overcoming barriers faced by adult learners and promoting their academic success.

Language barriers are a significant challenge for adult learners in Tanzania, with 82.8% of respondents identifying the language of instruction, English, as a primary issue. Many adult learners struggle with English, leading to misunderstandings that limit their academic comprehension and performance (Kimaro et al., 2022). Interviews with coordinators confirmed that learners often misinterpret questions posed in English, which adversely affects their academic success. This issue is echoed by Kimaro et al. (2022), who identified similar barriers in regions where English is not the primary language. The Tanzanian Education and Training Policy (2014) recognizes the importance of language in education, stating, "The medium of instruction in primary education shall be Kiswahili" (p. 27). However, the policy also acknowledges that English is essential for further education and employment, leading to a dual-language challenge for adult learners.

UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2021) emphasizes the importance of using native languages in adult education, especially in non-native English-speaking countries. The report advocates for culturally relevant language policies, suggesting that integrating more native language support in adult education aligns with international guidelines. Moreover, the National Adult Education Policy (2006) highlights the need to "promote the use of Kiswahili and other indigenous languages in adult education" (p. 10). Addressing these language barriers could significantly enhance adult learners' academic outcomes, enabling them to engage more fully with the curriculum and improve their overall educational experience.

Inadequate teaching and learning facilities are a significant obstacle, with 90% of respondents identifying limited resources as a hindrance. Many adult learners face challenges due to outdated materials, restricted technology access, and inadequate classroom conditions (Kyando, 2020). Coordinators at adult education centers confirmed that lack of resources, particularly in rural areas, severely impacts adult learning. According to Tanzanian education policies, including the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 2014, there is a commitment to improving facilities and resources in both primary and adult education, yet resource allocation remains limited, especially in underserved areas. The Circular No. 2 of 2021 emphasizes the need for adequate infrastructure and modern learning materials to ensure effective learning outcomes for all students, including adult learners (Ministry of Education, 2021). Mollel (2019) and Kyando (2020) noted that limited educational facilities significantly hinder adult education outcomes. This concern is echoed by UNESCO and the African Union's Agenda 2063, which emphasizes the importance of accessible and quality educational resources to enhance learning outcomes across all age groups. While Tanzanian educational policies have made strides to address these issues, they fall short of international standards outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education with adequate facilities for all learners (UNESCO, 2023).

Financial constraints, contrary to findings from other research, were not widely perceived as a major barrier in this study, with only 51.4% of respondents indicating it as an issue. Interviews with adult learners revealed diverse views on financial constraints, as some participants noted minimal costs associated with continuing their education, supported by government initiatives. These insights contrast with Kimaro et al. (2022), who identified financial limitations as a common obstacle for adult learners. Tanzania's Adult Education Policy plays a significant role here by subsidizing educational programs, making them more affordable and accessible for adults (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2016). Furthermore, Tanzanian education circulars emphasize support for adult learners, including financial assistance measures and flexible payment options in adult education programs, which may explain why fewer learners face financial difficulties (Government of Tanzania, 2014). This approach aligns with international perspectives from UNESCO and the ILO, which advocate for affordable adult education as essential for universal access (ILO, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). Greater collaboration with NGOs and the private sector could further enhance funding and reduce costs for adult learners, ensuring equitable access to education and fulfilling UNESCO's vision for financially accessible lifelong learning pathways.

In sum, adult learners in Tanzania face a variety of challenges that impact their educational achievements. These findings suggest a need for interventions that accommodate adult learners' unique social, economic, and psychological needs. A comprehensive support system addressing time constraints, family responsibilities, language instruction, adequate facilities, and financial support can significantly enhance adult learners' experiences in Tanzania, aligning them with international standards and goals for inclusive education.

However, the challenges affecting the academic performance of adult learners in basic education are contrary to both, andragogy and social cognitive career theory because they prevent adult learners from achieving their learning goals proposed in andragogy theory and they also prevent adults from meeting the qualification for their chosen career of interests as advocated in the social cognitive career theory (Machynska & Boiko, 2020; Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2006; Lent & Brown, 2019).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The following conclusions are based on the study's findings concerning the challenges faced by adult learners' academic performance in basic education in Rukwa region, Tanzania. The research highlights significant challenges faced by adult learners in basic education in Tanzania, revealing critical barriers that hinder their academic performance and limit their ability to achieve personal and career development goals. Key issues include inadequate funding, which affects infrastructure, teaching resources, and educator training; technological barriers, particularly in rural areas where access to digital tools and internet connectivity is limited; and persistent gender disparities, with women disproportionately affected by cultural norms, household responsibilities, and societal expectations. Language barriers further compound the difficulties, as many learners struggle with English as the medium of instruction. Consequently, this gap not only diminishes the learners' confidence but also undermines the broader goal of empowering individuals through education to improve their socio-economic status.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Despite these challenges, the study underscores the potential of adult education to transform lives and contribute to national development if these obstacles are effectively addressed. The study recommends and emphasizes the need for increased government investment, community-based interventions, and innovative approaches such as flexible learning schedules, localized curricula, and relevant skills based on the environment people live like agricultural skills, embroidery, fish and livestock products processing, and the integration of technology to enhance learning experiences. Moreover, addressing gender disparities through targeted policies and awareness campaigns is essential to ensure equitable access to education for all. Furthermore, the study recommends and serves as a call to action for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to prioritize adult education and implement sustainable solutions that align with Tanzania's broader development goals. By addressing the identified challenges, Tanzania can improve the academic performance of adult learners, empower communities, and foster socio-

economic progress. Among others, Further studies should be developed focusing on evaluating the impact of implemented strategies and exploring new pathways to support adult education across diverse contexts.

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