**Strategies used by the Institute of Adult Education to promote gender balance in Tanzania**

**Abstract**

The study explored Strategies used by the Institute of Adult Education to promote gender balancein Tanzania. This study employed a qualitative research approach, guided by a phenomenological research design. The target population were adult learners, lecturers and Resident tutors from the Institute of Adult Education. The study employed 20 respondents sampled from the Kinondoni centre. The sample involved 15 adult learners, 4 lecturers and 1 Resident Tutor. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analysed thematically as well as manually. A summary and direct quotations from the participants focusing on the objectives were provided. The researcher identified several strategies employed by the Institute of Adult Education to promote gender balance, including treating all genders equally and presenting features that are similar to those of female learners. The study also established that the Institute of Adult Education established a gender unit, a 50:50 enrolment policy, gender programmes, plans and activities toward gender balance. It concluded that appropriate learning strategies would benefit learners based on their characteristics. The study further recommended a need to devise a mechanism to ensure that gender is promoted at the Institute of Adult Education ensure a balance between male and female learners in various programmes. Moreover, the government should consider an employment policy that is gender sensitive to ensure that members of academic staff are employed with much consideration of gender to avoid male dominance.

**Key Terms:** Education, Adult Education, gender, gender balance, students,

1. **Introduction**

Education for adults is one of the key educational issues to meet the Education for All (EFA) agenda (Thomas, 2024). “Adult education refers to all education that takes place outside the formal constraints of formal schooling. It is for people who are biologically (at least fifteen years of age) and socially (can take responsibilities in the family or the community) recognised as adults. Such people may have missed the opportunity for initial education at the youngest and, for this reason, need some form of compensation; they may need to extend their knowledge or learn a trade, a recreational or leisure time activity or just require more knowledge for its own sake” (Indabawa, 2020).

Recognising this, all the countries globally continue to emphasise educating adults even during their retirement and beyond to activate their participation in development. “Adult education plays a key role in creating social capital, fostering social inclusion, and fighting both immediate and less apparent social exclusion expenses. To enhance active citizenship, adult learning is a significant underpinning. Basic skills and key skills are recognised as essential unmet requirements for many individuals in both advanced and poorer parts of the globe” (Thomas, 2024).

In Tanzania, “Adult Education (AE) was established in 1960 as an extramural studies section of Makerere University College, under the University of London. In 1963, the Institute was upgraded into a department and was placed under the Dar es Salaam University College. Later on, it became an autonomous Institution established by Parliamentary Act Number 12 of 1975 under the Ministry of National Education, currently, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. To date, the Institute has become a centre for Learning, Research and Training in the Adult Education area for Certificate, Diploma and Degree courses, Diploma, certificates and post-primary education learners. Its services extend to the grassroots level through regional centres established in 26 regions of Mainland Tanzania with the aims of designing, developing and delivering accessible quality life-long education programs through blended learning for sustainable social-economic development of Tanzania, Africa and the rest of the world” (Institute of Adult Education, 2018).

Bhalalusesa (2020) illustrate that at “independence in 1961, Tanzania mainland (Tanganyika by then) had an illiteracy rate of 80 per cent. Diseases were rampant, and people attributed them to witchcraft, and poverty was the best companion to Tanzanians, yet people attributed it to the will of God” (Bhalalusesa, 2020). In addition, issues relating to political will, resource availability, economy and politics affect the provision of education for older adults. AONTAS (2020) proclaimed that a lack of data that would analyse gender balance, age, sex, motivations, needs, obstacles and participation rates among older adults is also an issue; most reasons responsible for such conditions attributed to the colonial government (British colonial government) (Mpoki et al., (2017). Seeing that situation, “Nyerere (a president by then) launched a war against three enemies (ignorance, diseases and poverty) through the Arusha Declaration in 1967; hence, Adult Education in Tanzania has become a major instrument in national development” (Mwila, 2023).

“The purpose of Adult Education has changed from the learning of skills to the learning of self-reliance and the improvement of life at both individual and national levels for both genders” (UNESCO, 2021). For example, “in the teaching of literacy, attention is focused on subjects such as health, agricultural techniques, or political responsibilities and literacy is included in response to demand as the learners become aware of its functional importance” (URT, 2018). The equitable implementation of these strategies and programs was directed to the Institute of Adult Education (IAE), which had the authority for planning and provision of adult education (URT, 2010) and later, through decentralisation to local governments (Heikkinen et al., 2022).

Supporting this idea, Musingafi et al. (2019) viewed “functional literacy as seen by the government as having a socio-economic and political impact, particularly in rural areas where agricultural production was considered essential liberation of people from constraints. Also, adult education offers computer programmes which assist women to interact with others through the internet and modern cell phones. This enables women to be empowered as a means of connecting and sharing information”.

However, the effort made by the Tanzanian government, lack of financial resources, led the disparities in access to education, whereby people who have economic resources have better chances of getting quality education. “The poor class, the majority of which are women, is kept devoid of quality education due to resource limitations and inaccessibility to reputed public institutions. This phenomenon is believed to be the product of gender inequality in terms of access to resources that has not only turned education into an industry but has also established an apparatus for the reproduction of the same social structure over generations” (Greaves, Hill & Maisuria, 2019). By implementing these strategies, the Institute of Adult Education strives to ensure that adult education is a tool for promoting gender balance and achieving gender equality in Tanzania. Thus, this study investigated Strategies used by the Institute of Adult Education to promote gender balance in Tanzania.

1. **Review of Related Literature**

This section presents a review of related literature and studies related to the topic.

The gender equality and empowerment of women are regarded as key crosscutting issues in many societies, and thus every sector, including the education sector, ensures that specific needs of women and men, girls and boys in education are addressed through the Open and Distance Learning mode of education delivery (SADC, 2018). In the quest for gender balance, institutions of adult education have launched a gender mainstreaming strategy for open and distance learning to promote equal opportunity for staff and students (Open University of Tanzania, 2020) as well as provide a framework for mainstreaming gender in Open and Distance programs (SADC, 2018). It should be understood that promoting gender balance through Open and Distance learning contributed to the development and deployment of effective and harmonious Open and Distance learning, equal access and achievement for both men and women to quality education and training (SADC, 2018).

Research evidence has proved the presence of strategic actions geared to promote gender balance in IAE. A study by Abiodum (2019) identified an array of techniques that can be used to reduce or eliminate the tendencies of marginalisation and improve the experiences and opportunities of women in an Institute of Adult Education through Open and Distance Learning. The techniques among others include: educating and equipping women to contribute their useful quota to the society and eliminating all forms of illiteracy; institutionalizing greater dimensions of openness and flexibility; whether in terms of access, curriculum or other element of structure, promoting cost-effective, convenient, conducive and efficient Open and Distance; and enhance skills acquisition and capacity building to enable women develop self-awareness and self-esteem (Karabona, 2020).

The Gender Unit of the Open University of Tanzania (OUT), through its gender policy guidelines, aims at promoting equal opportunities for staff and students as well as mainstreaming gender programmes and plans of the Open University of Tanzania (Open University of Tanzania, 2017). Strategic actions used among others include the following: develop greater awareness about the potential benefit and promise of Open and Distance; engage key stakeholders through meetings, conferences and advocacy workshops and online discussion forums.

SADC (2018) developed a gender mainstreaming strategy for Open and Distance Learning. The strategies endorse key strategic intervention areas and strategic actions leading to gender balance in Open and Distance Learning. Below is a brief description of two strategic intervention areas related to the promotion of gender balance in Open and Distance: intervention area one and intervention area three.

“Intervention area 1: policy development, review and harmonisation, which aims at facilitating the creation of a conducive and supportive policy environment for gender mainstreaming in Open and Distance Learning. This initiatives uses the following strategies among others: review or develop Open and Distance policies with a gender perspective; develop a gender policy for education sector with evidence interventions to address gender inequalities in Open and Distance; implement gender policies and affirmative action like 50:50 enrolment policy in Open and Distance to raise female or male participation in tertiary education; facilitate advocacy campaigns targeted at women to enrol with Open and Distance and facilitate utilization of gender mainstreaming guidelines for Open and Distance institutions” (Peter, 2016)

“The intervention area 3 focuses on Open and Distance service delivery with a gender lens at secondary, TVET, teacher and tertiary levels. The intervention utilizes the following strategies: conduct robust social marketing programs of courses that are science oriented to attract more females; review curriculum for gender sensitivity; design systems and programs that meet students gender specific needs for example flexibility in school time, modes of delivery in instruction and accessibility of learning for females; promote role modelling in Open and Distance institutions through deployment of academic staff and management structures that ensures equal representation of male and female for both students and staff in Open and Distance; conduct intensive community advocacy and gender sensitization at all levels to encourage girls to study science and participation in technical field and implement affirmative action to facilitate equitable access of male and female in Open and Distance” (Peter, 2016).

The study by Msoffe (2016) revealed the importance of Open and Distance learning in promoting gender balance and women's empowerment. The study asserts that Open and Distance learning enables both men and women to pursue a course while at work, or take care of the family. UNESCO (2020) similarly states that Open and Distance learning provides an opportunity for empowerment of women as it allows them to study at their own pace and time while attending to other commitments, especially household tasks, family and work. Mwila (2023) found that face-to-face meetings encourage togetherness. The findings showed that face-to-face sessions (tutorial services) are vital and compulsory due to their role in discouraging specialisation by gender. When studying the provision of institutional support services of the IAE, face-to-face sessions become very necessary to complement what is missing in the individuals’ learning through sharing materials, thoughts and exchanging experiences. Conceptually, in the distance education system, it is generally argued that frequent faculty-learner contact is desirable on the assumption that such experiences contribute to the growth and learners’ development (Mlay, 2018).

1. **Methodology**

Methodology is the science of studying how research is conducted systematically (Alok and Mishra, 2011). It includes research design, population and sampling, data collection instruments.

**3.1 Study Approach**

The qualitative approach was adopted for this study. A qualitative approach is useful in obtaining detailed information from the informants in their natural settings regarding their various constructed meanings, opinions, values, behaviours and perspectives (Kombo & Tromp, 2006; Creswell, 2009), concerning the strategies used by the Institute of Adult Education to promote gender balance in Tanzania. The qualitative approach takes place in natural settings and involves the interpretation of facts based on multiple meanings that people bring to them (Bulayi, 2018).

**3.2 Study Design**

The study adopted a Phenomenological design. Phenomenological studies examine human experiences through the descriptions provided by the people involved. These experiences are called lived experiences. The goal of phenomenological studies was to describe the meaning that experiences hold for each subject (Donalek, 2004). Selection of the design is determined by its ability to explore qualitatively the different ways in which individuals experience, conceptualise, perceive and understand phenomena in their real or natural contexts (Donalek, 2004). The study intended to Strategies used by the Institute of Adult Education to promote gender balance in Tanzania, hence participants experienced how the Institute of Adult Education deal with and maintains gender issues. A phenomenological design with the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions was appropriate to obtain the data needed for the study.

**3.3 Area of Study**

The study was conducted in the Dar es Salaam region, particularly at the Institute of Adult Education. The Dar es Salaam region was purposely chosen as the study area. According to the 2022 national census, Dar es Salaam Region had a population of 5,383,728. With 2,600,018 males (48.3%) and 2,783,710 females (51.7%) (URT 2022). It mainly covered one Institute of Adult Education centre, which was in the Dar es Salaam region. Dar es Salaam was chosen due to the fact that, since its establishment in 1975, it has its roots back to embarking on the strategies of gender balance in providing access to adult learning to achieve the objective of gender equality (Thomas, 2024). In that sense, Dar es Salaam stood a better chance to offer needed information to fulfil the purpose of the study on how the Institute of Adult Education in Tanzania, especially in Dar es Salaam, as a head quote, promotes gender balance

**3.5 Sample and Sampling Techniques**

The target population for this study was students studying at the Institute of Adult Education, Resident tutors and lecturers who taught at the Institute of Adult Education centres in the Dar es Salaam region. It was anticipated that learners at the Institute of Adult Education were to provide relevant data on whether the Institute of Adult Education promoted gender balance or not. Lecturers teaching at the Institute of Adult Education were involved in the study because they interacted with learners in classes, so they knew the nature of the learners they taught, guided and counselled. Institute of Adult Education Directors were involved since they were the ones supervising the Institute of Adult Education centres. So, they had rich information regarding the nature of the learners enrolled. They provided data to cross-validate information given by learners and other respondents. The study employed 20 respondents sampled from the Dar es Salaam centre. The sample involved 15 learners, 4 lecturers and 1 Resident tutor. The sample size was large enough to yield acceptable results for the study.

**3.6 Data Collection Methods**

Data collection refers to the gathering of specific information to serve or prove some facts (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). An interview was administered to the Institute of Adult Education directors and lecturers. The questionnaires were designed using the English language. A structured interview was also used to assess opinions from students, lecturers and the centre director. The interview schedule was designed in English. It comprised a list of structured questions/ topics that guided the interview sessions. During the interview sessions, a researcher requested consent from participants to record the conversations to assist later analysis. However, findings from the interview were translated into English during the analysis process.

**3.7 Data Analysis Plan**

Data analysis is a process that implies editing, coding, classification and tabulation of collected data (Kothari, 2014). In this study, data were analysed thematically and manually. A summary and direct quotation from the participants, focusing on the objectives of the study, were provided. Thematic analysis fitted this study because it was used to analyse classifications and present themes (patterns) that relate to the topic. Stewart (2020) illustrates that analysing qualitative data involves a systematic process of interpreting non-numerical information to discover patterns, themes, and insights. This process involves different steps. The first step is data familiarisation, where researchers immerse themselves in the data by reviewing transcripts, notes, or other materials multiple times. This initial phase helps researchers gain a holistic understanding of the content and context of the data. Thus, the researcher read and re-read the data to become familiar with it in order to generate a great understanding.

Stewart said, once familiar with the data, the next step is coding. Coding involves identifying and labelling specific segments of the data that are relevant to the research questions. These codes represent key concepts or themes that emerge from the data. Researchers may use manual coding, where they highlight and annotate the data, and software tools can assist in organising and categorising the information. In relation to this context, the researcher generated summaries of the main themes of the data that might be relevant to answering the research question.

After coding, researchers group similar codes to form broader themes or categories. This step involves identifying connections between different codes and understanding how they relate to each other. The goal is to create a logical narrative or framework that captures the main ideas within the data. In this study, the researcher organised relevant data and reviewed the sustainability themes and grouped them according to the questions.

The final stage of qualitative data analysis is interpretation. Researchers interpret the themes and patterns identified during the coding process, linking them back to the research questions and theoretical frameworks. This interpretation involves concluding the meaning and significance of the data, often resulting in new insights or theories. Thus, the researcher checked the candidate themes against the questions to determine the reality against the asked questions. In this phase, the researcher developed themes, which sometimes involve divided themes, combined themes, or rejected themes. It helps the researcher to determine the relevant or irrelevant themes as provided by participants through checking or reviewing them again and writing up the complete report by weaving together the analytic description and data extracts, and contextualising the analysis with existing literature and theory used to guide the current study.

**5 Result and discussion**

# Strategies used by the Institute of Adult Education to Promote Gender Balance

This part focused on the findings of strategies used by the Institute of Adult Education to promote gender balance**.** The strategies were identified through examining actions or initiatives done by the Institute of Adult Education, which were geared towards enhancing gender balance. The following strategies were identified as commonly used at the Institute of Adult Education: Establishment of a gender unit of the Institute of Adult Education, enhancing enrolment equality to 50:50, and gender mainstreaming in all Institute of Adult Education activities, as explained below.

## 5.1 Establishment of the gender unit of the Institute of Adult Education

It was strongly affirmed that determined to ensure gender balance Institute of Adult Education had launched a gender unit whose aim was to ensure that the Institute of Adult Education observes and maintains equal opportunity for all. An interview with one lecturer at the Dar es Salaam centre revealed the following:

The Institute of Adult Education has always committed to promoting gender balance. Practically, to reach this end, it has launched a gender unit with a motive to promote equal opportunities for staff and students and also to mainstream gender programmes (Interview with a lecturer at Dar es Salaam campus on 13th May 2024).

The centre Lecturer confirmed that the establishment of the gender unit of The Institute of Adult Education has greatly contributed to the Institute of Adult Education's motive of enhancing gender equality through its support to gender related activities. This is what he had to say:

… The gender unit of the Institute of Adult Education has been instrumental in bringing equality. Take for example, it has been supporting both female and male staff members in terms of recruitment, leadership, promotion as well in knowledge and skill advice and counselling about gender related issues that may affect their academic life…the unit has been implementing several activities geared to promote gender balance for example coordinating and facilitating the eradication of gender based violence and engage stake holders through meetings, conferences and advocacy workshops (Interview with a Resident tutor at Dar es salaam centre on 12th May 2024).

The above results practically depict that the Institute of Adult Education has been very sensitive to gender issues. The findings confirm what SADC (2018) recommended, if at all, that gender balance is to be promoted. SADC (2018) asserts that Gender Focal Points need to be established in Open and Distance institutions. These, however, need to be trained, with core gender responsibility functions that are part of their performance appraisal.

## 5.2 Enhance enrolment equality to 50:50

The Institute of Adult Education has also been committed to reaching gender balance by raising the number of both male and female students to a 50:50 ratio. Focus group discussion with students studying at the Institute of Adult Education revealed that the Institute of Adult Education has made commendable efforts to increase female enrolment. This is what one female student commented when sharing her experience with a researcher in an FGD session:

…for many years since the establishment of the Institute of Adult Education, enrolment of male students outstripped that of females. Following the establishment of the gender policy Institute of Adult Education has been quite sensitive to the 50:50 policy that targets to raise women's enrolment to equal that of males. The effect of this policy has been a notable increase in the enrolment of female learners with the Institute of Adult Education. However, this is a long journey since enrolment has not reached 50:50 (FGD with learners at Dar es Salaam centre on 5th May 2024).

The same findings were confirmed by a centre Resident tutor who was taking part in an interview session. This is what he remarked:

Unlike the past years, the Institute of Adult Education has recently experienced increased enrolment due to sensitisation on gender related issues and improved access to the internet. The percentage of females has increased on average from 18.6% to 26%. We are now witnessing a good number of females enrolling on various programmes (Interview with a centre Resident tutor at Dar es Salaam centre on 12th May 2024).

Implied from the above findings that the past gender gap has been narrowed with the increase of female enrolment in the Institute of Adult Education related academic programs. The findings echo those of Swamy (2011), which depict that enrolment has been increasing steadily in Open and Distance learning with an annual growth rate of about 20% in the last two years. More specifically, the enrolment of women and girls, 32 32 32% from socially weaker disabled and geographically weaker sections, has improved.

## 5.3 Gender mainstreaming in all the Institutes of Adult Education

Study findings indicate that the Institute of Adult Education has ensured gender mainstreaming in all its activities in a bold attempt to promote gender balance. Participants in an interview session depicted that in almost all Institute of Adult Education activities, the concept of gender has been incorporated to sensitise the Institute of Adult Education community with gender issues. Take, for example, most programs at the Institute of Adult Education, communication, information sharing and networking and the Institute of Adult Education's gender policy are gender responsive, geared to address gender inequality at the Institute of Adult Education. Study findings indicated that the Institute of Adult Education has ensured gender mainstreaming in all its activities in a bold attempt to promote gender balance. In almost all Institute of Adult Education activities, the concept of gender has been incorporated to sensitise the Institute of Adult Education community to gender issues. The findings are similar to the report of the Institute of Adult Education (2017) that the Institute has mainstreamed its gender programs, plans and activities.

**6. Conclusion and Recommendation**

It concluded that appropriate learning strategies would benefit the learners based on their characteristics. The study further recommended a need to devise a mechanism to ensure that gender is promoted at The Institute of Adult Education to ensure a balance between male and female learners in various programmes. Moreover, it recommended that an employment policy be gender sensitive to ensure that members of academic staff are employed with much consideration of gender to avoid male gender dominance.

**Disclaimer**

This paper is an extended version of a Thesis document of the same author.

The Thesis document is available in this link: <https://repository.out.ac.tz/1716/1/HELENA_PETER_-DISSERTATION_-09-01-2017.pdf>

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**Ethical approval**

Ethical consideration refers to the code of conduct that directs how the research can be conducted (Grey, 2014). The research participants were treated following standards and norms, which confirmed their humanity. In this study, the researcher adhered to all ethical issues relating to human rights.

**Consent**

As per international standards or university standards, respondents’ written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

**Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)**

Author hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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