

ADULT EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF ECONOMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING ACCESS TO ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Salim Rotich, Flora Fedha and John Bett

Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Management, Egerton University, Kenya

Corresponding Author's Email: psalimrotich@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines adult educators' perceptions of economic factors influencing access to adult education programs. The study adopted mixed-methods research design, which combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing access to adult education programs. Quantitative data were collected from 283 adult learners and 105 adult education teachers using structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with education stakeholders. The study examined perceptions concerning poverty, availability of learning materials, financial support, transport costs, farming activities, business activities, dropout, repetition and progression. Findings showed that a majority (54.3%) of the respondents held positive perceptions, agreeing that poverty drives high dropout rates (54.8%), declining enrollment is due to lack of funds for materials (52.5%), and that government financial support aids progression (52.5%). Fewer agreed on barriers like transport costs (29.2%), lack of basic learning materials and resources (35.3%), or seasonal absences among farmers (47.1%). Qualitative insights confirmed economic priorities, poverty, and high dependency ratios as key contributors to low enrollment, high repetition, dropouts, and irregular attendance, particularly during market days or farming seasons. Overall, economic challenges significantly hinder access, underscoring the need for targeted support in resource-limited African context.

Keywords: adult teachers, economics, education programs

Introduction

Access to adult education programs has become increasingly important for personal development and societal progress as global demands for lifelong learning continue to grow. As economies evolve, continuous skill-building addresses skill gaps, technological shifts, and employability needs. Advanced nations such as Finland and Germany exemplify this through comprehensive adult education systems that provide learning opportunities ranging from basic literacy programs to vocational and professional training, supported by government policies, educational institutions, and community initiatives (European Commission, 2021; OECD, 2022).

In Africa, the urgency of strengthening adult education initiatives is heightened by widespread illiteracy and low educational attainment. Inadequate infrastructure and scarce funding hinder program expansion, limiting reach in many countries (UNESCO, 2021). Socio-cultural and economic factors further restrict access to education and training opportunities, with gender norms often prioritizing males, sidelining women, while immediate income needs eclipse educational pursuits (African Development Bank, 2022; World Bank, 2023). Economic factors are crucial determinants of access to Adult Education programs across the globe. These factors include income levels, employment status, cost of education, and availability of financial support. Globally, economic status is one of the most significant barriers to accessing Adult

Education. Individuals with lower income levels often face challenges such as the inability to afford tuition fees, lack of access to learning materials, and time constraints due to work commitments. In contrast, those with higher income levels are more likely to engage in lifelong learning opportunities, as they have greater financial stability and access to resources (Peters & Smith, 2021). This disparity underscores the need for policies that promote inclusive access to adult education regardless of economic status.

In the USA, economic disparities significantly impact access to Adult Education. Individuals from low-income households are less likely to participate in Adult Education programs due to financial constraints and the need to prioritize work over education (Johnson & Lee, 2022). Additionally, the cost of education and the limited availability of financial aid for adult learners further exacerbate these challenges. However, recent initiatives aimed at reducing tuition costs and increasing access to online learning have shown promise in bridging the economic gap in Adult Education (Martinez & Roberts, 2023).

In the UK, economic factors such as income and employment status are closely linked to participation in Adult Education. Adults from lower-income brackets are less likely to engage in lifelong learning, partly due to the cost of education and partly because of the perceived lack of relevance to their employment prospects (Davies & Thomas, 2021). The UK's government has introduced various schemes to encourage adult learning, including subsidized courses and flexible learning options, but economic barriers remain a significant challenge (Brown & Taylor, 2022).

Germany's approach to Adult Education is shaped by its strong vocational education system. However, economic disparities still exist, particularly among immigrants and low-income populations. These groups often face barriers such as a lack of financial resources, which hinder their participation in Adult Education programs (Schmidt & Müller, 2022). Efforts to address these issues include targeted support services and integration courses, but more needs to be done to ensure equitable access for all economic groups (Wagner & Fuchs, 2023).

In Nigeria, economic factors such as poverty and unemployment significantly limit access to Adult Education. Many adults, particularly in rural areas, are unable to afford the costs associated with education, and the lack of infrastructure further exacerbates these challenges (Obi & Adeyemi, 2021). Government and non-governmental organizations have implemented various programs to improve access, but economic barriers continue to impede progress, particularly for marginalized groups (Okoro & Chukwu, 2022).

The economic landscape in the Ivory Coast also presents challenges to Adult Education access. High poverty rates and limited educational infrastructure mean that many adults, particularly in rural areas, are excluded from learning opportunities. Additionally, economic inequalities between urban and rural areas contribute to disparities in access, with urban residents more likely to participate in Adult Education programs (Diabate & Koné, 2021). Initiatives to expand educational opportunities in rural areas are essential for addressing these disparities.

In Burundi, the economic challenges are pronounced, with a high poverty rate and limited access to education for adults. Many adults in Burundi are engaged in subsistence farming and lack the time or resources to pursue education (Nkurunziza & Bahati, 2021). Moreover, the country's educational infrastructure is underdeveloped, particularly in rural areas, making it

difficult for adults to access learning opportunities. Economic factors such as these severely limit the potential for Adult Education to contribute to personal and community development. Madagascar faces similar economic challenges that hinder access to Adult Education. Poverty is prevalent, particularly in rural areas where educational resources are scarce (Rafalimanana & Rakotondrabe, 2022). The economic status of individuals plays a crucial role in determining their ability to participate in Adult Education, with those from poorer backgrounds less likely to engage in learning opportunities. Efforts to improve access must address these economic barriers by providing targeted support and resources for disadvantaged groups.

Mauritius has made significant strides in expanding access to Adult Education, but economic disparities still persist. While the country has a relatively high standard of living, there are still significant differences in access to education between different economic groups. Adults from lower-income backgrounds often face challenges such as limited financial resources and lack of access to technology, which impede their ability to participate in education programs (Ramdoyal & Soomaroo, 2021). Government initiatives aimed at reducing these disparities have focused on providing free or subsidized education and increasing access to online learning.

In Tanzania, economic factors such as poverty and unemployment are significant barriers to Adult Education. Many adults in Tanzania, particularly in rural areas, are unable to afford the costs associated with education and lack access to educational resources (Mshana & Kihwele, 2022). Additionally, economic inequalities between different regions of the country contribute to disparities in access, with adults in more affluent areas more likely to engage in Adult Education programs. Addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions that consider the unique economic context of different regions.

In Kenya, economic factors play a significant role in determining access to Adult Education programs. These factors include income levels, employment status, and the cost of education. Income level is a primary determinant of access to Adult Education in Kenya. Adults from low-income households often face financial barriers that prevent them from enrolling in education programs. The cost of tuition, learning materials, and transportation can be prohibitive for many, especially in rural areas where income levels are generally lower (Mwangi & Njuguna, 2021). Consequently, individuals from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to participate in Adult Education, exacerbating existing economic inequalities (Omondi & Wambua, 2022).

Employment status also significantly affects access to Adult Education in Kenya. Employed individuals, particularly those in stable jobs, are more likely to engage in education programs as they often have the financial resources and the time to pursue further learning. In contrast, those who are unemployed or engaged in informal sector work may prioritize finding or maintaining employment over education, viewing it as a more immediate need (Muturi & Githinji, 2021). This situation creates a cycle where those who would benefit most from education are least able to access it.

Government policies and interventions can either mitigate or exacerbate the impact of economic factors on access to Adult Education in Kenya. While the government has made efforts to promote Adult Education through initiatives such as subsidized fees and community learning centers, these programs are often underfunded and do not reach the most disadvantaged populations (Mwenda & Mureithi, 2022). Moreover, the lack of a

comprehensive policy framework that addresses the specific needs of adult learners from different economic backgrounds limits the effectiveness of these interventions.

Therefore, economic factors play a crucial role in determining access to Adult Education in Kenya. Income levels, employment status, and the cost of education are significant barriers that prevent many adults from engaging in lifelong learning opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions that consider the diverse economic contexts of Kenyan adults. By improving access to financial support, providing affordable education options, and addressing economic barriers, it is possible to enhance participation in Adult Education and promote greater economic equality in Kenya.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- (i) What are the adult teachers' and learners' perceptions on the influence of economic factors on access to Adult Education programs?
- (ii) What are the adult teachers' and learners' perceptions on the influence of cultural factors on access to Adult Education programs?
- (iii) What are the adult teachers' and learners' perceptions on the influence of economic factors on access to Adult Education programs?

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, which combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing access to adult education programs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This design allows for the simultaneous collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, ensuring that the findings are corroborated and enriched by diverse perspectives.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted mixed-methods research design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The mixed-methods approach was considered appropriate because it allows for a detailed exploration of complex issues while validating findings through different data sources and methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The use of both approaches also facilitated the corroboration and enrichment of findings from different sources.

Study Area and Target Population

The study was conducted in Marakwet West Sub-County, Kenya. The target population comprised adult learners, adult education teachers, center managers and relevant education officials involved in the provision and management of adult education programs in the study area.

Sampling Techniques

The study employed simple random sampling to select adult learners and census sampling to select adult education teachers. The adult education centers included in the study were selected from the adult education centers operating within Marakwet West Sub-County. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to select key informants who possessed relevant knowledge and experience concerning the management and implementation of adult education programs.

The study ultimately obtained quantitative responses from 283 adult learners and 105 adult education teachers. Qualitative information was obtained through semi-structured interviews with relevant education stakeholders.

Sample Size Determination

The sample size for the quantitative component of the study comprised 283 adult learners and 105 adult education teachers. The study therefore obtained responses from a total of 388 respondents for the quantitative component. The adult learners' responses were analyzed to establish their perceptions of the influence of economic factors on access to adult education programs, while the adult teachers' responses were used to assess teachers' perceptions of the same factors. The study also incorporated a qualitative component in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with education stakeholders, including center managers, adult education teachers and the Sub-County Director of Education, Marakwet West Sub-County. The combination of quantitative and qualitative participants enabled the study to obtain both measurable perceptions and contextual explanations of the economic factors influencing access to adult education programs.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to adult learners and adult education teachers. The questionnaires contained closed-ended items designed to measure respondents' perceptions of economic factors influencing access to adult education programs. The teachers' questionnaire included eight items measured using a five-category response scale comprising Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Undecided (U), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA).

Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interview schedules. The interviews sought detailed information concerning participants' experiences and perceptions of economic challenges affecting enrolment, attendance, progression, repetition, and completion of adult education programs.

The researcher administered the questionnaires to the selected respondents and conducted interviews with the selected key informants. Appropriate ethical procedures, including obtaining informed consent and assuring respondents of the confidentiality of the information provided, were followed during data collection.

Validity of Research Instruments

The validity of the research instruments was established through expert review and content validation. The structured questionnaires and semi-structured interview schedules were reviewed by experts with knowledge and experience in adult education and educational research. The review focused on the relevance, clarity, adequacy and appropriateness of the items in relation to the study objectives and research questions.

The comments and recommendations provided during the review were used to refine the instruments before their administration of the study participants. Attention was given to ensure that the questionnaire items adequately captured the economic factors influencing access to Adult Education programs and that the interview questions elicited relevant information from education stakeholders. The quantitative instruments were administered to adult learners and adult education teachers, while semi-structured interviews were used to obtain additional information from education stakeholders, including center managers, adult education teachers and the Sub-County Director of Education. The final instruments were therefore considered appropriate for collecting the quantitative and qualitative data required to address the study objectives.

Reliability of Research Instruments

The reliability of the quantitative research instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. A pilot study was conducted to establish the internal consistency of the questionnaire items before the main data collection. The results of the pilot study were used to assess the clarity, consistency, and suitability of the questionnaire items. The questionnaire was considered sufficiently reliable for use in the main study.

The trustworthiness of the qualitative data was enhanced through triangulation and comparison of information obtained from different respondents. The use of information from adult education stakeholders provided an opportunity to compare different perspectives on the economic factors influencing access to adult education programs and enhanced the credibility of the qualitative findings.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize respondents' responses to the questionnaire items. For the perception measures, responses to the eight items were tallied, and respondents were categorized as having positive, neutral or negative perceptions based on their responses to most of the items. The findings were presented using tables and figures.

Qualitative interview data were analyzed thematically with the interview responses being transcribed and reviewed carefully to enable the researcher to become familiar with the information provided by the participants. Relevant statements were identified and coded according to their relationship with the study objectives. Similar codes were grouped into categories, from which broader themes concerning economic factors influencing access to adult education programs were developed.

The emerging qualitative themes were compared with the quantitative findings to identify areas of convergence and divergence. The qualitative findings were used to provide contextual explanations for the quantitative results, particularly regarding the effects of poverty, economic

priorities, farming seasons, market activities, dependency burdens, learning materials and financial support on enrollment, attendance, progression, repetition and dropout.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that economic factors significantly influence access to adult education programs in the study area. This is a pointer that economic constraints remain a major impediment to access to adult education in Marakwet West Sub-County. Without addressing the financial challenges faced by adult learners, the goal of promoting literacy and learning could remain unattainable for many.

The study makes the following recommendations:

- (i) Adult education providers in Marakwet West Sub-County, Kenya should adopt socially and culturally relevant program designs by engaging local leaders, religious institutions, and families in order to enhance acceptance and participation in adult education programs
- (ii) The Ministry of Education, County Government, and National Government should implement economic support measures such as subsidized learning materials, flexible class schedules outside working hours, scholarships, financial incentives, integrated livelihood skills training, and income-generating activities at adult education centers to improve access and sustainability of programs.
- (iii) Further empirical research should be conducted to quantify the effects of socio-economic and cultural factors on access to adult education, including replication studies in other regions of Kenya to enhance generalizability and improve program effectiveness

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