



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation.

Lifelong learning in Tanzania: Adult education for rural communities

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Article Info

ISSN (online): 2582-7138

Volume: 06

Issue: 01

January-February 2025

Received: 20-11-2024

Accepted: 23-12-2024

Page No: 968-971

Abstract

This study investigated lifelong learning in adult education in the rural communities of Tanzania. The central research question was to investigate effectiveness of adult education in rural promoting lifelong learning in Tanzania. The data presented were collected through interviews with the participants who have undergone adult educational in rural areas. The findings of the study indicate that lifelong learning has played a pivotal role in rural communities. It has reduced number of illiteracies in rural areas, it enables people to manage their income, open shops and restaurants, and provides people with the knowledge of domestication of animals.

Keywords: Adult education, Lifelong learning, rural communities

Introduction

Traditional lifelong learning in Africa

In early traditional Africa, although education was organized in an informal sense, community learning started from childhood and continued through adolescence and into old age (UNESCO, 2007). The age-graded apprenticeship system and the community learning practice were carefully embedded into the political, economic, spiritual and physical life of people (UNESCO, 2010) ^[20]. This kind of lifelong learning (LLL) was practiced via oral methods such as legends, epics, tales, historical poems, proverbs, songs, plays, ceremonies, rituals and festivals (URT, 2003) ^[23]. Moreover, it was offered on the basis of experiential LLL. It existed as a means for survival and for the development of skills, social values and acceptable attitudes as well as a means for building community spirit (URT, 2010) ^[25]. LLL activities included the practice of activities organized for each age and sex group at the inception of puberty to prepare them for adulthood and societal behavior expectations (URT, 2008) ^[24]. This indicates that in traditional African society education was lifelong in nature which was practiced involuntarily or unconsciously (Manase, 2012) ^[10].

Being an all-embracing concept, adaptable to many sectors, LLL and the related concept of LLL are complex to conceptualize. Attempts to delineate the concept include studies and scholarly papers by notable authors (Chau and Francoise, 1975) ^[5]. The intricacy in conceptualizing LLL is partly due to the nature of the concept, since it embraces mixed dimensions including educational, social, economic and cultural. Alternatively, the difficulty in conceptualizing LLL to originate from its nature as a loose and all-encompassing concept focusing on something that we all do sometimes unconsciously (Davies, 2002) ^[6]. Moreover, in some countries LLL is confused with related terms such as continuing education, which implies education for adults (Indabawa and Mpofu, 2006) ^[8]. Likewise, for some people LLL has been erroneously assumed to be synonymous with non-formal adult education without any relationship to higher education (Kageni, 2012) ^[9].

LLL has been a subject of dialogs in most of the UNESCO conferences since the 1970s. Some of the important early global conferences related to LLL include the UNESCO conference of 1975 in Nairobi; 1960 in Montreal; Tokyo 1972 and 1985 in Paris, which addressed such matters as universal literacy, democracy, increasing learning opportunities for all age groups and the promotion of gender equality (UNESCO, 1990). The growing interest in LLL can also be noted in the 1997 the 5th UNESCO conference on Adult Education, which broadly viewed adult education within the framework of LLL. The declarations from this conference recognized the right to education and the right to learning throughout life more than ever as a necessity,

(UNESCO, 1997). It also encouraged member states to ensure that LLL becomes a more significant reality in the early 21st century (UNESCO, 1997). Despite the debates on African traditional LLL, the two UNESCO commission reports, 'Learning to be' and the 'Learning the treasure within', remain the key documents representing broad vision on LLL for both developed and developing countries. Means that, within the African context, much of the systematic emphasis on LLL originates from global conferences organized by UNESCO (UNESCO 1990). Therefore, conscious emphasis on LLL in the context of Africa was evident from the 1990s when UNESCO held different conferences giving specific attention to developing nations (UNESCO, 2013).

Adult education during the colonial era was primarily a concern of private agencies. Very little attention was given to it by colonial administrators. For example, like in Tanganyika at that time adult education was given very little attention. This ascribes that the colonial government had less investment in adult education. Consequently, a need for trained manpower in Tanganyika immediately after independence was even pronounced in the field of adult education (Youngman, 2000) [29]. In the late of 1970s and early of 1980s there was an experience of international economic depression. This depression affected Tanzania as well in the sphere of education as a whole. This situation led to the deterioration of social services which included adult education and education in general. Due to the economic depressions, adult learners were forced to drop out of the classes due to government cutting off of the budget (Wejnert, 2005) [27].

During the independence era in 1960s most of adult Tanzanians were illiterate, diseases were widespread and witch crafts were ascribed to individuals. Moreover, poverty was Tanzanians' greatest companion (Mushi, 2009). The government had to put more emphasis on adult education to eradicate illiteracy, poverty and diseases (the greatest enemies) in the country. To counteract this Tanzanian government introduced some literacy campaign, through which, by 1973 almost 3 million Tanzanians benefited (Oluoch, 2012) [13]. Moreover, Tanzanian government introduced the integrated community-based Adult Education in 1993, the project designed to develop learner-centered and community-based learning approaches in literacy and post literacy classes for adult and out of school youth in Tanzania (UNESCO, 2017). In addition, Tanzanian government introduced Adult Education Development Project (AEDP) to reduce the level of adult illiteracy (URT, 2008) [24]. The program is implemented across all 25 regions of the Tanzania main land. Learning centers are located in primary schools and the learner cycle lasts 18 months. All these campaigns were based on teaching adult life skills, reading, writing and counting.

The Implementation of LLL particularly to adults in Tanzania align with the intention of transforming Tanzania into a middle income and semi-industrialized nation by 2025; to give adults the opportunity to extend their competence in order to promote personal development, democracy, equality, economic growth, employment and fair distribution of wealth by the year 2025; achieving The United Nations 2025 education goal which intended to ensure that all people acquire appropriate competencies to promote sustainable development including sustainable lifestyle, human rights, gender equality, promoting a culture of peace and to increase

the number of adults who have relevant skills (technical and Vocational skills) for employment and entrepreneurship (UNESCO, 2011; URT, 2018 and Veramu, 1992) [24, 26].

Many view LLL to adult as one of the most powerful tools to reduce poverty and inequality. It sets the basis for human civilization's ongoing economic growth and development. Adult literacy improves respect for the views of women from family and community members (William, 2014) [28]. In many countries, adult education has helped many people to regain some of the opportunities lost by illiteracy through adult training, especially in literacy (Veramu, 1992) [26]. This has helped marginalized communities to regain some education skills for personal, social, economic and political development. Factors such as adverse attitude towards women's schooling, poverty and political circumstances in most sub-Saharan African nations hinder millions of people in their early ages from obtaining their vital human rights and fundamental education. This has led to an elevated unemployment rate among many economically vibrant people in most African countries, including Tanzania (UNESCO, 2013). To curb the challenges, adult education and literacy should be considered as crucial instruments. However, in Sub – Saharan Africa, numbers of adult illiterates continue to rise UNESCO (2006). In this regards, In Africa, illiteracy is still increasing (The World Bank 2012). Since then, the majority of Tanzanian communities have been residing in rural areas for centuries. One of the very important practice in their daily social lives was education. The so-called informal education was implemented by the individual communities, varying according to the purpose of the community. Regardless the variations in purposes, the ultimate purpose common to all communities was to ensure the development of their societies in all spheres of lives (URT, 2010). However, from 2015- population and Housing census, shows that a number of illiterate adult people aged from 15 and above was estimated to be 5,525,565 (National Bureau Statistics, 2012). This study focused on investigating how adult education has helped to achieve the goal of economic, social, cultural and political development towards achievement of Tanzania sustainable development goals of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote learning opportunities for all.

Methodology

This study has used qualitative approach in its course of conduct. Materials accessed for the study provided data which were predominantly in form of words and views of people. These data required further qualitative analysis to understand. The oral data were predominantly accessed via the interviews with the people who studied via adult education system and residing in rural areas of the Mkuranga district. Due to the hardship to obtain informants the researchers opted to use snowballing sampling where after every end of conversation with an informant the researcher asked the informants to direct him to other people who could participate and provide useful information for the study.

Findings and discussion

The research question was to investigate effectiveness of lifelong learning among adults of rural communities in Tanzania. The obtained data indicate that LLL has several impacts which could be sorted as social and economic success in rural communities.

One of the learners said that;

Since I joined adult classes, I can now count, read and write. This enables me to budget my income and manage it wisely. I have the capability of accounting for all my income and expense. In the past, I didn't know my total income and I didn't know my cost too. For instance, in my case, due to absence of adequate management, I had a severe food shortage. Now, I've attempted to handle both my agricultural output and my cash (Interview, 21st May, 2023).

The participant added that;

Also, my participation in my child's education is increasing. In the past I thought that my responsibility is to fulfill such indirect costs like buying uniform, books and paying water bills. Now, I have the ability of asking my child question relating to what she has learnt, helping her with some homework and home based studies.

Another learner added;

Household and home financial activities such as tailoring and cooking have helped me to open my workshop on tailoring issues and restaurants where I produce revenue; entrepreneurship skills which enable me to conduct petty trade, how to manage my income generated and how to add value to my agricultural products (Interview, 22nd May, 2023).

Slightly most of adult learners also highly agreed that the adult literacy program provides learners with the ability to participate in income earning operations as stated earlier. The findings indicate that LLL in rural areas has helped adults to acquire arithmetic skills, reading and writing skills. The obtained skills play a vital role on adults' participation in their children education matters. Besides, the skills offer adults with the capability of handling annual income and costs. These findings concur the findings of Kadau (2023) who found that awareness among adults is the for effective parents' participation in academic matters. The findings also, concur the findings of UNESCO (2017) who found that integrated community based adult education has developed capability of Tanzanian adults in economic matters.

The finding concurs with the former adult learners who said that;

The adult education helped me to get and use improved agricultural skills like honey production, cultivating different types of vegetables in their garden and poultry production to generate more income. I have been able to build a modern house roofed with iron sheets and not thatches. My domestic and home economic skills have enabled me to open a workshop on tailoring and restaurant where I generate income. Entrepreneurship skills helps to conduct petty trade and how to manage income generated (Interview, 6th May, 2023).

Another learner asserted that;

I had essential understanding and abilities that were very crucial to my life because of the literacy classes I attended. I can read, write and do some calculations as well. That's why one of my parents who resided in a neighboring town made it easier for me to work in a tiny kindergarten. Now, I'm working. So, attending literacy classes assisted me a lot as it gives me the chance to come

from a rural region and live in the city where everything is better (Interview, 10th May, 2023).

The district education officers concurred with the educators. One officer said that:

Majority of the women who participated in adult learning have are involved in activities like sewing, weaving of baskets, mat making, poultry, agricultural products which enable them to get a stable income to support their families. Most of them were impoverished when they began the program. However, they took some significant steps as a consequence of their exposure to the company skills training parts of the adult literacy program. They now produce chickens, fatten sheep and participate in the processing of dairy products. They are earning money (Interview, 10th May, 2023).

Finding was supported by a former learner who said that:

Adult literacy program provided me with the chance to take part in income earning activities like rearing chicken, goats and vegetable farming. I am taking part in income generating activities. I have chicken, a variety of vegetables in my garden and livestock. Therefore, I will not rely on anyone for money in the future as my income will continue increasing (Interview, 4th May, 2023).

Discussion

In line with research question: findings established that adult literacy has been effective in economic development of rural people whereby the learners acquired skills that enabled them to start income generating activities. They were also able to open up bank account and save some money for future use. Some former adult learners were also able to employ themselves through involving themselves in activities like sewing, weaving of baskets, mat making, poultry, agricultural products which enable them to get a stable income to support their families. Adult education provides females with the expertise and abilities of trading, poultry production, increasing vegetables, dairy processing and honey manufacturing, increases women's business experience and abilities, advances women's saving understanding, advances women's understanding of wise use of resources, and improves women's access to loans.

In this research, the adult learners verified that their capacity to participate in income earning operations to achieve financial / economic liberty was greatly enhanced by the adult literacy program. They obtained significant abilities such as poultry production, sheep rearing, and honey manufacturing and growing in gardens of various kinds of vegetables. They might get cash for their families in that manner. Informant data indicate that the abilities they obtained from the program of adult literacy helped them participate in various economic operations. This gives women a chance to get free from poverty and reliance on males to get cash. They were able to do all these tasks without moving away from home and sacrificing their family life. Other significant abilities created by the respondents as a consequence of their participation in the adult literacy program were saving cash abilities and resource efficiency abilities. Saving assisted them reduce their extravagance at home.

Their exposure through adult literacy program to the notion of numbers and calculations assisted them to take care of their finances without anyone being deceived. Not only could they count figures from one to a thousand, but they could also

make some calculations. The informants could also share the expertise they have in their daily routines with the researcher. For instance, they count their cash in marketplaces without any mistake; read their ticket numbers to get the service in turn when they come to a grinding mill to process their wheat; discover public offices by reading office numbers without the assistance of others; purchase shoes and clothes that suit them by referring to the figures written on the shoes and their size number. Also, when they visit financial organizations like a bank to either deposit or withdraw their funds without the assistance of others, they could correctly write their names and add their signature. They also created the ability to sell at lucrative rates and purchase products for their households at affordable rates. The literacy program's entrepreneurship element enhanced the motivation of women to make cash and gain understanding about ways to make it big.

Conclusion

This work has discussed the Effectiveness of Adult education in rural Promoting lifelong learning and ensure development among rural community in Tanzania. The purpose four major themes were noted from the telephone interviews. The themes discussed were it enables people to manage their income, opening shops and restaurants, it has also reduced number of illiteracies in rural areas and avail people with the knowledge of domestication of animals. These findings signify that adult education plays a big role towards both lifelong learning and the development of the rural communities of Tanzania. This study was limited by time bound and hardship to access informants in the villages hence it cannot provide a general understanding of the phenomenon under enquiry. Hence forth further study is recommended to access more data which could enable people in academia to draw further strong conclusions on the study.

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