

# Factors that Influence Students' Performance in Adult Education: A Case of Early Childhood Education at the University of Nairobi

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**Abstract:** *Adult education is continuously becoming more popular and widely accepted in Kenya since many of the higher institutions of learning in the country continue to record high numbers of enrollment from the older adults as compared to earlier years. This growth in the number of students, that can be considered as older adults in universities, has accorded this group of learners attention with much research being conducted in order to understand the need for continuing education. This paper seeks to highlight the various challenges that the mature adult learners face while undertaking their degree programmes. Data was collected from 226 adult learners in early childhood education by use of questionnaires. The findings of the study were presented in tables using percentages and frequencies. The study found that challenges such as difficulties in coping with family and work commitments, the need to have pre-requisite information technology skill as well as a lack of family support are some of the challenges that factor in on the final academic results of the adult learners. The study concludes that adult learners require a lot of support from their colleagues at their places of work, community, and campus for them to concentrate in their studies without unnecessary stress.*

**Keywords:** Education, Early childhood and education, adult education

## 1. Introduction

Presently, the usual stereotype of the young college students aged between eighteen and twenty years is continually fading in society as a result of the increasing number of older adults who are registering in tertiary institutions all over the world. This is a worldwide occurrence, especially in the developed nations, where statistics present high figures of older students enrolling for college studies. Statistics indicate that there are currently higher enrollment figures of adult learners recorded in developed countries in the European and American continents as well as in Australia. For example, there has been continued substantial enrollment of older adults in universities in the United States of America since the mid 1970s. Higher education authorities in the US classified those individuals aged above twenty two as the mature students and during the aforementioned period, the proportion of these adult students enrolling into the country's universities equaled that of the traditional students (classified as those enrolling while aged between eighteen and twenty two years). This influx of older students was mainly prompted by developments in the technological world as well as other economic and demographical developments (Kings & Richardson, 1998).

In the United Kingdom, the high enrollment of adult learners in the University is due to the various policy changes made in favour of adult education by the British government (Kings & Richardson, 1998). Past recommendations by the National Advisory Body standing committee noted that continuing education needed to be fostered for a number of reasons. The NAB noted that continuing education played an essential role in, not only promoting economic prosperity but also in significantly contributing to personal development and social progress and, further, it renewed personal confidence and restored a sense of purpose to peoples' lives by cultivating new interests. Australia also put in place policies conducive to the non-traditional college

students following recommendations of the Review of Australian Higher Education which emphasized the need for broadening of provisions in the higher education sector so as to increase numbers of students from sectors of the community that have traditionally lacked representation (Daniels, 2011). One of these sectors that have been targeted by the new provisions is the older adults and the Australian government, in line with the recommendations, has set a target that by the year 2025, forty percent of the twenty five to thirty year olds in the country will have attained a university degree.

Developing nations in Africa have also recorded increasing figures of mature students' enrollment in the higher education institutions, hence showing that there will continue to be phenomenal growth of continuing education in these countries. The mature aged learner in South Africa is considered to be aged twenty three years or older as per the current legislative definition (Castle, et al, 2007). Following the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) which advocated for the increasing of general participation rates in the public higher education institutions with the objective of facilitating lifelong learning, developing the skills base of South Africa, as well as redressing the country's historical inequalities in education provision, higher education targeted towards older adult learners, among other 'non-traditional' learners. This was promoted by the government because the number of qualified school leavers was below the targeted number intended to be inducted into public higher education. In Kenya, the trend is the same as mature aged adults seeking higher education opportunities has consistently increased over the past years.

## 2. Challenges Affecting Performance of Older Adults

The current hard times with the economy have forced many of the mid-life adults back to studying despite the fact that

the tuition costs have continued to increase massively over the past years. Most of these students resuming higher education view an advanced educational qualification as an investment for a better paying job. However, these mature adults face a number of challenges while taking up their new role as higher education students and these challenges, in one way or another, affect their general performance in their coursework (Hemsley, 2001). Various groups and researchers in the UK have looked into the challenges faced by adult learners in the higher education institutions and many of the challenges have been identified as 'institutional barriers' (Castle, et al, 2007). The major factor among these barriers is the high cost of tuition and learning materials which are often the learners' responsibility. The other significant challenge the older learners face is lack of information on the various institutional procedures such as admission and available study paths. Challenges faced by many of the Australian adult learners are related to the institutions since, even though the government has continued to promote adult education, the institutions have not made the necessary adjustments in order to meet the needs of the older adult learners. The institutions are yet to record, separately, the number of older adults and thus no mechanisms are put in place to monitor their progress in the institutions. There is also a lack of learning support designed for the group to much contrast of the situation of international students who are even offered extensive additional support (Daniels, 2011). Challenges faced by adult learners in South Africa are similar to those faced in the aforementioned countries (Australia, US and UK) since they fall under the category of institutional and situational barriers. These challenges include high costs with regard to college fees and other necessities such as accommodation and transport as well as domestic and work commitments that affect one's concentration on their studies. There are other factors that are dependent on the learners' previous experience in education as well as the knowledge they have acquired during previous schooling and the degree to which these factors relate to the country's academic practices and standards (Castle, et al, 2007). In Kenya, adult learners experience the same constraints of increased fees, lack of money to substitute college materials, learning facilities and personal needs.

Most adult learners in the higher education institutions have to find a way to balance a range of responsibilities due to engagements at their place of work and with their families. Even though many of these individuals have resumed studies with the most probable objective of improving their lifestyles and /or advancing their careers, they still have matters in their lives that will always take higher priority than their current engagement in furthering their education (Bird & Morgan, 2003). This coupled with heavy workloads at their places of employment will always inevitably have to greatly influence the performance of these students. Committing oneself to a degree programme currently requires one to be ready to dig deeper into his pockets. The higher education institutions have continually received decreasing monetary support from the government over the past decades and the various programmes introduced to increase entry levels into the universities such as the parallel programme, and the institutional based programme, are all avenues employed by the institutions to attaining self

sustainability. This has made continuing education an expensive affair that puts significant strain on the adult learners since they have other family commitments. The burden of finding fees and money to cover other expenses related to enrolling and participating in the university programme coupled with other financial commitments are always prioritized as important to the mature adult learners. There is resultant stress due to the struggle the adult learners' go through and this always finds its way into influencing their performance in their academics (Tenhouse, 2011).

Getting learning support is crucial to the academic performance of any university student, young or old. For many among the older students in the higher education institutions however, this is hard to come by due to a number of reasons. First, their mode of study could be non-conducive to them establishing satisfactory relationships with the academic staff, or the course instructors themselves could be grossly unavailable as they have various engagements (Simond, 2011; Conti, 2010). This means that the adult learners must put in a lot of time for their studies, and taking into consideration that they still have a number of commitments that are still of high priority to them, learning support can be viewed as a necessity for this older group of learners. Furthermore, most older adult students lack the needed pre-requisite information technology skills. This puts them in a position that requires them to get the needed knowledge from the various institutional structures that are most likely not set up in the university they have enrolled in. In most institutions internet access and use of computers have become the main conduit for campus correspondence and general information flow. This gross disadvantage certainly influences their academic performance in their respective programmes.

### **3. Forms of Adult Education in Kenya**

The promotion of adult education in Kenya began in 1966 when the University of Nairobi set up the Board of Adult Education. The institution later on established the Faculty of External Studies in 1986. The programme was set up to create places for Kenyans who could not manage to join the existing internal faculties in the public institutions (Mogikoyo, 2010). A number of universities in the country have designed various modes of study in the provision of the various adult education programmes. These education delivery models include offering print based distance education, institutional based modes of study, mixed mode provision as well as web based e-learning.

Print based distance education programmes are offered by the University of Nairobi's school of continuing and open learning. The print materials are only used as the primary delivery strategy while there are other support components that are also in-built into the delivery of the course. The print material used is in the form of course notes, practical guides as well as study lecture units (Juma, 2002). The institution based mode of study can be categorized into two. The first is the full time residential mode where adult learners in various programmes join the rest of the regular university students who are much younger. The other category is the full time institution based mode of study

which is tailored towards students who are in active employment in any educational institutions, especially secondary and primary schools. Mixed mode provision is similar to the parallel degree courses offered in the various institutions in the country and they combine face-to-face tutorials as well as strategies included in the provision of distance education. Many postgraduate diplomas offered in Kenyan universities, particularly in education, are ideal examples of courses delivered through mixed mode provision. Satellite and web based delivery modes, simply defined as e-learning, incorporates the use of information technology in the delivery and mastery of the course work. The programmes integrate the use of satellite technology and the internet in order to allow cost-effective and efficient delivery of course content. Video conferencing is also a key part in the delivery of the mode of study's course content.

#### 4. Objectives of the Study

The following were the objectives of the study:

- 1) Determine family factors that affect the performance of adult learners at the University of Nairobi.
- 2) Establish community and workplace factors that affect adult learners' academic performance in the school based programmes.
- 3) Investigate college factors that affect the performance of adult learners in the University of Nairobi.
- 4) Investigate personal factors that influence the performance of adult learners in the school based programmes.

#### 5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The study was conducted at the University of Nairobi. Information was gathered through questionnaires tailored to gain data specific to the study. It addressed the challenges faced by adult learners in early childhood education, which in turn affect their performance. Data was collected from 226 Early Childhood Education school based students who come to learn during the school holidays. The study used frequencies and percentages to analyze data which was presented in tables. The findings are presented per each objective.

Objective one sought to determine family factors that affect the performance of adult learners at the University of Nairobi. The findings are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Challenges related to the respondents' families**

Responses	Frequency of response	Percentage of respondents
I can't meet all of my children's needs since I'm absent most of the time	59	26.1%
I can't be there for my spouse even though she/he needs me	35	15.5%
My siblings require my support	22	9.7%
My absence due to studies demands a lot from my spouse	21	9.3%
Sometimes my spouse isn't supportive to the idea of me studying	20	8.8%
My parents don't understand my reasons for resuming studies	18	5.8%
My parents require my support which I can't offer due to course demands	16	7.1%

My siblings aren't supportive to my studies	13	7.9%
My siblings miss me since we don't communicate as much	11	4.9%
I have to sort my children's financial needs first before mine (educationally)	11	4.9%
Total responses	226	100%

Information presented in Table 1 indicates that a great number of respondents 157 (69.4%) cannot meet their nuclear family's personal needs, while 69 (32.6%) do not get support from extended family members and this affects their performance in education. As discussed in the literature, older adult learners have to balance a number of responsibilities as they continue with their studies. All the aforementioned commitments to one's family and, in some cases, to one's extended family put an enormous strain on the adult learners and this inevitably affects their performance in their academics (Meindl, 2011). Spousal support is also a crucial component to an adult learners' success in their continuing education.

The second objective was to establish community and workplace factors that affect adult learners' academic performance in the school based programmes.

**Table 2: Challenges related to the respondents' workplace and respective communities**

Response	Frequency of response	Percentage of respondents
There's too much workload frustrating my efforts to study	54	23.9%
Some members of the community are envious and think I've become too big for them	52	23%
Some members of the community have a negative attitude towards adult education (e.g. Some see it as a waste of resources)	37	16.3%
Workmates are envious and think I'm being too ambitious	27	12%
I lack time to interact with my friends in the community due to my demanding schedule	26	11.5%
Not all my colleagues are supportive of me studying (view me as a threat)	20	8.9%
Some members of the community have a negative attitude towards studying ECE	10	4.4%
Total	226	100%

Analysis presented in Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents 125 (55.3%), do not get support from community members who do not appreciate the value of further studies in old age, while 101 (44.7%), indicates that their workmates are envious of their studying efforts and they had to deal with an overwhelming work environment that made it difficult for them to fulfill their studying obligations thus affecting their performance in studies. As discussed in the literature, work commitments form a significant part of the responsibilities that the older adult learners have to balance as they also focus on their academics (Meindl, 2011). The third objective was to Investigate college factors that affect the performance of



adult learners at the University of Nairobi. The information is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Challenges related to the respondents' college

Responses	Frequency of response	Percentage of respondents
There is lack of enough learning materials	52	23%
Not all of the students are friendly/cooperative (i.e. some frustrate others' efforts)	50	22.1%
We lack time to access the learning materials due to distance from Kikuyu campus to main campus	38	16.8%
The college fees is too expensive	28	12.4%
There are high costs related to accessing learning materials	27	12%
College infrastructure is wanting	17	7.5%
There is poor service provision even though fees has been paid	14	6.2%
Total	226	100%

The findings in Table 3 show that a great number of respondents 171 (75.7%) complain about lack of learning material, long distance from the library, and lack of cooperation from fellow colleagues, while 55 (24.3%) complain about high costs and poor service provision. As discussed in the literature, university education currently requires extra digging into one's pocket due to the high fees as well as other related costs that have also significantly increased hence leading to extra straining of the adult learners who have other financial commitments that require their undivided attention as well. Researchers have noted that most of the adult learners struggle to get finances by incorporating various finance saving strategies but even those strategies still result in the older adults straining themselves and this inevitably impacts on their academic performance (Tenhouse, 2011). Lack of pre-requisite technology skills that have presently become the norm on campus due to merging of these technologies with many of the essential institutional structures such as course registration, unit booking as well as general information flow is a great disadvantage that many of the adult learners have to face.

Objective four sought to investigate personal factors that influence the performance of adult learners in the school based programmes. The information is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Challenges related to the respondents' emotions and personal life

Response	Frequency of response	Percentage of respondents
I occasionally go through emotional stress	64	28.3%
The examination period is stressful	54	23.9%
I get stressed due to overwhelming workload	54	23.9%
It's hard on me, being away from my family	10	4.4%
My personal health is being affected by work and school pressures	14	6.2%
We lack any leisure time due to the demanding schedule	30	13.3%
Total	226	100%

Table 4 shows that the majority of adult learners 118 (52.2) go through emotional stress because of heavy work load and being away from their families, while 108 (47.8%) indicated that they lack leisure time and miss their families. This is an indication that the older students have a great number of distractions that are unavoidable and this makes it difficult for them to commit to their studies. This shows how much the adult learners have to commit themselves to their academics in order to perform well since they undergo stressful periods during their time in college hence affecting their performance as well (Bird & Morgan, 2003).

## 6. Conclusion

The study has shown that older adult learners face a lot of challenges, and that their studying environment is different from the traditional campus lifestyle that is characteristic among the younger adults who form the majority of the student population in higher institutions of learning. Occurrences such as the illness of one's child, sudden unemployment, change in career directions are the ideal unexpected extremes that this group of learners may experience while engaged in their studies. Other significant factors such as the motivation will have more impact and are even much less temporal with regard to the implications on the adult learners' academic performance. These challenges require undeterred attention to academics by the adult learners, a need for self motivation and greatly exercising self discipline so as to maintain a high level of commitment to their studies and, in the same light, their academic performance. In addition to having an objective oriented resolve, adult learners need to acquire and improve on their lacking areas that will be essential in their studies; areas such as computer skills, research skills and general handiness with the internet and other communication technology since these skills may not be taught in the institutions they enroll in.

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