

# Education for older adults in Tanzania: Trends, issues and concerns

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*Abstract.* Globally, education for older adults has become one of the key issues in educational policy debates in recent years due to the need to meet the lifelong learning imperatives. Given this trend, many countries have made conscious efforts to create educational opportunities for older adults that would ensure that their learning needs are met so that they are fully engaged in community as active citizen even during their retirement age and beyond. The challenges in meeting the educational and learning goals for older adults, however, seem to be extremely acute for developing nations like Tanzania, than it is the case for the developed nations. Reluctance in supporting education for older adults in some countries has sometimes been associated with the fact that in most cases, the rationale for provision of education and training has always been based on the demands in the labour market, of which, the majority of educational and training programmes for older adults do not fit. This article traces the trends, issues and concerns in the provision of education for older adults in Tanzania. It assesses both the needs for such education, and the institutional responses which have been in place in an effort to ensure the effective provision of education and learning opportunities for older adults.

*Keywords:* older adults, education, learning, Tanzania, Africa.

## Introduction

For many years since 1970s, Tanzania has offered adult and community educational opportunities for adults. In recent years however, given the emergence of factors such as increased life challenges and complexity, and shifts in demography, the need to cater for education for older adults, has become increasingly urgent. However, comparatively, the ageing population in developing countries such as Tanzania has been cited to be relatively low compared to demographics of older adults in the developed countries (Longworth &

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Davies, 1996). This article traces the trends, the need, and the adequacy of policy responses towards education for older adults in Tanzania. It particularly assesses the key factors and trends which have influenced the provision of educational and learning opportunities for adults in Tanzania, thereby delineating critical issues and concerns.

### **The concept, significance and contexts for provision of education for older adults**

Scholars such as Roberson and Merriam (2005), Ford and Orel (2005), and Findsen and Formosa (2011) analysed issues and concerns about education for older adults from the context of developed countries. Only few scholarly works in the education for older adults seem to exist in the context of developing world such as Tanzania, including Oppong (2006) and Dayton & Ainsworth (2002). Scholarly works such as that of Findsen (2005), and that of Ford and Orel (2005), analysed the importance and the need for the education for older adults, arguing for the necessity of recognizing its significance because older adults play a critical role as partners as clients, teachers, volunteers and professionals in the education process. The arguments on the importance of education for older adults suggest the need for creation of a vibrant system that offers a range of learning opportunities for them, so as to promote the lifelong learning agenda. It is argued further that, supporting learning opportunities for older people is crucial because of the need for using their knowledge, experiences and competences that could eventually enable the achievement of active participatory lives through education (Friebe & Schmidt-Hertha 2013).

Findsen and Formosa (2011) underlined the need for addressing issues concerning education for older adults, arguing that, in recent years almost all countries have experienced unprecedented demographic shifts to an extent that the period has been referred to as the 'age of ageing'. They further project that by 2050, 22 per cent of the world's population will be aged. Meanwhile, Kalache, Barreto and Keller (2005) observed that over 60 per cent of the current aged population is living in developing countries, with this number projected to increase by 75 and 85 per cent in the years 2025 and 2050 respectively. As stated earlier, the drive towards widening participation of older adults in education and learning is based on a growing importance of lifelong learning arising from the emergence of global forces and needs necessitating learning throughout life. The major concerns in this context have been a country's ability to devise policies and strategies that would recognize the importance to create educational opportunities and institutions catering for older adult education. Some authors such as Nabalambaa and Chikoko (2011), however, have noted the absence of policy at the international level, arguing that while the Millennium Development Goals provide specific targets for children, youth and women, the goals do not refer to older people as a specific group. Nabalambaa and Chikoko (2011) concluded that ageing has not been given adequate attention even in the MDG agenda, which is the overarching framework for international development priorities.

Meanwhile, the education for older adults has been cited as exceptionally crucial within the context of Africa. As argued by Charlton and Rose (2001), within the context of Africa, education for older adults is critically important because most Africans enter old age after a lifetime characterized by social and economic problems emanating from poverty and

deprivation, poor access to health care and a diet that is usually inadequate in quantity and quality. According to them, despite the fact that adults in those countries face those problems, most social, economic and educational interventions in African countries are directed primarily toward children and young adults. Similarly, education for older adults within the context of Africa seems to be exceptionally important due to peculiar social problem and situations in which most adults are implicated. It is illustrated further that in recent years, the AIDS epidemic had been rising dramatically in sub-Saharan Africa, and the mortality of prime-aged adults and older people have been adversely affected by the death of prime-aged adults (Barnett & Blaikie 1992, cited in Dayton and Ainsworth, 2002). Barnett and Blaikie , explained further that older adults are more likely to be affected by AIDS deaths, because in many instances they find themselves in households with no prime-aged adult and some of them are left with the duty of caring for young and parentless children. It is against this background therefore that the education for older adults seems to be exceptionally crucial in the context of Sub-Saharan African countries such as Tanzania.

Education for older people is also thought to be central because older people play a key role in African family welfare, and the majority of families would not survive without the contribution of older people (Stanley, 2008). It is further believed that across the continent, many extended families have been relying on older adults as a source of support. Meanwhile, Friebe and Schmidt-Hertha (2013) argued for the importance of adult education at a higher age because it is likely to preserve autonomy, and encourage social participation in later life. It is argued further that education for older adults is crucial because an ageing population is often linked with a decrease in social adaptability, and consequently, educational activities of older people, both at individual and societal levels, should be encouraged. Paradoxically however, Stanley (2008) noted that despite the indispensable contribution of older adults, many of them in Africa experience many problems including deepening poverty, discrimination, violence and abuse, and are unable to access their entitlements such as social welfare benefits, income support, community care, and health services. It was further observed that since many older people live in rural areas in Africa, where there are fewer services, the older adults often experience economic exclusion, and are often denied employment and access to social and economic services and encounter social exclusion due to age discrimination.

### **Education for older adults in the Tanzanian educational system**

As stated earlier, Tanzania has been offering some educational opportunities to its adult population. The provision of educational opportunities in the country however, has been characterized by several features, some of which can serve as a limitation to effective older adult teaching and learning. For example, even though, scholars such as Aspin, Chapman, Hatton & Sawano (2001) advocated for the need for the adult learning systems that allow interaction among different structures, institutions and agencies that offer learning opportunities for provision of all possible learning opportunities, to a larger extent this has not been the case for the educational provision in the country. Generally, in Tanzania, the educational system is predominantly formal, academic and hierarchically-structured running right from primary school to tertiary level. It is based on a 2-7-4-2-3+ system comprising two

years of pre-primary education, seven years of primary education (Standard I-VII), four years of secondary ordinary level education (Form 1-4), two years of secondary advanced level education (Form 5 and 6) and three or more years for technical or higher education. The official school attendance age in Tanzania ranges from 5-6 for pre-primary, 7-13 for primary, 14-17 for lower secondary, 18-19 for upper secondary and 20-24 for university education (United Republic of Tanzania, 2010).

With regard to education for older adults, even though institutions, such as the vocational training centres, the Institute of Adult Education (IAE), and the Open University of Tanzania (OUT), exist in the country as a means for the provision of adult education, much emphasis in terms of resources and recognition seems to be placed on formal education. The existing non-formal institutions are mainly concerned with offering programmes such as adult literacy training, community education and vocational education and training; most of these programmes seem to be less coordinated and less organized. Moreover, the majority of government official documents in Tanzania tend to treat the formal education system and qualifications as superior to the non-formal education system. Critics such as Bhalalusesa (2003) note that the official reports such as the country's Education for All Assessment Report (United Republic of Tanzania, 2000), in which the major government decisions and actions undertaken since the World Conference on EFA are reported, tend to put more emphasis on primary education rather than on adult education. Bhalalusesa (2003) noted further that adult education is mentioned only in passing as part of basic education. Similarly, it has been further argued that in terms of investment in EFA the report does not show how much was allocated and spent on adult basic education. As Bhalalusesa (2003) suggested, further marginalization of non-formal education within the education system includes the reforms made at the Ministry of Education, in which the adult education sector that used to form an independent directorate with its own budget was reduced to a mere unit. Comparable observations are also maintained by Hoppers (2006:93) who noted that the relationship between formal education and non-formal education remains "fluid, dynamic and often problematic and curtails the provision of a wider diversity of education forms, each of which can have its own place". Given this tendency, the non-formal education sector in Tanzania, which handles education for older adults, seems to be treated as an entity separate from the educational system. The consideration of formal education as a separate entity with a different structure has been one of the main sources for the polarization of education provision between the formal and non-formal educational systems (Mushi, 2012). Consequently, there has been a trend towards a diminution of the role of non-formal and informal educational agencies in the country because of under-funding and poor governance (Urch, 1989; Galabawa, 1990; Mushi, 2012).

### **Issues and concerns in the provision of education for older adults in Tanzania**

As stated earlier, in Tanzania the provision of educational and learning opportunities for older adults is affected by many factors and trends, which determine the nature, provision and the levels of participation. Similar to other developing countries, some of the commonest factors and trends that influence the provision of education for older adults and education at large in Tanzania, include issues relating to political will, resources availability, economy and politics as discussed below.

### *Lack of reliable data*

One of the key factors that define and shape provision of older adult learning is demographics (Longworth & Davies, 1996). However, one of the concerns in the provision of older adults' education in Tanzania is the lack of data. Fewer data exist that would have indicated the composition of older adults, their age, sex, motivations, needs, and obstacles and participation rates. Most of the available data are too general and they do not give a special attention to older adults, thus making it harder to ascertain the levels and extent of participation as well as the actual needs. It seems important therefore for Tanzanian government to carry out annual surveys in literacy that among other things would have analysed the needs and participation status by gender, age and the nature of programmes. The problem of a lack of research and data on education for older adults in the context of developing countries such as Tanzania has also been highlighted in a study conducted by Oppong (2006). The author calls for a critical need for comparative analyses of different aspects including issues related to how factors such as culture, socio-political systems, how sweeping social change shapes lives, inter-connections, opportunities, constraints and analyses of gender.

### *Lack of holistic adult learning policy*

The adult education sub-sector does not have a comprehensive policy to guide provision and implementation of adult learning opportunities in the country. Although the government Education and Training Policy (United Republic of Tanzania, 2014), provides broad guidelines on adult and non-formal education, these guidelines are not adequately comprehensive and are not simplified into sub-sector versions of policy in order to guide effective provision of older adults learning opportunities in the country. The absence of comprehensive policy has also been highlighted in the previous empirical studies. A study by Nabalambaa and Chikoko (2011), for example, indicated that despite the serious demographic shifts in most African countries, ageing is not visible in most policy dialogue and vulnerable older people are often overlooked in major policy documents and in most national development plans.

### *Overlooking older adults in programme design*

Some recent studies such as that of Mushi (2012) have indicated problems affecting the adult learning programmes because most programmes are designed and developed without adequate consultation with the clients. The older adult learners are only brought to the picture when it comes to mobilizing them for implementation. Clearly, unilateral programme design and decision making process that do not involve the target group is less likely to continue and has slender chances of survival. Some of the adult learning innovations in Tanzania could not be sustained due to this reason (Mushi, 2016). There is need for the government to address itself seriously to the question of incorporating the views of adult learners in programme design, implementation and evaluation to ensure that adult learning programmes reflect their needs and interests (Mushi 2010).

### *Lack of institutional support*

Traditionally, Tanzania's education for adults has focused on those people who were denied access to education and learning opportunities in their childhood, in such a way that most institutions and programmes were designed to offer educational opportunities for adults who missed education (Mushi, 2012). Given this trend, the sector of education for adults, including programmes such as education for retired adults and older learners has not been diversified to cater for adults' formal, informal and non-formal educational needs. There has been a lack of programmes such as pre-retirement education in the current education system. The few programmes that exist have been offered in an *ad-hoc* fashion and are arbitrarily conducted by individual companies and organisations for their staff. The problem of lack of resource can further be noticed due to a lack of policies and resource centres that would have designed programmes for adults especially in rural areas. As pointed out earlier, the major focus had been on the provision of formal education. Similarly, the role of provision of adult education in Tanzania has traditionally been the responsibility of central and local governments. However, in recent years, given the emergence of privatization and liberalization policies, some new providers of adult education have emerged mainly non-governmental organizations.

### *Poor resources, financing and expenditure on education in later life*

Due to lack of political will and commitment for older adult education, fewer monetary and non-monetary resources have been allocated in the area of learning in a later life. In most cases, the policy and financial support emphasis have been for basic, secondary and higher education. Only a limited attention has been given to the education for older adults. The reason for underfunding of adult learning programmes appears to be attributable to the low status accorded to adult education in general because it is not academic and does not prepare people for high income or status (Mushi, 2010). While adult education was considered by the government to be the most potent force for bringing about change, academic training was at the same time thought to be needed to produce the required higher-level manpower. In contrast to other sectors of education adult education seems to come at the bottom of hierarchy in terms of revenue allocation.

### *Attitudes towards older adults' learning/education*

The issue of attitude has been cited in much literature as having an important role to play in understanding education in general, and appreciating teaching and learning in particular (Oppong, 2006; Topală, 2014). Within the context of Tanzania, the general public perception towards education and learning is that basic, secondary and tertiary education systems are the most crucial components. Compared to other forms of education, the broader field of adult education has suffered from an overall inferior image, and the tendency has been to view education for older adults as leisure. A similar poor image on adult education within the context of Africa, has been for most of the people to consider it as mainly linked to literacy. Given the poor image that education is mainly linked to literacy, the adult education sector, and the education for older adults in particular, has received insignificant policy attention. As

mentioned earlier in this paper, one of the reasons for persistence of this trend has been due to the fact that education for older adults has not been given due weight, and not deemed to be contributing factors to social, economic, cultural development of the country. It has been seen as not contributing to the economy, but only useful for personal interests and survival. To redress this situation, it is important that this dominant popular attitude is reversed.

The other common attitude-related issue curtailing the provision of education and learning opportunities for older adults in Tanzania, has to do with adults' personal views and attitudes toward education and learning. In most cases the adults' personal views and attitudes have been based on negatively associating learning in adulthood with a front-end model, whose main focus is on education for children and young adults. The problem of older adults' poor image and attitude has also been reported in some of the previous studies, such as that of Friebe and Schmidt-Hertha (2013). They noted that adults are more or less open to get involved in educational processes depending on their self-perception, and whether they see themselves as active learners, including their perceptions of their own learning capabilities and their potential for personal development.

#### *Lack of policies to support indigenous knowledge systems*

Older adults in communities acquire knowledge, skills and values from indigenous cultural systems through observation and active participation (Mushi 2016). This knowledge is related to the environment in which they live and is passed among village members and from one generation to another informally with the aim of sustaining the community. Some of these activities in which older adults take part include fishing, building, tinsmithing, animal husbandry, traditional dancing, soil conservation and decorative arts. Unfortunately, these indigenous knowledge systems have not been recognized by the government as a critical source of knowledge.

## **Conclusion**

This paper discussed the trends, issues and concerns regarding education for older adults in Tanzania. The discussion of issues and concerns in this paper seems to be crucial because apart from illuminating problems and concerns, it could stimulate further discussion of areas that require further attention and reforms that may lead into more radical approaches in addressing concerns in education for older adults in the country. The discussion of trends and issues in the provision of education for older adults in Tanzania in this paper is crucial also because it can contribute into shaping the strategies for offering learning opportunities and training for older adults in Tanzania. Clearly, there is a need to set an agenda so that radical changes in educational policy that would redress the challenges and shape the future to achieve lifelong learning policies in Tanzania are made. In the light of the issues raised in this article, it is essential for policy makers and practitioners to examine critically policy and practice concerning older learners. It is important that reforms are made to encourage education for older adults in Tanzania. Such reforms and improvements can engage stakeholders such as industries, non-governmental organisations, government agencies and employers. There is also a need for the government and other stakeholders to find a way to

allocate adequate resources that would widen access of education opportunities to older adults in the country.

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