



# Strategies for Improving Adult Education Participation in Kenya: A Case of Trans-nzoia East Sub-County

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## Abstract

The Government of Kenya remains committed to enhancing literacy and numeracy to all her citizens. This is through the provision of adult education to cater for out of school youth and adults who missed out of basic education in line with the country's educational objectives and the vision 2030. However, participation in adult education remains low despite high number of illiterate adult in the county. This paper shows the assessment of participation in adult education and the determined the strategies for its improvement in Kenya. It identifies the characteristics of adult learners, their reasons for learning, and the barriers to the effectiveness of the program. The determined strategies to improve participation in adult education include: Provision of civic education on adult education, Provision of physical facilities and program support materials, use of various innovative teaching methods, making adult learning practices highly motivating, imparting knowledge and skills easily applicable in life situations and empowering adult learners by facilitating access to new income sources. The study was carried out in Trans-Nzoia East Sub-county, Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya. It adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study sample incorporated: adult learners, adult education teachers and the Sub-County Director of Adult and Continuing Education (DACE). A sample size of 97 respondents was identified through random (stratified and simple) and purposive sampling. Data was collected using closed ended and open ended questionnaires, and a semi-structured interview. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics: frequencies and percentages and presented in tables. Based on the findings of the study, this paper recommends more effort in the policy making, organization and implementation of adult education to realize improved participation.

**Keywords:** *Adult education, Reasons for adult learning, adult learner characteristics, barriers to participation, participation, strategies.*

## Introduction

Education development policies since independence, current national policies and the Kenyan Constitution emphasizes that all citizens have a right to basic education (ROK, 2005; 2010; 2012). This is in line with international education commitments as well as conventions, including the Jomtien declaration of 1990 and the Sustainable Development Goals (2030) to which Kenya is a signatory. Despite these, the number of illiterate adults appears to be growing annually and participation in Adult Literacy Programs is on the decline (KNBS, 2007). Moreover, the introduction of Free Primary education (FPE) in 2003 by the government, saw adults and out of school youth aged 15 years and above, enrolling in formal public primary schools meant for children instead of the Adult literacy centers available for them. In the recent past enrolment in adult education programs in Kenya has declined sharply, from 415,074 in 1979 to 100,029 in 2005 (Ministry of Education, GoK 2005). On average the Ministry of Education now enrolls about 77, 000 adult learners in the country annually (The Standard, Wednesday, July 27, 2011). For instance, Trans-Nzoia

East Sub-county experiences adult literacy rate of only 33% (R.O.K 2009). By the year 2008 only 740 adult learners were enrolled comprising of 334 male and 406 female.

Trans-Nzoia East Sub-county is one region experiencing low participation in adult literacy programs in the face of many illiterate adults and low adult literacy rate at 33 %. It has reduction in attendance rate, increased dropout rate and low completion rate. This low and declining trend in the participation in adult education prompted a study of this nature to focus on identifying the strategies to improve participation in the program. Program providers need to have an appreciation of who their target groups are; their motivation for engaging in learning, the barriers to participation, and the preferred forms if the programs are to both be effective and survive.

## Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design. Kothari (2005) states that descriptive survey design seeks to give an accurate description of the present status of a phenomenon, practices and

attitudes. The sample of 97 respondents was obtained from 6 out of the 15 adult education centers in Trans-Nzoia East Sub-county. This included 90 adult learners (15 per learning center), 6 teachers (1 per learning center) and the Sub County Director of Adult and Continuing Education (DACE). The sample was identified through simple and stratified random sampling as well as purposive sampling. Data was collected using primary tools: two questionnaires (one for adult learners and the other teachers) with both closed-ended and open-ended questions and a Semi-structured interview. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize closed-ended responses into frequencies and expressed in percentages. The authors analyzed the conditions in adult education centers, the learners' characteristics, and their reasons for learning, the barriers to their participation and the determined strategies. The findings were analyzed in percentages and discussed.

## Discussion of Findings

### Characteristics of Adult Learners

Important adult learner characteristics that affect participation were established. These include gender, marital status, age, prior education level and occupation.

#### Gender

Gender implied whether the adult learners were male or female. It is an important characteristic for the design of policies regarding participation in adult education program if its desired objectives are to be met. It was found that there were nearly twice as many female participants in Adult education compared to the males at 65.8% and 34.2% respectively. This was consistent with previous studies by Merriam and Caffarella (1999), Creighton and Hudson (2002), The United States National Center for Education Statistics, USNCES (2004) and the Kenya National Adult Literacy Survey, KNALS report published by Kenya National Bureau of Statistics in 2007. The findings manifested a persistent problem of gender imbalance in access to adult education implying the failure to realize the goals of adult literacy programs specifically bridging the literacy gap between males and females.

The low participation by males in adult education is a cultural issue in African communities as men regard themselves as superior to women in all cultural aspects. They therefore fear sharing classes with female learners or at worse when the adult teacher is female. There is need to design appropriate policies in two major ways for redress: 1. Promote civic education through partnerships in adult education to encourage men to enroll for the adult education. 2. Create conducive learning environment that is responsive to the cultural needs of gender issues to encourage the participation of men and realize higher participation of women.

#### Age

Age referred to the range of years in which the adult learners fall. It affects policy making and participation in adult education since individual needs and priorities change with age. The results showed that participation in adult learning in Trans-Nzoia East Sub-county was significantly lower among adults aged 15-25 at 15.1%. This was attributed to the positive effects of Free Primary Education (FPE) in which most of their peers enrolled. Thus, if FPE was strengthened this category of learners would have benefited fully and eliminated their need for enrolling in adult education. The adults aged 26-35 would also have benefited fully had FPE been introduced earlier. This calls for the continued

provision of FPE by the government to promote literacy in the country.

Participation in adult education was highest among adults age group 36-45 years at 31.5%. The findings in this group relates somehow to marriage since at this age the adults are likely to be in stable marriages getting financial and psychosocial support from their spouses unlike the younger age groups. This implied that to encourage higher participation in adult education by the adults in younger age groups the government needs to finance the program or offer financial incentives that promote their participation.

Participation in adult education was lowest among adult learners over 55 years at 9.6%. These findings are also consistent with the study by USNCES (2004) in which three youngest age groups (16-30, 31-40, and 41-50) were more likely to participate in formal adult learning as opposed to older adults ages 51-65 and ages 66 and older. This implied that the objectives of the adult literacy programs specifically providing literacy for adults who missed out of formal education cannot be achieved since older adults over 55 years are not enrolling. This was attributed to the fact that they lacked confidence to study or their life priorities lie in pursuing other interests over education. This calls for civic education on adult education to target this age group to realize their increased participation. In an aggressive advocacy campaign for Adult education participation their awareness as well as importance of education will entice them to enroll. They need to know how education will benefit them and spark up enthusiasm in their lives despite their age. They should live actively informed about themselves, their environment, their country and the world as opposed to being seen as people just waiting to die.

#### Marital Status

Marital status implied whether the adult learners were married, single, separated or widowed. Marital status was established to be a significant factor that affected participation in adult education in Trans-Nzoia East Sub-county and therefore a characteristic to bear in mind while designing the administration of the adult education program in the area and the country at large. It was found that 79.9% of adult learners were married, single 10.9%, separated 6.9% and widowed 2.7%. Married adults are thus more likely to participate in. This corroborates with the USNCES (2004) study which found that the overall participation rate was higher among adults who were married (47 percent), unmarried and living with a partner (43 percent), and separated, divorced, or widowed (38 percent). Married adults are thought to get financial and psychosocial support from their spouses in their studies. The findings were related to the age factor as those at age group 15-25 who are unlikely to be married or in unstable marriages recorded the lower participation rate at 15.5%. The government should offer financial support to single adult learners.

#### Prior education level

This referred to the initial education of the learners before enrolling in the adult education program. Prior level of education was found to be an important determinant of further participation in adult education. The study found that adult learners with prior lower and upper primary education level were the highest participants at 32.9% each compared to those who had pre-primary education and those who had no education at all. This implied that the more educated an individual is the more likely for that person to enroll for adult education. Those who dropped at upper primary education also need to complete primary education and get certificates for

them proceed to secondary education. These findings were consistent with numerous research studies (Titmus 1989; USNCES 2004; Bureau of Labor Statistics 1993; Creighton and Hudson 2002) which found that overall participation rate in adult education increased with increased prior educational attainment. Positive achievements at certain lower levels of education makes individuals feel good about themselves and acts as motivations for demand for more education. This call for a curriculum content that adult learners can easily comprehend, relate to their daily needs, make them enjoy learning and at the same time challenge them to demand for more education. This will increase enrollment, progression and completion rates in adult education as well as sustainability of literacy levels. It is worth to note however from this study that the percentage of adults who had no prior education at all was relatively higher (24.7%) than those who had pre-primary education (9.6%) and adequate measures should be put in place to promote their learning. This means that there is sufficient appreciation among many illiterate adults for the need to participate in education.

### Occupation

Occupation referred to their means of livelihood. An individual's occupation can either promote or inhibit the person's educational plan. Some occupations may demand of workers to acquire certain academic (literacy and numeracy) competencies for them to retain or gain promotions in their jobs. It was established that most adult education learners in Trans-Nzoia East Sub-county were casual labourers and farmers constituting 43.8% and 37.0% respectively. Given that casual labourers and farmers (who have inadequate fiscal resources) form the majority of the adult learners there's need for a monetary strategy to increase their income or to directly support their fee payment. The government should subsidize farming and offer financial support to casual labourers for them to enroll and attend lessons as scheduled. The program should operate on flexible working schedules as opposed to fixed time schedules. This would be convenient to the adult learners who need adequate time to fend for their families, take care of their children and attend to their studies.

### Reasons for participation in adult education

These are the driving forces behind the enrolment of the learners in the adult education program. Understanding these reasons would help in designing relevant and effective curriculum that meets not only the objectives of adult education in general but also the specific needs of the adult learners. The respondents were thus asked to state why they enrolled in adult education program. The findings indicate that 74.0% of the adult learners enroll to get knowledge. In the 21st Century knowledge is the basic production force in human society and the main condition for its success. The fact that knowledge is power is a popular and agreed proverb. It is a powerful factor that empowers people to achieve great results. Knowledge enhances individual and national development, which is an important objective of the Adult Literacy program in Kenya, (Kenya Institute of Education, 2011). Therefore the findings of this study are compatible with goals of the adult education and the overall development plan of the country as spelt out in the various government policies and development plans. As the country's development plan, the Kenya Vision 2030 acknowledges the role of Adult education in acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes important in implementing the initiatives set in its pillars. Specifically, the medium-term plan for the Kenya Vision 2030 sets to significantly increase adult literacy (ROK, 2007). Since there is no limit to what an individual can learn, a well organized adult

education program tailored to the Vision 2030, learner needs and their characteristics such as gender and age can empower the individual learners as well as immensely contribute to the realization of the country's development plan.

It was also found by the study that 21.9 percent of the adult learners enrolled to get jobs. This may be expected from the young adults who enroll in this program. They see education as an empowering tool to give them employable skills as argued by Roberts et al (2005) that a key motivational factor for learners can be the possibility of a new professional identity offered by a vocational training program. The curriculum and overall organization of the program should thus include practical skills in agriculture, business and entrepreneurship to increase the employability of these learners as they progress with their studies. The employable skills in the curriculum are a powerful tool of empowerment to the learners to increase their income and overcome the financial barriers. This will not only act as an incentive to increased enrolment but also retention and completion rates of participants and hence effectiveness and sustainability of the program. Flexible study schedules can also allow the adult learners to apply the practical entrepreneurial skills in a wide range of activities.

### Barriers to effective participation in Adult education

Barriers are both impediments to enrolment and challenges to the completion of the studies by adult learners. Unlike formal primary education which is free and compulsory, adult education participation is voluntary and barriers can impede the effective participation by adult learners. To derive data on the effect of barriers on enrollment, adult learners were asked to state whether they enrolled immediately or delayed their decision to enroll after expressing their initial interest. The results showed that 71.2% of adult learners delayed to enroll at an earlier date when they first expressed interest. This was attributed to some barriers that impeded enrollment. These barriers were divided into situational, institutional and dispositional barriers. They ought to be addressed by designing appropriate strategies to encourage learners to enroll at the right time in the program and carry out their studies to completion effectively.

### Situational barriers

These are personal or family related challenges arising from an individual's life situation. They have powerful effect and if not overcome they may completely derail an individual's plans of action regarding to participation in adult education. It was established that these barriers inhibited enrolment of adult learners. The results indicated that of the situational barriers, 67% of adult learners identified lack of time as a major drawback to the effective participation in adult education in Trans-Nzoia East sub-county. It undermined enrollment of prospective adult learners, led to irregular attendance and also resulted into drop out among adult learners. These findings were consistent with the study by Lung'aho, S (1984) that identified poor timing of classes as a problem in Adult education participation. Therefore it is a serious problem that threatens the survival of Adult education Program in Trans-Nzoia East Sub-county as it affects both enrollment and leads to drop out cases. This implied that the adult learners are engaged in multiple activities and require flexible scheduling. The adult education teachers should therefore create flexible working hours compatible with the situations of most of their learners. The learning time table should not be as rigid as those used in Primary and Secondary schools. This will enable more to enroll, increase

retention and completion levels hence raise the effectiveness of the program.

Although lack of money was not a major problem but at 20.5% it means income disparities exist and cannot be overlooked. Adult education learners in Trans-Nzoia East Sub-county experienced financial challenges both with respect to payment of school fees and providing for family needs which led to drop outs. Poverty is a serious threat to the attainment of the goals of adult education in the country. The government should subsidize farming and offer financial support to the casual labourers in Trans-Nzoia East Sub-county. If the farmers earn more they will have more money to pay for the education of their children and have time for their own studies. They will also have some surplus to reinvest in farming and other sectors of the economy raising their financial capacity. The benefits of reducing poverty will promote adult education participation, basic education and higher education hence the attainment of the broader national goals of education at all levels of the education system in the country.

#### **Institutional barriers**

These include institutional practices and procedures that discourage enrolment of adult learners and cause drop out cases. These too seriously threaten the efficiency and effectiveness of the adult education program and need to be addressed by developing appropriate strategies. It was found that inconvenient locations of adult learning centers and emphasis on full-time study in many adult education centers were the main institutional barriers to enrollment at 47.9%, and 41.1% respectively. Distant locations of adult learning centers discourage learners from attending their classes regularly. Trans-Nzoia East Sub-county is a vast area with only 15 adult learning centers hence located far from some adult learners. This problem was made worse by the poor means of transport in the area particularly during the rain seasons when the roads became muddy and impassable. It is this group that is at the most risk of dropping out due to distance from their homes to the study centers. This implies that establishing more adult education centers operating on flexible timing would improve the participation of the adult learners, which is the focus of this study. This will attract more learners making the program more successful.

It was also established that lack of teachers discouraged some learners and they had to drop out of the adult education program. Since each learning center had only one teacher, learning would stop if the teacher was transferred without immediate replacement. Indeed some adult education centers had been arbitrarily closed down due to lack of teachers. This left the adult learners helpless and had to drop out of their studies. Equally challenging was the fact that the single teacher at each of the adult education centers handled all the subjects irrespective of the level of the curriculum hence mixing learners of different levels of the curriculum in one single class. This disadvantaged some learners who felt dissatisfied and they ended up dropping out of the program altogether. As a remedy, the government should employ enough teachers in all the adult learning centers to ensure the survival of the adult education program and realization of its objectives. Teacher resource is a valuable factor for the success of any educational program.

#### **Dispositional barriers**

These are psychological factors that may work against an individual's decision to participate in the adult education program. They stem from the attitudes that adults have about learning and

affect their motivation. From the findings, 57.5% of the adult learners could not enroll on time due to lack of confidence. This is a big threat to the adult education program as success in any learning program requires the confidence of the learners. Civic education is vital to popularize adult education and build the adults' confidence to have them enroll. Potential adult learners should be encouraged to enroll and clearly told the benefits of taking part in learning them, their society and as citizens of the country and the world. Publicity of success stories of adult learners elsewhere could help to arouse and sustain interest, motivate and inspire more learners in Trans-Nzoia Sub-county to enroll and complete their studies.

It was also established that adult learners were uncomfortable in mixed-gender and mixed-age classrooms hence dropped out of the adult education program. Men particularly were uncomfortable sharing classes with women. From a cultural perspective men fear competing with and at worst being defeated by women hence their discomfort in sharing the classes. This was consistent with the study by Terer (2004) in Elgeyo-Marakwet County and Nafukho et al (2005) who also argued that men were uncomfortable sharing classes with women while women were shy in mixed gender classes. Older Adults over 55 years were also uncomfortable sharing classes with Adults aged 15-25 whom they considered their grand children and feared to be seen competing with them. This implies the organization of the adult education program should consider the culture of the target community. Civic education should be conducted to minimize the effect of these cultural inclinations and encourage especially men and women to study together confidently in the spirit of cooperation rather than competition. Moreover effective provision of free primary education in Kenya could eliminate the enrolment of young adults in adult education.

#### **Strategies determined to improve adult education participation**

Respondents' opinion on the suitability of possible strategies to improve participation in adult education in the study area was analyzed.

#### **Provision of Civic education on adult education**

It was established that only 8.2% of the adult learners strongly agreed that provision of civic education on adult education in Trans-Nzoia East Sub-county would improve participation in the program. This implied that the use of civic education would be a weak strategy that must be made effective for it to bear the expected results. If well applied civic education is expected to raise the awareness of the adult education program, provide information on the importance of adult education and provide information that will raise the confidence of adults who fail to enroll due to lack of confidence.

The effective application of this strategy needs strong partnership in adult education. Today partnerships are an unavoidable way of cooperation between all relevant parties, within or outside the formal system of education. At the national and county level, as well as at the level of employers and institutions, social partners must be provided with a multiple consumer role; investors, negotiators and promoters of learning. Local level partnerships are essential for complete and efficient implementation of learning strategies in the adult learning centers. These should include public administration and local government offices, county governments, local advisory councils on employment, educational institutions and related services such as information, guidance and counseling,

research centers, enterprises (as part of their corporate social responsibility), public employment services, nongovernmental organizations (especially various interest groups and potential learners).

Possible mechanisms for information flow on adult education to increase awareness include personal contact (such as door-to-door and word-of-mouth recruiting), use of existing social networks that can influence prospective learners' dispositions toward learning such as chiefs' barazas, funerals, church services weddings, workplace posters among others and regional and national level advertisement (radio spots, cinema advertising..) can also raise awareness and influence recruitment.

Measures to raise the confidence of the adult learners through civic education include publicization of the success stories of those who have succeeded through adult education programs, addressing the cultural issues that undermine adult education participation such as encouraging men to accept mixed gender classes and against avoiding mixed age classes.

#### **Provision of Physical facilities and Program support materials in adult education**

It was established that 42.5% of the adult learners strongly agreed that provision of physical facilities and program support materials was a viable strategy in improving participation in adult education in Trans-Nzoia East Sub-county.

This was corroborated by the other respondents of this study as teachers and the Sub-county Director of Adult and Continuing Education (DACE) pointed out the lack of physical facilities and learning materials. It is also consistent with numerous earlier studies. For instance, Ngau (1997) stressed that literacy centers run by government mainly operate in facilities some of which are inappropriate for the adult use. Most adult learners use public facilities such as churches, social halls, primary schools and nursery classrooms. Some of these classes are poorly lit and ventilated. Ayot (1995) and Murai (1985) observed that adults use small and uncomfortable desks especially in classes held in nursery school buildings. There are low level improvised benches with no back support and flat form for writing on. A report published by UNESCO Nairobi office in 2006 cited barriers to participation in adult literacy programs as; cost of learning materials, lack of relevant teaching materials, and lack of centers within reach of most adults, and curriculum that are not relevant to learners' needs.

The government should establish more adult education centers operating on flexible working hours. The centers so built should have adequate classrooms to allow classification of learners by level of study, age, and gender wherever possible. The physical facilities such as classrooms, libraries, toilets should not only be adequate but also kept clean and attractive always. This will boost enrollment, retention and completion rates of the adult learners.

#### **Use of various innovative teaching methods in adult education**

It was found that 42.5% of adult learners strongly agreed that the use of various innovative methods of teaching in adult education was a strategy worthy applying to improve participation in the program. Teachers ought to vary the methods of teaching to make learning attractive, enjoyable and rewarding. These include various types of learning, such as educational trips, use of resource persons, discussions among others.

As a profession, teaching faces decisive changes in the coming decades: teachers become guides, mentors and mediators. Adult education is essentially different from children's education also according to the target groups. Each group, as well as each adult learner in the group, brings various previously acquired knowledge and experience which if accepted and respected contribute to one's motivation to finish a particular program and to continue with education. Quite often that knowledge and experience is greater than the teacher's. Thus, adult learners must be the subject of the educational process which must aim toward fulfilling their needs. The capacity and the confidence to develop and practice open and participatory teaching and learning methods should therefore become an essential professional skill for adult educators.

Adult educators should seek to foster transformative learning within their classes by considering the following: 1. Create a climate that supports transformative learning. Taylor (2000) suggests that teachers need to be "trusting, empathetic, caring, authentic, sincere, and demonstrative of high integrity". They need to provide students with immediate and helpful feedback, employ activities that "promote student autonomy, participation, and collaboration" (Taylor, 1998,) and help them to explore alternative perspectives and engage in problem-solving and critical reflection. 2. Know your students and the types of learning activities that most appeal to. Cranton (2000) suggests that "thinking types" who enjoy logic will appreciate "case studies, debates, critical questioning, and analyses of theoretical perspectives." Those who are uncomfortable with confrontation and having their statements challenged may be more successful when learning occurs in "harmonious groups" in which participants discuss, but do not debate, alternative viewpoints. The experiential learner will enjoy field trips and simulations, and the intuitive learner will appreciate brainstorming and games involving imagination (ibid).

Instruction should be delivered in a more liberating style as argued by different theorists of transformative learning. For example; Paolo Freire (2000) taught Brazilian workers to read by engaging them, through a problem-posing instructional approach, in discussions about working conditions and poor compensation, thereby helping them change their thinking and strive for social change. To Freire, transformative learning is a liberating tool for the oppressed individuals and the society.

The government should employ more trained teachers in adult education and vacate completely from the current staffing norms where each learning center had only one adult teacher. This is expected to optimize the teacher resource in the adult education sector which is in a crisis at the moment. Such teachers should also be paid well since well remunerated teachers are more motivated at work and spend most of their time teaching without worrying how to cater for their financial needs. The action plan must provide adequate measures for the continuous professional development of teachers which will have a positive effect on professional advancement.

#### **Making adult learning practices highly motivating**

It was established that 49.3% of the adult learners strongly agreed that making adult learning practices highly motivating was a suitable strategy for improving participation in adult education in Trans-Nzoia East Sub-county. Motivation is an important factor in learning as it promotes retention and completion rates. It also depends on the methods of teaching and the satisfaction learners get from studying. Learning should thus be supported by adequate

relevant program materials such as journals, periodicals, computers and internet facilities. Knowles (1978), argued that an adult educator should be innovative enough to gauge the needs of the adult groups and prepare teaching and learning resources which are relevant to the needs.

To raise motivation the adult education program should be organized in such a way that it continues to arouse and sustain the interest of learners. It should therefore meet their short term and long term life goals. As already observed, adults may be motivated by a range of factors. Brooks et al (2001) concluded that adults are principally motivated to improve their basic skills for “self-development”, be this personal, social or occupational. Ward and Edwards (2002) found that although learners’ motives for joining classes were diverse, they were most often related to: the practicalities of improving job performance and/or employment prospects, supporting their children’s learning, and moving on to study at a higher level and improving confidence, rather than a simple desire to be more literate or numerate.

#### **Imparting knowledge and skills easily applicable in Life situations**

It was found that 53.4% of adult learners strongly agreed that making knowledge and skills learnt in adult education easily applicable in life situations was expected to improve participation in adult education. Indeed the learners have goals to achieve at the end of their programs and the application of their acquired knowledge and skills would determine whether they enroll for higher levels or not.

The adult education curriculum should lead to individual development and fulfillment and offer skills relevant in the society. The adult learners should be able to demonstrate in practice how the program helped to improve their life conditions through acts like ability to speak in Kiswahili and or English, calculate simple arithmetic or read the bible in the church. Such demonstrations of competency could spur interest in other prospective learners.

The curriculum should also impart the knowledge of various emerging issues in the society to make learners contribute positively to solving societal problems. Relevance of the curriculum with regard to emerging issues was assessed in this study. Teachers’ opinions on the coverage of the emerging issues in the curriculum were analyzed. It emerged that the curriculum satisfactorily provides for information on H.I.V/AIDS, Gender equity, Human rights and Integrity. However, 50% of the teachers opined that they were very unsatisfied with ICT integration in the curriculum. This implied that the curriculum should be redesigned to incorporate ICT, an important aspect of people’s lives today. This is important since it was the finding of this study that adult learners were interested in acquisition of knowledge, employable skills and ICT skills all of which can be met with adequate integration of ICT in the curriculum. More specifically some adult learners enrolled with the objective of learning to operate ICT gadgets like mobile phones and utilize Mpesa services without seeking the help of more competent people who could cheat them off their income.

#### **Empowering adult learners by facilitating access to new income sources**

It was established that 43.8% of adult learners strongly agreed that empowering learners by facilitating access to new income sources was an important strategy of improving participation. The

Directorate of Adult and Continuing Education should integrate financial literacy in the Adult Basic Education and Training Curriculum. This should encompass income-generating programs, skills training and provision of micro-credit facilities to beneficiaries. This could attract and retain more participants in adult education as majority rely on odd jobs to meet the financial needs of their families and support their own studies.

These findings were consistent with the studies in participation in adult education in many European countries which have revealed that adult literacy and basic skill elements are embedded in broader vocational or social and occupational rehabilitation programs (Höghelm, 2011) for their increased success.

Integration of basic literacy and numeracy skills with employable skills leads to opening new sources of income that could generate more money and time for most adults to enroll. The curriculum should thus be designed with content that meets both the academic needs and the income- raising goals of adult learners to meet the objectives of the individual learners, of adult education in the country and the broad national goals of education in Kenya.

### **Recommendations**

These recommendations aimed at offering suggestions to the government policy makers and implementers to improve the adult education participation in Kenya.

1. Adult education program organization should march the unique characteristics of the adult learners. The adult education centers should operate on flexible working schedules convenient to all learners.
2. Civic education should be carried out to sensitize the people on the importance of adult education and build their confidence to enroll in the adult education program.
3. Subsidize farming and offer financial assistance to casual labourers. This would increase the earnings for farmers to pay fees for the education of their own children and release more time for them to participate effectively in adult education.
4. Offer adequate financial support to the adult education program to meet the cost of learning resources, employment and payment of salaries of the teachers. The teachers should be exposed to continuous capacity building to empower them with new knowledge and skills in teaching adult education. The teachers should also be well paid and motivated through other means to maximize their output. Facilities should be expanded to accommodate both male and female learners in separate classrooms.
5. Establish links with other stake holders such as Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Constituency Development Fund (CDF) to realize their increased involvement in financing the adult education programs and whatever support they can give to individual learners.
6. Strengthen the provision of Free Primary Education (FPE) to ensure that young adults at age 15-25 do not compete for places with older adults in adult education.
7. Initiate income generating projects targeting majority of adults and low interest credit facilities to act as incentive for participation in adult education.

## Conclusion

The focus of the study was to assess participation in adult education in Trans-Nzoia East Sub-county and strategies for its improvement. Questions on the characteristics of adult education participants, reasons that encouraged their participation and the barriers to their effective participation were answered. The strategies to improve participation in adult education in the study area and the country at large were determined. Encompassing these aspects in the policy making, organization and implementation of adult education will promote access, quality, equity and effectiveness of adult education programs in Kenya.

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