

# **Learning in the Context of Multiple Responsibilities: Experiences of the University Adult Learners in the Evening Programmes**

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## **Abstract**

*This study examined the experiences of adult learners pursuing master's degree on a part-time basis through the evening programmes at the University of Dar es Salaam. Objectives were to find out how they accomplished their learning activities along with other responsibilities, and establish the perceived impact of those multiple responsibilities on their academic performance and programme completion. A multiple case study design guided the conduct of this qualitative study, which comprised 28 participants from the School of Education (SoED). Data were collected through interviews and documentary review and subjected to thematic analysis. Findings revealed that university adult learners in the evening programmes were learning while committed to other responsibilities such as full-time employment, family and social responsibilities as well as extra-income generating activities. Their experiences revealed that multiple responsibilities adversely affected their academic performance and programme completion, which however, depended also on individual learner's efforts and strategies adopted to cope with the situation.*

**Keywords:** *multiple responsibilities, programme completion, university adult learners,*

## **Introduction**

The need for adult learning in terms of acquiring new knowledge, skills and attitudes has been ever increasing in the contemporary society. This is due to the global changes that are taking place every day along the social, cultural, political and economic aspects, which are largely influenced by the development of science and technology (Yang, Schneller & Roche, 2015). In the recent decades, the role of higher education in fostering development under the philosophy of lifelong learning has been a burning debate in the international discourses. The agenda for the future adopted by the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Adult Education for instance, called for

*International Conference to Celebrate 50 Years of Adult Education in Tanzania*

institutions of formal education from primary to tertiary level to open their doors to adult learners—both women and men, and adapt the programmes and learning conditions that meet their needs (Yang et al., 2015). Emphasis is also in the new global development agenda for sustainable development on the provision of inclusive education to enable upward social mobility, end poverty and foster positive and sustainable change (UN, 2015). In this regard, nations are compelled to ensure and sustain lifelong learning environment.

Tanzania is in the front line in taking different measures to ensure that her people are well equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to cope with the global changes. On this basis, it formulated a national development vision, which envisages a well-educated and learnt society to solve the society's problems by 2025 (URT, 2000). The vision intends to address the challenges of development for the country to compete at both regional and global levels by having skilled and knowledgeable personnel. In implementing such a broad development plan, education and training policies and plans have also been set to ensure education access and training opportunities to all people as a major goal (URT, 2014). In fulfilling this goal, the country has increased learning opportunities to adults in higher learning institutions whereby several online, distance learning and evening programmes have been introduced.

The University of Dar es Salaam in particular, has been offering postgraduate programmes through online and evening modes for those who cannot attend on a regular full-time basis. For instance, School of Education (SoED) offers Master of Arts in Education (MAED) and Master of Educational Management and Administration (MEMA) degree programmes through evening mode. The programmes provide room for professional development to the qualified candidates, particularly adults who have multiple responsibilities. In particular, adult learners engaged in these evening programmes are simultaneously attending other responsibilities such as full-time job commitments, leadership positions, marital roles, family care, domestic activities, religious roles, and other social events unlike those in the regular full-time programmes.

The aforementioned multiple responsibilities are found to result to role conflict and role overload among adult learners as a failure to strike the balance, which largely affects their learning (Kasabo, 2014). They lack enough time to study, fail to pay attention to their studies and in completing their assignments on time (Gatmaintan, 2006). Consequently, they obtain lower grades in their course works and they experience prolonged time in writing their dissertations due

to the part-time classroom attendances and break-ups in the learning process respectively (Darolia, 2014). This context has triggered the interests of the researchers to tape the practical experiences of the university adult learners pursuing master's degree in the evening programmes in a bid to find out the perceived effect of multiple responsibilities in achieving their academic goals in a Tanzanian context. Thus, the study sought to answer the question: How do the university adult learners pursuing master's degree in the evening programmes accomplish their learning activities parallel with other responsibilities, and how do such multiple responsibilities impact on their academic performance and programme completion?

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Analysis of theoretical and empirical perspectives with regard to learning in a context of multiple responsibilities and the possible effects in achieving the academic goals among the adult learners enabled the researchers to establish diverse discourses and terrain of relevant variables that informed and guided this study:

### **Role Stress Theory *cum* Coping with Role Conflict Model**

This study is informed by Role Stress Theory, coupled with a model for coping with role conflict. The former is based on classical role theory with a key tenet that the occupancy of multiple responsibilities creates more demands than one can handle, leading to role overload in terms of insufficient time to meet all demands (Home, 1998). Multiple roles occupancy can also lead to role conflict which explains the clashing demands of several sides. In relation to this study, multiple responsibilities may cause a negative impact on academic performance. Since one role demand may be incompatible with another role then there is possibility of causing conflict between and among the roles. A need to combine this theory with a Model for Coping with Role Conflict by Hall (1972) due to the fact that the Role Stress Theory fails to give solutions on how to cope with challenging roles. The model suggests three types of coping strategies. Type I coping is a structural role redefinition which involves an active attempt to deal directly with the role sender and lessen the conflict by relocating and sharing one's tasks. Type II coping is personal role redefinition whereby a learner changes personal concept of role demands by setting priorities and ensuring that certain demands are always met. Type III coping as a reactive role behaviour entails attempting to improve the quality of role performance without changing the structural or personal definition of one's role since their demands are unchangeable and person's

main task is to find ways to meet them either in a passive or reactive orientation (Raymond, 2015). These perspectives guided the researchers to understand how the university adult learners in the evening programmes were learning while accomplishing other responsibilities.

### **Multiple Responsibilities and their Taxonomies**

Multiple responsibilities have been classified differently. Lenaghan and Sengupta (2007) consider multiple responsibilities as working and studying at the same time. However, Hemmerich (2014) and Sallee (2015) consider multiple responsibilities as professional responsibilities, family responsibilities and academic responsibilities. In a more detailed way, multiple responsibilities are classified as family (marital role, being a parent, domestic duties, childcare and siblings); financial (income generating activities); social (religious and community activities); work responsibilities (employment); and student responsibilities (Filipponi-Berardinelli, 2013; Somuah, 2013). Thus, being an employee on a full-time basis; doing part-time coursework; being a partner or spouse, parent, caregiver, volunteer; and having income generating activities are multiple responsibilities some adult learners compelled to accomplish parallel with learning. From this theorization, multiple responsibilities can be categorized into five—family, financial, social, work and academic responsibilities. Since the university adult learners are engaged differently in those responsibilities, they are expected to have varied experiences as narrated in this study.

### **Learning Barriers in a Context of Multiple Responsibilities**

Adult learners face three categories of barriers:

#### ***Situational barriers***

According to Terrell, as cited in Fairchild (2003), situational barriers refer to the state which parents feel guilt when they are far away from their children. As they fail to forgo this cost, they opt to be with their children. On the same, the age of the children determines the persistence of the learners, women in particular, since it may interrupt their learning. In this case, the evening adult learners who are parents are sometimes compelled to attend their children and sacrifice the time for studies for the sake of children's wellbeing. In the same vein, evening adult learners who are married may, in some instances, have marital conflicts which interfere with their studies. It is

on these grounds their academic performance and programme completions are subject to being negatively impacted.

### ***Dispositional barriers***

Dispositional barriers are related to an increase in roles, demands and time conflicts, which eventually lead to role conflict, role overload and role contagion (Fairchild, 2003). In their totality, they are associated with stress, anxiety and depression. Evening adult learners face role conflict in the sense that a particular learner may be obligated to attend to different roles. One may be required to attend family matters, or the assigned tasks at work, and at the same time required to submit an assignment given by the lecturer which may lead to career compromises. Consequently, role overload or insufficient time to accomplish all the tasks, becomes another challenge thus, difficulties in balancing work, education and family/social matters. ***Institutional***

### ***barriers***

Literature suggests that most universities are ill-equipped to deal with career orientation of adults (Fairchild, 2003). On the same, students' learning support services such as academic guidance, access to information and study materials and counseling services are inadequately put in place. Moreover, office and class hours may not meet the needs of all adult learners who also work and at the same time care for families. All these are at the expense of adult learners who tend to obtain unsatisfactory academic performance, drop out or delay unnecessarily in completing their programme study circles.

### **Adult Learners' Multiple Responsibilities and Academic Performance**

Academic performance of adult learners may be affected both positively and negatively by multiple responsibilities. Some students view juggling work and school roles as impacting them positively especially if the nature of their work is related to school, while others find themselves in a role conflict that negatively impact on their academic aspirations (Lenaghan & Sengupta, 2007). Huie, Winsler and Kitsantas (2014) conducted a study on employment and first-year college students' achievement, finding out the role of self-regulation and motivation among employed adult learners. It was discovered that the increased working hours decreased the overall performance of the learners and vice versa. The same research findings were obtained by Lundberg (2004) in the USA, whereby students who were working more than 30 hours in a week did not perform well as they had lower grades in their courseworks. The same situation was

found to have had resulted to a prolonged time to complete their programmes (Darolia, 2014). In this case, the increased hours at work influence negatively on role balance and consequently on academic performance and programme completion among the adult learners.

In Tanzanian context, most students with multiple responsibilities in open and distance learning experience unsatisfactory academic performance than those in the conventional universities (OUT, 2012). This is attributed to work overload which makes learners feel stressed and unable to perform well in their studies (Haule, 2015). As their academic progress determines the next stage of their studies, their completion time is consequently prolonged and sometimes the programmes are uncompleted (OUT, 2012). This is equally affirmed by Rowlands (2010) who associates the situation with learners' part-time attendances and breaks in the programme. Nonetheless, the study by Huie et al. (2014) offers mixed findings which suggest that students who are better at managing their time, are less affected by the work overload, their academic achievement remaining higher and even completing their programmes in time. Thus, the balance of responsibilities and time management are important coping mechanisms to work overload and role conflict for successful adult learners' academic achievement. However, since the situational and institutional barriers which may also impact on their academic achievements differ from one learner to another, different approaches to address them both individually and collectively ought to be taken into account.

## **Methodology**

This study was conducted at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), particularly in the School of Education, whereby two evening programmes—Master of Arts in Education (MAED) and Master of Educational Management and Administration (MEMA) degree programmes were studied as multiple cases. This design suited well this qualitative study as it enabled the researchers to gain real life experiences of the university adult learners from the two programmes who were actually engaged and affected by studying while fully committed to other responsibilities. A total of 28 participants were involved in this study. Purposively, two SoED management team members were selected by virtue of their academic and administrative functions. To get the best and accurate representation of respondents in the two programmes, quota sampling was applied to select 20 adult learners from two specific quotas of MAED and MEMA, while convenience sampling was used to obtain six lecturers. Data were collected through interviews and documentary review and subjected to thematic analysis. The relevant

categories were inductively developed from the chunk of the obtained data, in relation to the study objectives in question. This was followed by establishing the relationships and patterns of themes and sub-themes which later helped to form a coherent story, discussed in relation to different perspectives and the abstract world of theories.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Based on the main research question set for this study, findings are organized and discussed in the order of the emerged themes.

### **Multiple Responsibilities of the University Adult Learners**

Findings from interviews revealed different multiple responsibilities accomplished parallel by the university adult learners during their master's degree undertaking, which directly impacted on their academic performance, as well as on their programme completion:

#### **Work responsibilities**

Participants revealed that they were committed to different work responsibilities which compelled them to opt for the master's degree in the evening programmes. The information given by the participants revealed that 17 out of the 20 interviewed university adult learners were full-time employees at different capacities and they had no study leave permit from their employers. So, they were supposed to go to work in the morning before attending lectures in the evening. Findings exposed further that some of them were playing key managerial functions in their working places. For instance, one adult learner argued:

I am a District Education Officer (DEO). When I was applying for my study leave, my boss advised me to opt for the evening programme in order to keep my position. This was due to the fact that joining a regular programme would cost me dearly by losing my position as I would be replaced just after six months. I did not want to lose my position, so I opted for this programme.

Nonetheless, it was revealed by one of the SoED management team members that the huge number of potential students in this category was one of the key market opportunities that made

the university introduce the evening programmes to cater for and give an equal opportunity to everyone, as they couldn't manage to enroll in the regular programmes. The staff described:

Evening programmes were introduced because some of our potential clients are working on a full-time basis. They still need to develop their careers but cannot enroll in the regular programmes. So, evening programmes aimed to cater for this group and thus, offer an opportunity to achieve their dreams of pursuing master's degree in a more flexible way

These findings reveal that university adult learners pursuing MEMA and MAED through evening programmes have different responsibilities to accomplish at work along with the role of studying. However, those in managerial positions were more likely to have their academic achievements compromised due to their full-time engagement in managerial functions. On average, adult learners were daily spending more than 8 hours for work responsibilities, while spending only three to four hours for their studies in the evening. The increased working hours were found to have had adverse impact on their academic achievements as well affirmed by Huie, Winsler and Kitsantas (2014). These findings are also supported by a study conducted by Lenaghan and Sengupta (2007), which found out that adult learners with parallel roles of working on a full-time basis while studying were more likely to drop or achieve unsatisfactory results in their studies.

### **Family responsibilities**

Apart from work responsibilities, interviewed adult learners reported that they had family responsibilities, which greatly interfered with their learning. Findings indicated that 15 out of 20 university adult learners in the evening programmes had family responsibilities such as being a mother/father, wife/husband with the roles of taking care of the children and/or a spouse. Apart from being the main care takers of their children, mothers had additional responsibilities of doing house chores like cooking, washing and the alike, which were to be accomplished along with their studies. Impliedly, the findings suggest that being a single parent for instance, made the situation even more difficult as one was compelled to assume the roles of both the mother and father while studying. Thus, the findings imply that the level of the university adult learners' academic achievements was largely determined by the family responsibilities. Gatmaitan (2006), Hemmerich (2014) and Ziems (2017) support these findings by affirming that college adult learners with parental and marital roles tend to have limited time to fulfill the demands of their

studies, ending up with poor academic achievements, prolonged completion time, and sometimes dropping-out as a failure to balance those roles.

### **Social responsibilities**

Apart from work and family responsibilities, the interviews with learners revealed that they were pursuing their master's degrees while engaged in different social responsibilities. The findings indicate that all adult learners in the evening programmes were involved in several social responsibilities. Wedding and funeral ceremonies, kitchen parties and send-off parties happened to be occasional. On the contrary, however, there were other social activities they regularly engaged in, such as religious activities and social functions which consumed much of their time for studies. The more the groups in which one was involved, the more the responsibilities one would perform at the expense of their academic endeavor. These findings are also affirmed by Filipponi-Berardinelli (2013) and Somuah (2013) that adult learners have social responsibilities apart from family, work and studentship responsibilities. Since adult learners are part and parcel of the society, most of their time is consumed by these social responsibilities.

### **Extra income generating activities**

Interviews with adult learners further showed that they had to do different income generating activities parallel with their studies in order to raise income to cater for their needs including tuition fees. Findings also revealed that university adult learners had family and social responsibilities which required their financial support. Thus, they had to pay school fees for their children and for their own studies; pay house rents; support their parents, siblings and other relatives; pay for transport; cater for basic needs such as food, clothes and shelter; clear bills such as electricity, water and television subscriptions; pay for communications, and other different contributions in the their communities.

As such, in order to be able to fulfill all the needs required, their tuition fees being the most costly, adult learners were compelled to find other alternatives of raising their income apart from the salary. Half of them reported to have been engaged in different petty businesses. One of learner amplified further:

I have an extended family. I take care of my brother's children and my young sister who is a single mother. Therefore, I do three different small businesses in order to raise my income to be able to pay for all those needs of my dependents and those of myself.

These findings are in line with Fairchild (2003)'s argument that adult learners have different responsibilities such as supporting dependents, paying school fees, catering for basic needs and paying for different bills. However, the findings imply that having one source of income, mainly the salary, was not enough to meet all the needs, hence the university adult learners were compelled to find other sources of income. The findings also imply that adult learners were more occupied with the income generating activities and ultimately had limited time for their studies as they were less committed to the academic matters. This had a negative impact on their studies in terms of learning and performance and consequently, slow rate of their programmes' completion.

### **Multiple responsibilities and the learning of adult learners**

For the researchers to solicit adequate information that would clearly describe the impact of multiple responsibilities on the university adult learners' academic performance, it was important to rely on the aforementioned multiple responsibilities and examine through interviews how learning of the university adult learners was impacted.

### ***Compromised learning process***

Researchers concentrated first on finding out the effects of multiple responsibilities on learning. It was revealed that there were several effects of multiple responsibilities on adult learners' learning, which included missing or delaying lectures; lacking of concentration during the lecture sessions; lack of enough time to read and do assignments; limited time for library; late submission of assignments; and lack of enough time to prepare for tests and examinations:

### ***Missing and/or late attendance to lectures***

One of the mandatory responsibilities of the university adult learners in the evening programmes is to attend lectures. However, these adult learners reported that they missed some of the lectures and sometimes arrived very late. Data shows that six out of 20 participants missed lectures regularly, mostly due to the reasons associated with their multiple responsibilities. Additionally,

data shows that eight of 20 adult learners attended classes late. Thus, findings revealed that university adult learners missed or came late in the lectures due to work responsibilities, attending meetings; participating in social responsibilities such as funerals; family responsibilities like taking care of sick relatives; and doing extra income generating activities. Missing lectures led to the difficulties in fully and systematically participating in the learning as compared to those who attended. Coming late in the lecture had also implications in catching up things they missed out. These findings imply that majority of the university adult learners in the evening programmes struggled very hardly to attend lectures at 5.00 pm as scheduled, as they did not have permission to leave their working places earlier.

### ***Tiredness and lack of concentration in the lectures***

Interviews with the university adult learners revealed that they were attending classes in a tired situation as they were fully committed to work, family and social responsibilities for most of the day time. Data shows that 17 out of 20 participants confirmed to be so tired during the lecture sessions, which made them loose focus in their learning. One of them suggested:

I had a challenge of coming to the lectures on time. Apart from the whole day work commitments, it was quite horrible and hectic to arrive at the university due to the traffic jams in the city. So, I always felt myself so tired and sleepy during the lecture sessions. It normally took an hour to gain momentum and get back to the lecture.

In corroborating what was testified by the adult learners, all the six lecturers and one of the SoED management team members confirmed the same through interviews:

Most of these adult learners in the evening programmes are full-time employed workers in different institutions. They have to go to work. Teachers for example, have to teach and do all the responsibilities before they attend lectures in the evening. Of course, most of the time some of them are observed to be tired.

These findings reveal that most of the university adult learners doing evening programmes were employed. In this case, they were occupied at their work places from the morning to evening before coming to the university, leave alone their family matters and financial challenges reported earlier. This implies that when they arrived at the university in the evening, they attended lectures while tired and with lack of focus and concentration. As the result, some of them tended to sleep unconsciously while the lectures were underway. Thus, it was too difficult under these circumstances to grasp what was taught, which in turn affected their performance.

Gatmaintan (2006) argues that adult learners fail to concentrate on their studies as they become overwhelmed with multiple responsibilities both at home and work. These findings lead to a suggestion that personal role definition such as prioritizing activities and balancing working hours are an important coping mechanism in accomplish their learning activities.

### ***Limited time for personal study and library search***

Interviews with the university adult learners revealed that they had very limited time for personal studies and further reading in the library due to the multiple responsibilities they occupied. Majority of them reported that they never went to the library, and only few had visited it occasionally during the preparations for university examinations. They reported that their limited time for library was caused by multiple responsibilities. Again, they were supposed to read materials that were found in the library, at the section where it was usually closed at 6:30 pm. Thus, it was very difficult for the majority of adult learners to accomplish the given assignments and attempt exams diligently as they largely depended on the lecture notes, which were not well detailed. On the other hand, it was even more difficult for them to afford writing and complete their research projects. One of the adult learners reported:

As a secondary school teacher, I am fully engaged in teaching, preparing lessons, class notes, exercises, tests, exams, and marking. I used to do my assignments based on the notes given by the lecturers without further reading. There was no time for library as I used to come at the university in the late hours just to attend lectures. Reliable and easy access to online materials in our library could help us read online within our limited time.

These findings imply that adult learners who were expected to use the library facilities effectively did not get time to do so due to the dispositional barriers as their roles and demands increased and compromised their learning. Further, the institutional barrier of lacking reliable and easy access to online library services increased the likelihood of unsatisfactory academic performance.

### ***Limited time to accomplish personal and group assignments***

It was revealed that majority were not able to do all the given assignments on time and by themselves as they were too busy at work, at home, and in other social and extra income generating activities. Thus, they could even completely fail to participate in group assignments. During submission of group assignments, they could just ask for their names to be added in the list as revealed here:

I used to do my assignments under pressure because of time constraint. As an employed teacher, I am fully engaged in teaching before I come to the lectures. So, I used to do my assignments basing on the notes given by the lecturers without consulting further resources, as the time was too limited to find other relevant materials. It sometimes compelled me to ask my colleagues do the group works and include my name in the list (university adult learner, MAED).

The revealed malpractice of doing assignments on behalf of others has a negative impact in terms of the future competences of the graduates. Yet, the university adult learners revealed that some of them did not meet the set deadlines for submission of the assignment because they failed to complete on time due to their family, work and social responsibilities. So, they had to ask for an extension of the submission dates. One of the adult learners had this to say:

I fail to finish assignments on time since the time I am supposed to do the assignment is the same time I am at work. I have only few hours to do the assignments at the university before lectures. We finish lectures around 8.00pm so, I get home very late and family responsibilities are there to be done. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to finish all the assignments on time and so, even my performance in some assignments is not good (Adult learner, MEMA).

The findings show that adult learners in the evening programmes have limited time to do their assignments such as writing term papers, seminar presentations, book reviews, and group works. This was due to the fact that they had other responsibilities such as family and work responsibilities. Hence, they had to do the assignments after lectures from 8.00 pm while at the same time they were needed at home to attend other family responsibilities. Sometimes, they had to sacrifice their sleep in order to do assignments at night or during weekends. Their failure to accomplish the given assignments on time resulted in the accumulation of more assignments. These dispositional barriers compelled adult learners to do their assignments under pressure because of limited time and consequently performed far below their expectations.

### ***Compromised adult learners' academic performance***

It has been established in this paper that learning among the university adult learners in the evening programmes was adversely affected by their multiple responsibilities. Thus, they had limited time for lecture attendance, personal and group assignments and personal reading and library search. Consequently, they had to submit assignments late, come late to the lectures, and miss some of the lectures. All of these together had implications for their academic performance. However, their academic performance differed from one individual to another depending on

one's ability to manage time and balance responsibilities. Thus, both the low grades and high grades among adult learners were recorded.

### ***Low versus high grades among the university adult learners***

Overall data on academic performance of all 20 university adult learners of the first and second year included in the study revealed that there were a total of eight As, 39 B<sup>+</sup>s, 49 B<sup>-</sup>s and four Cs for their first semester. Data indicates that B<sup>-</sup>s were dominant as compared to other grades in their overall performance. Additionally, about 75% of all the university adult learners in the evening programmes had at least two or more B<sup>-</sup>s in their performance, while four Cs were also recorded. The latter grade C implies that there were adult learners who completely failed in some of their courses and they had to do supplementary examinations or even carry forward the course to the next academic year. One of the university adult learners with a record of low grades had this to affirm:

I had a lot of responsibilities which stressed and confused me a lot. Coupled with limited time, I was compelled to do each and everything under pressure. As a result, I failed to satisfactorily do my assignments, tests and exams. Overall, my performance is not impressive as I obtained four B<sup>-</sup>s, and two Cs, of which I also carried one in the second year after supplementary exams (adult learner, MEMA).

These findings suggest that the university adult learners were so much engaged in other responsibilities to the extent of not being able to do well in their studies and ultimately achieved unsatisfactory performance, particularly in their first semester. The findings are in line with the assumptions of Role Stress Theory that the occupancy of multiple responsibilities creates more demands than one can handle, leading to role overload which is insufficient time to meet all the demands (Home, 1998). Furthermore, Lundberg (2004) posits that students who are working more than 30 hours in a week, do not perform well academically and they usually score lower grades in their course works. Other researchers supporting the finding of this study include Huie, Winsler and Kitsantas (2014), Lenaghan and Sengupta (2007) who argued that the increased working hours decrease the overall GPA, which was clearly evident in the current study.

Nonetheless, other university adult learners in the evening programmes revealed during interviews that they still scored high grades (As and B<sup>+</sup>s) despite their multiple responsibilities. They shared their experiences of perceiving multiple responsibilities positively as challenges to address. They further revealed that their multiple responsibilities gave them a motive to strive for

achieving higher in their learning targets, hence used effectively all the little time they had. Thus, students who were better at managing their time were less likely to delay or miss lectures, while at the same time, having their other responsibilities well accomplished. It signifies their level of reactive role behaviour of improving the quality of roles performance without changing the structural or personal demands. According to the Model for Coping with Role Conflict, it was an important mechanism that enabled them balance their multiple responsibilities, which eventually gave them good academic results. Furthermore, the findings imply that having self-determination and positive attitude is essential for adult learners in dealing with multiple responsibilities while studying. The key tenets of Role Expansion Theory also support these findings as they suggest role multiplicity as beneficial to an individual since it can lead to positive feelings about one's self-perception and an increase in one's status (Fluehr, 2013). Moreover, Nordenmark (2004) argues further that the increasing involvement in social roles, students develop a feeling of high gratitude as it provides them with greater meaning of life and more control over life situations.

### **Dynamics of the adult learners' academic performance in different semesters**

It was revealed that their academic performance varied with time. This was the case for the second year adult learners who had already completed their coursework for two semesters. Thus, researchers were interested in establishing changes in their performance across the two semesters.

Table 1 illustrates further in a tabular form:

*Table 1: Second Year University Adult Learners' Academic Performance*

Participants	Grades for the First Semester				Grades for the Second Semester			
	A	B <sup>+</sup>	B	C	A	B <sup>+</sup>	B	C
1 <sup>st</sup> Interviewee	1	4	-	-	3	1	1	-
2 <sup>nd</sup> Interviewee	-	1	2	2	2	1	2	-
3 <sup>rd</sup> Interviewee	2	1	2	-	4	1	-	-
4 <sup>th</sup> Interviewee	-	3	1	1	1	4	-	-
5 <sup>th</sup> Interviewee	-	1	4	-	1	4	-	-
6 <sup>th</sup> Interviewee	-	1	4	-	-	2	3	-
7 <sup>th</sup> Interviewee	-	5	-	-	-	5	-	-
8 <sup>th</sup> Interviewee	1	4	-	-	2	2	1	-
9 <sup>th</sup> Interviewee	-	3	2	-	1	3	1	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Field Data (2019)

Table 1 shows the academic performance of all nine second year university adult learners (first semester and second semester in their comparison), among those who were interviewed. Among the second year adult learners, they had an overall performance of 4 As, 23 B<sup>+</sup>s, 15 B<sup>-</sup>s and 3 Cs in the first semester as compared to the second semester whereby 14 As, 23 B<sup>+</sup>s and 8 B<sup>-</sup>s were obtained. They reported that the first semester was more of familiarizing with the new environment. The majority lost their focus on academic matters and eventually ended up scoring low grades in the first semester. Nonetheless, it was also discovered that in the second semester, they were more settled and experienced to face most of the challenges coming on their way. Thus, their performance was positively improved as revealed in Table 1. One of the university adult learners argued:

In the first semester, I was in a total dilemma as I was trying to adapt to the new schooling environment while adjusting myself at work. So, the performance was not good. I got one B<sup>+</sup>, two B<sup>-</sup>s and two Cs. In the second semester, I devised some studying strategies and improved my performance to two As, one B<sup>+</sup> and two B<sup>-</sup>s (university adult learner, MAED).

These findings imply that there was an increase in the number of higher grades and a decrease in number of lower grades in the second semester when compared to the first semester. Therefore, the GPAs of the evening adult learners were mostly affected by the lower grades of the first semester. These findings suggest that their lower performance in the first semester was due to the disorienting dilemma as well put by Christie, Carey, Roberson and Grainger (2015).

### **Delayed programme completion among learners**

Through interviews and review of Graduation Books and UDSM Facts and Figures, researchers established a trend of evening programmes' completion among the university adult learners from the school of education. Specifically, information of those who completed their evening programmes in each academic year was extracted as presented in Table 2 and analysed thereafter:

Table 2: *Trend of Adult Learners' Completion in the Evening Programmes (2013-2019)*

Academic year	Registered A/learners	A/learners Graduated in time	Percentage	A/learners Graduated beyond time	Percentage	A/learners failed to Graduate until 2019	Percentage
MAED Evening Programme							

2011/12	122	-	-	83	68%	39	32%
2012/13	76	13	17%	30	39%	33	43%
2013/14	49	1	2%	34	69%	14	29%
2014/15	20	-	-	14	70%	6	30%
2015/16	11	-	-	5	46%	6	54%
2016/17	7	-	-	1	14%	6	86%
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>37%</b>
MAMA Evening Programme							
2014/15	6	-	-	5	83%	1	17%
2015/16	25	2	8%	8	32%	15	60%
2016/17	7	-	-	3	43%	4	57%
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>53%</b>

Source: UDSM Graduation Books (2013-2019) & UDSM Facts and Figures (2011/12-2016/17)

Table 2 shows a total of 285 university adult learners who were registered in the MAED evening programme from the academic year 2011/12 to 2016/17, and 38 adult learners in the MEMA evening programme from 2014/15 to 2016/17. In principle, normal programme completion time for all evening programmes is 24 months. However, among the MAED registered adult learners, only 14 (5%) were able to complete their studies in time, while 167 (59%) completed their studies beyond the required time. In addition, about 104 (37%) did not complete their studies until 2019. For MEMA evening programme, only 2 (5%) were able to complete their studies in the required time, 16 (42%) completed their studies beyond the required time, and about 20 (53%) adult learners were not able to complete their studies until 2019.

The findings as presented in Table 2 explicitly suggest that in 2011/2012, 2014/2015, 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 intakes, no adult learner was able to complete the programme within the specified period. However, in 2012/2013 intake, only 13 (17%) completed the programme in time, and in 2013/2014 intake, only 1 (2%) of the adult learners completed the programme in time. Overall, adult learners in MAED evening programme took about three to six years to complete their programme. This was confirmed during the interviews that multiple responsibilities caused such a delay among many. Consequently, such a prolonged completion time demoralized them in their learning, while their respective supervisors felt overloaded by the big number of students as in each year they were given new students to supervise. Unusually, other potential adult learners who wanted to join the programme and those who were newly registered in the programme had the perception that three to six years was the normal timeframe for one to complete the programme.

These findings influenced the researchers to further understand other reasons than multiple responsibilities that made the adult learners in the evening programmes not to complete their programmes in time. Data obtained through interviews revealed that most adult learners in the evening programmes were more engaged in their academic matters during the time of course work because there were formal schedules and strict deadlines which compelled them to attend lectures, study and do the given assignments, tests and university examinations. However, during the interviews, adult learners reported that the problem started in the second year when they were given own time to write their proposals, do the research and write the research reports. It was revealed that most of them went back to their other responsibilities completely and gave the research work a second priority. This trend affected their completion time as well supported by Darolia (2014) who found out in the USA that students who use most of their time for work activities, end up prolonging the time to complete their degrees. Also Rowlands (2010) supports the findings of this study by arguing that adult learners take a long time to complete their degree programmes due to part-time attendances and breaks in their education cycles because of multiple responsibilities.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Adult learners in the evening programmes were heavily occupied with multiple responsibilities including work, social, family, and extra-income generating activities. These multiple responsibilities adversely affected their academic performance and programme completion in the evening programmes, but this depended on individual learner's efforts and strategies adopted to cope with the situation. In addition, several situational, dispositional and institutional barriers amidst the multiple responsibilities of the university adult learners who also lacked proper coping mechanisms tended to impact even more negatively on their academic performance and programmes' completion. Therefore, establishment of learning support survives and reliable access to materials through online platforms is strongly recommended so as to facilitate easy learning among the university adult learners. In particular, the study recommends for academic guidance services to adult learners so as to enable them make right and informed decisions in planning and balancing their multiple responsibilities.

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