

Investigating the Implications of Sustainable Adult Education and Continuous Learning for the UK Economy from the Perspective of the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education

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INTRODUCTION

The ability to foster adult education and lifelong learning under the existing economic environments is crucial in building a diverse, strong, and effective workforce (Slattery, 2024). Therefore, it helps to enhance national competitiveness and progress in the sphere of financial preparedness. New opportunities and threats in the globalised marketplace and moving up the maturity curve of the most dynamic technologies compel a far more profound process of re-embedding the understanding of the requirements for adult education, stating that learning skills, credits, and career mobility throughout life are vital. More to the point, quality adult education for sustainable human resource capacity enshrines the workforce's capacity to adapt to emerging technologies and economic dynamism, hence making the workforce re-employable and contributing to economic stability and growth, as postulated by Gleason (2018). The purpose of this research will be to discuss the manifestations of sustainable adult education and lifelong learning for the economy of the United Kingdom. This research draws its presumptions from the policies formulated by the United Kingdom Ministry of Labor and Education. It reflects on how the educational paradigms of the said ministries inform the dynamics of the labor market, economic productivity, and socio-economic mobility. This confirms that there is a great necessity to articulate the direct and indirect economic advantages of sound frameworks for adult education and evaluate policy efficacy in the current approach to lifelong learning.

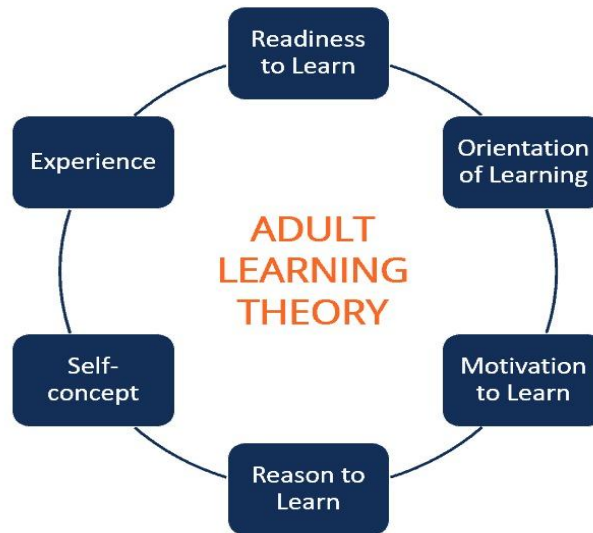
This study's importance is broad in scope, covering both theoretical and practical dimensions of education and economic policy. On a theoretical note, it contributes to the enhancement of the intellectual debate on the relationship between education and financial resilience. On a practical note, it should inform policy formulation and adjustment by providing empirical insight into the effectiveness of current educational strategies. Through adult education programs, policymakers offer a unique opportunity to combat skill shortages while augmenting job satisfaction for workers and extending the length of stints with their employers (Kochan and Dyer., 2020). This paper also seeks to deepen the comprehension of continuous learning as a tool for economic inequality reduction on the way to inclusive economic growth. The findings would, therefore, directly impact the basis of educational policy, labor market strategies, and broader economic planning to be relevant to changing expectations in the global economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Frameworks

The relationship between education and lifelong learning and their impact on some kind of economic outcomes is clearly demonstrated by several credible theoretical frameworks that prove the transforming role of lifelong learning in monetary terms for the individual and the nation as a whole. As Becker (2009) puts it, the Human Capital Theory establishes education and training investments as necessary prescriptions for increasing the productivity of workers and, hence, the general productivity of the economy. It leans on the importance of enhanced levels of education and skills improvement in raising an individual's economic value, consequently boosting productivity and growth at the national level. Further, the idea of HCT is developed in the Lifelong Learning Theory, which claims that continuous learning and development of knowledge are indispensable conditions for maintaining employability and adaptation within a shorter period to the quickly changing technological and economic conditions (Field, 2000). The theory focuses on the need for more continuing learning as one of the critical aspects of workforce development that can fully cater to the changing or transient needs in the global economy to reduce associated economic transition risks.

Another vital model related to this is the Learning Economy framework by Lundvall and Johnson (1994), which describes the economy as a medium comprised of never-ending processes associated with learning. In this scenario, companies that can learn new things faster and put that knowledge to use enjoy a substantial competitive edge as business organizations. This framework implies that nations' economic success has gradually shifted to depend on their abilities to learn and be innovative. Adult learning is one basis of the perpetual learning environment (Rothwell, 2020). All these theories underline the vital role of education in economic resilience and adaptability.



Source: Puiu, 2023

Figure 1: Adult Learning Theory

These principles underlie perhaps one of the soundest theoretical bases for examining how sustainable adult education and lifelong learning policy may be applied to economic gain and, when good educational policy and practice are practical, to optimize economic growth and stability.

Previous Studies

Remarkable research has been conducted on the assessment and impacts of adult education and lifelong learning on economic development, resulting in outstanding findings regarding multifaceted benefits. Necessary research conducted by Jenkins et al. (2003) on longitudinal data demonstrated that adult learning is closely associated with higher wages and better chances of job placement, thus verifying the Human Capital Theory's postulates. Studying the outcomes, they discovered that even low attainment through adult education could provide people with a 5-10% in boost their earnings so that tangible economic returns had been proven to flow from lifelong learning. These results supported Rabirot (2023) early indication that adult learning linked to further education has a personal effect on returning positive economic returns and social benefits in terms of reduced welfare burdens and increased civic participation— however variably realized. These results suggest that adult education can play a vital role in engendering people who are economically more independent and socially responsible.

According to Boeren's (2016) research, the most prized key to economic resilience is the adaptability possessed by the workforce in facing technological changes. This is simply attributed to life and extended learning and, of necessity, continual professional programs for workers, enabling one to face and follow the vision of technological advancement while maintaining his employability and productivity. This research contributes to the Learning Economy framework, which holds that "more fundamentally, firms and workers can learn quickly and adapt, which will increasingly determine economic success in countries that are organized around knowledge." For instance, such policy impact is found in studies in the case of the OECD (Guner, 2017), where it is indicated that well-designed adult education programs backed by sound policies lead to more excellent labor market outcomes. The OECD analysis emphasizes the integration of the education

policy and the labor market's demands in a way that would allow for maximum economic returns from adult learning (Mikulec and Guimarães., 2023). The results also advocate policies that make learning accessible to all adults, especially those adult learners at economic risk of displacement due to changes in industry and technology.

Concerning the effects of adult education on health, crime, and the intergenerational benefits of schooling, McMahon (2009) contributed functional analysis regarding the externalities. Hence, his findings state that although adult learning is costly in terms of money, it benefits societal accruals that are far higher than the costs and, therefore, presents an excellent economic case to have significant investments from the government and private sectors in adult learning programs. These works of research, though separate in their ways and methodologies, go a long way together to explain the breadth and scope of the impact of adult education and lifelong learning on any economy. Not only do these studies epitomize the benefit of imparting this education to individuals for higher levels of income and job retention, but they also represent other significant gains for societies in general and economies in particular, such as social cohesion, less public spending on welfare, and a more dynamic, adaptable workforce. Research that provides such a critical underpinning to inform advocacy efforts fosters policy improvements and investments in lifelong learning that strategically meet the set objectives of economic policymakers and institutions.

Gaps in Literature

Although a body of evidence exists in which adult education relates to economic achievements, gaps in substantially understanding how individual experiences and policy frameworks interact in adult education still subsist. Very few studies discuss learners' subjective experiences vis-à-vis their feelings on how continuous learning influences both work life and personal life. These are essential narratives to understand when creating educational programs that speak to the needs and desires of adult learners. Secondly, though quantitative data are rife about the economic impacts of adult education, the qualitative analyses that would consider the intricacies involved in educational provision across different demographic groups have not been developed. Such would provide better insights regarding the effectiveness of policies taken over diverse socio-economic, age, and cultural spectrums resulting in a more detailed account of policy success and areas that needed improvement.

There is a missing element of available longitudinal qualitative studies when considering tracking changes over time in learners' characteristics and economic conditions. Such longitudinal insights are essential for measuring the long-term effectiveness of programs of adult education and their flexibility in comparison to dynamic economic conditions (Martin et al., 2021). To some extent, the current paper will try to fill these voids by engaging qualitative approaches to research the detailed impacts of adult education policies and by capturing the lived experiences of adult learners toward a better understanding of how education shapes economic stability and personal development across time.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This qualitative paradigm study examines what sustainable adult education and lifelong learning would mean to the UK economy. The chosen methodologies include semi-structured interviewing for case studies, which will allow deep investigation of individual and collective experiences and perceptions of adult education. This will assist in analysing qualitative ramifications of educational policies and economic results that would otherwise be evidenced by the quantitative numbers only.

The semi-structured interviews will be conducted with all varieties of adult learners, such as working professionals, parents returning to education, stay-at-home mothers, policymakers, and educators from different parts of the United Kingdom. This format is beneficial because it has the freedom of open-ended questions and the direction of predetermined questions for more consistency in the interviews while maintaining the specifics of a person's answer, which can bring richer analysis to the forefront (Brett and Wheeler, 2021).

In addition to the interviews, case studies will be employed to describe and explicate specific education programs and their economic effects. These shall be chosen in a way that they relate to the topics of concern, both sustainable education and workforce development, and provide a background as to why or how some of the measures were implemented or could not be within the offered economy and social setting. This increases the credibility of the research conclusions and gives a hierarchical perspective of the ongoing processes in adult education and their economic impacts.

Sample Selection

A purposive sampling method will be applied to this dataset to derive a rich and relevant one for qualitative analysis. The participants in this study will be policymakers working at the UK Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education, together with practitioners involved in continuous and lifelong learning programs for adult education. It will also involve adult learners from diverse professional sectors and demographic categories to encompass different experiences and outcomes. Where possible, priority will be given to those who have influenced or engaged directly in implementing policies or programs at whatever jurisdiction that touches on adult education. What does this attempt? This will bring together a comprehensive range of views on the implementation and impact of adult education initiatives within the UK's economic context.

Table 1: Demographic Breakdown of Interview Participants

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Occupation	Highest Level of Education	Region
P1	34	Female	Teacher	Bachelor's	London
P2	45	Male	Engineer	Master's	Midlands
P3	29	Female	Nurse	Bachelor's	Scotland
P4	53	Female	Manager	Doctorate	Wales
P5	41	Male	Consultant	Master's	North West
P6	38	Female	Technician	Associate	South East
P7	47	Male	Administrator	Bachelor's	London
P8	50	Female	Analyst	Master's	Midlands

Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups form the central data collection methods in this study because of their effectiveness in enabling the collection of very detailed data of a qualitative nature. They will be guided by questions that are both open-ended and more directed. Therefore, the guided format ensures the exploration of individual perspectives in more depth while ensuring that all the topics at hand are covered. All interviews, by participants' informed consent, shall have their responses audio-recorded to provide verbatim transcripts for further detailed analysis. There is also the possibility of conducting focus group discussions that serve more of a view of what the group thinks and sharing ideas among the other stakeholders like educators, learners, and policymakers. Typically, the focus group will capture from 5 to 8 participants with themes taking those available in the existing literature. A moderator will facilitate these discussions to encourage interaction and ensure all voices are heard.

Conducting focus group research is fruitful for scenarios where various opinions may appear, indicating the critical areas of opinion convergence or divergence among the targeted stakeholders (Ballantyne et al., 2020). These will be complemented with data from note-taking and document analysis; information in policy papers, reports, and educational material will be used to confirm data gathered with the interviews and focus group.

Data Analysis

The data from the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document review will be analyzed thematically because this flexible approach highlights the themes embraced in the gathered qualitative data. The analysis methods are guided by the six-step method for thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke to promote the systematic analysis of the collected data (Naeem et al., 2023).

- **Familiarization:** This includes developing a typed record of all interviews conducted, reading the data, getting acquainted with the data, and even recording first impressions (Peel, 2020).
- **Coding:** The information will be coded in an organized manner, where the text will be broken into chunks that are categorized using small, meaningful labeling.
- **Generating Themes:** Codes will be taken together into potential groupings, bringing together all the data related to each potential theme (Terry and Hayfield., 2020).
- **Reviewing Themes:** Themes will be checked against the dataset to ensure they present a coherent pattern and represent the dataset.
- **Defining and Naming Themes:** Each theme will be refined and clearly defined.

- **Producing the report:** Weaving an analytic narrative with bright data extracts and their context within the theoretical and empirical literature.

Such a structured approach will ensure a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how sustainable adult education impacts economic outcomes in the UK.

FINDINGS

Presentation of Data

The thematic analysis of the qualitative data from interviews and focus groups highlights vital themes that underscore complex interaction among adult education and economic outcomes.

Enhanced Employability and Economic Stability: Quite a few learners report that applications for remaining engaged in lifelong learning are close to their hearts and are directly parallel to the job and upward mobility in job longevity. For example, one mid-career professional expressed, "Upon finishing advanced courses in digital marketing, I not only received a promotion but was much more confident in securing my future in this job." This seemed to reflect opinions from a variety of receiving sectors.

Barriers to Access: Many positive impacts were highlighted, and several participants pinpointed some barriers to effective participation in adult education: financial constraints, time scarcity, and information sameness about available programs. A policymaker explained, "There's a gap between the availability of programs and awareness among potential participants. We must bridge this gap to fully harness the economic benefits of adult learning."

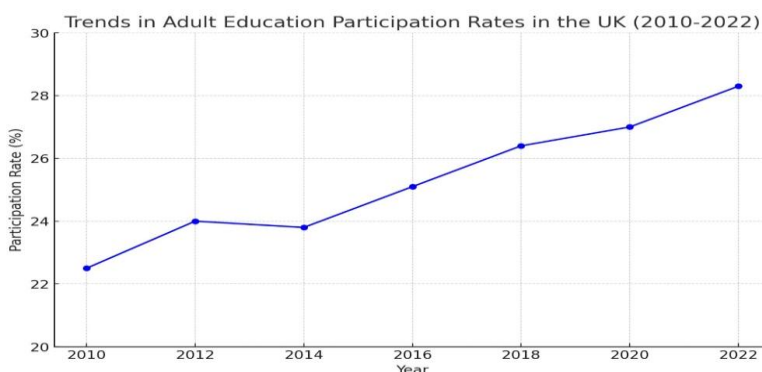
Policy Impact on Learning Opportunities: Stakeholders representing educational and governmental sectors discuss how policy changes can contribute to making adult education programming rather than just practical (Benavot et al., 2022). "Effective policy is not just about funding; it's about creating an ecosystem that supports lifelong learning at all levels," said a representative from the Ministry of Education.

Social and Cultural Implications: The data provided a significant gift: Continuous and lifelong learning leads to a more informed and engaged citizenry. "Learning later in life has not just advanced my career but has profoundly enriched my personal life and social interactions," one focus group participant reported.

Such stories, because direct quotes from participants prompt them, provide rich, textured understandings of what adult education does for learners and the broader economic landscape. They emphasize the role of lifelong learning in underpinning financial stability and highlighting potential areas for policy to multiply these benefits.

Themes Identified

Important themes have emerged from data analysis from semi-structured interviews and focus groups that pinpoint and explain nuanced thematic/inter-relational rich dynamics of adult education with its economic implications.



Source: [explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk.](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/), (2023)

Figure 2: Trends in Adult Education Participation Rates in the UK (2010-2022)

Such themes include thoughts under "economic empowerment through skill enhancement," "institutional barriers to education," "the role of policy in facilitating lifelong learning," and "the broader socio-cultural benefits of adult education."

Economic Empowerment through Skill Enhancement: From the theoretical underpinning of human capital theory to the perception of investments in education and skills-uplift program enhancements, one dominant trend that emerged from the data was the direct relation between adult education and enhanced economic stability and improved prospects. Participants often cited that acquiring new skills or updates to their current skills had provided better jobs, including promotions and higher wages. For instance, one respondent said, "After certification in project management, I was able to land a well-paying job with considerably brighter advancement prospects in the long run."

Institutional barriers to education: Much as there were positive results in programs in adult education, a couple of obstacles have been noted again—from financial constraints and lack of time to lack of information on such a service. It resonates with identified gaps within the literature where such institutional and systemic barriers are seen as significant challenges to stakeholders in realizing fully their economic development initiatives through adult education (Costan et al., 2021).

Policy to enable lifelong learning: It is nearly the same as the Learning Economy framework already highlighted, setting an imperative on ongoing education to keep economic competitiveness. According to policymakers and the education fraternity, these policies have an immense role in developing and creating a suitable environment for engaging in lifelong learning (DeSantis, 2020). Changes that most policymakers and participants view as necessary within the current policies for changes in re-form to favor adult learners include changes in financial issues, availability of programs, and programs that are in tune with the labor market requirements. "Policy interventions that ameliorate financial barriers and offer greater levels of support to part-time learners could simply transform participation rates," responded one of the policymakers.

The Broader Sociocultural Benefits of Adult Education: Beyond economic benefits, adult education contributes to societal well-being by fostering greater civic engagement, social inclusion, and cultural awareness (Faradova, 2020). This theme supports the broader implications discussed in the literature, where adult education is seen as a social transformation and cohesion tool. Those interviewed revealed that new skills and knowledge they learn in life serve to make their professional life better, personal development richer, and a better social and life interaction experience. An in-depth statement to this end is the view shared by a participant in a focus group on how continuing my education has made me a more informed citizen and active participant in my community.

These themes show the multi-dimensional reach of adult education upon both the individual and the broader economy. They corroborate theories discussed in the literature review and specify a dynamic interrelation between education, economic outcomes, and social development. The latter findings assimilate and underline that policy interventions, presented to bring lifetime learning effects on the economy, necessarily have to be sensitive to the very diverse needs and obstacles of adult study to maximize benefits to the whole economy. This thematic analysis will contribute to the body of knowledge that existed at a given point and keep the ways open to further research to explore the longitudinal impacts of those educational practices.

DISCUSSION

The implications of sustainable adult education and lifelong learning for the developed economy in the UK shall be addressed in this inquiry as a substantive analysis of the initially outcomes (Sterling, 2021). The research was conducted to discover how these educational practices influenced economic resilience, adaptability, and the overall socio-economic landscape. It thus drew from the theoretical frameworks of the human capital theory and the model of the learning economy. The findings confirmed an association between adult education and improved employability and job mobility; therefore, this was taken as a direct confirmation of the assumptions of Human Capital Theory that education is a critical investment for economic productivity and personal career success. This parallels the study's aim to portray the economic benefits of lifelong learning. Participants said that, after participating in the adult learning programs, they started feeling more secure about their jobs and taking advantage of more career-enhancement prospects—the theoretical principles were operationalized. The study also diagnosed significant barriers that would inhibit any effective practice of participation in adult education programs, particularly in economic terms, time, and information. Consequently, if this order is fulfilled, the policy would have to be improved significantly to deliver adult education programs in a way that could make them accessible and relevant to a broad and diverse workforce. This aspect of the findings critically informs the goal of assessing

policy effectiveness, suggesting that while the current policies are providing some support for adult education, there still exist considerable gaps in accessibility and information distribution that could be closed to maximize participation and its associated benefits.

It was noted in discussions on policy implications that effective adult education involves not just the availability of the programs but also depend—structures supporting lifelong learning. This is quite relevant to the study's objective of viewing policy's role in adult education. The findings suggest that the data garnered needed to be dynamic and responsive policy frameworks while at the same time ensuring that the adaptation to changes in educational and economic needs is consistent in fostering a resilient and adaptively strong workforce.

These findings, therefore, provide a firm base for a strong argument that indicates the crucial nature of sustainable adult education and lifelong learning. Moving the debate from the desirability of such benefits, viz., policy intervention allows these benefits, so it is a critical enabler for such benefits into the policy interventions that will remove barriers and enhance the efficiency of adult learning programs.

The implication of such findings and knowledge is vital in understanding how adult education is linked with economic imperatives and social policies, contributing to the purpose of the study in enriching discourse in education and economic development (Faradova, 2020). These influences adult education suitable for the holder and life-long learning go to the base of economic metrics and workforce development, two indispensable levers for feeding a post-crisis, resilient economy (Huey Jr, 2022). Backing this fact up, qualitative data from this study overtly co-leads to these educational initiatives driving up the earning and employability of individuals: two significant metrics that directly influence economic/gross growth.

They raise their productivity and adaptability to a dynamic labor market because they are endowed with new or updated skills. This enhances individual economic outcomes and raises national productivity towards achieving macroeconomic stability and growth. Lifelong learning enables workforce development by ensuring that the workforce's skills are up to date and that the workforce can sail and adapt to changes in technologies and markets (Sogor, 2021).

It reduces associated economic costs of underemployment and unemployment and avoids risks related to skills obsolescence. Therefore, strategic integration of adult education into workforce development plans can be considered an investment in the future economic setting that guarantees not only a skilled workforce but one that is versatile enough to sustain economic momentum in a climate of changes and challenges on the global scale.

These findings point towards several focused policy changes to increase the effectiveness of adult education systems in the UK and generate maximum economic and social impacts from these systems. On the first line, the research suggests that adult education programs lack sufficient funding and need more subsidies.

Funding would relieve individuals, particularly in the low-income ranks, of the financial cost (Ikilezi et al., 2021), this would lead to the democratization of access through the chances of lifelong learning to ensure that increased numbers of persons participate no matter their ability to pay, which could be due to eradicating prejudice and discrimination level in the society. The other shows that flexible learning schedules and embracing part-time student packages would play a very significant role in ensuring that increased numbers of participants among adults in paid and unpaid employment with family responsibilities take place". Policies encouraging employers to facilitate continuous learning could either do so through flexible work arrangements or co-financed training (Dubel and Pawłowska., 2020).

Furthermore, better information dissemination on the available adult learning opportunities is direly needed. Here, both government and educational institutions should join hands in full-fledged awareness campaigns through digital platforms and physically by going into communities so that information on what is available reaches every niche of society, with particular emphasis on the underserved.

These policy changes will help mitigate some of the policy barriers indicated in this study. Still, perhaps they will further tie adult education to economic development, facilitating a more effective, responsive, and resilient workforce.

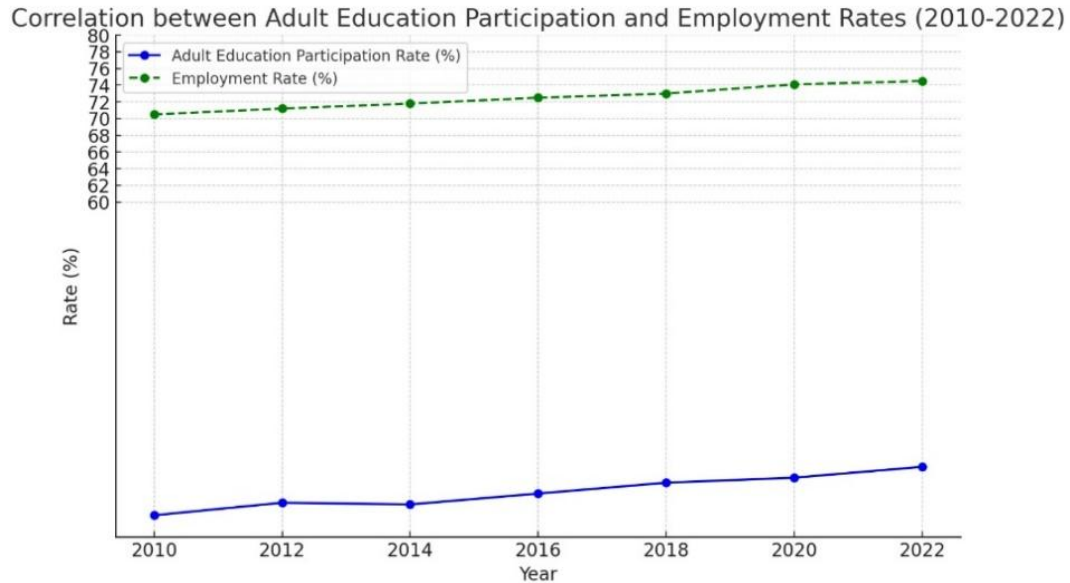


Figure 3: Alim et al., 2024

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has illuminated the importance of sustainable adult learning and lifelong education in improving economic indicators and the country's workforce development in the United Kingdom. It has come out in the open that people in adult learning are facing many more employment, career enhancement, and economic security that, in the aggregate, are in the direct context of general economic development. However, near relative contribution from significant barriers identified in this research comes from financial strings, followed by time constraints and lack of access to required information, respectively, which negatively impact the full implementation of the associated benefits—implicating policy implications that the outlined educational strategies thus far need to be honed to cater for improved accessibility and alignment with economic and workforce needs.

Recommendations

- Policymakers should increase allocations to adult education programs and introduce more financial aid packages to help eliminate entry barriers for low-income learners.
- Schools can provide more flexible schedules for courses involving day, evening, weekend, or online classes to meet adult learners' various needs.
- Stimulate educational institution partnerships with enterprises for dual financing of training programs and practical outlets to allow learners to apply developed skills.
- Carrying out effective campaigns through the media regarding the benefits of adult education programs and their availability, using social media, community centers, and small and medium enterprises.

Future Research

Future research should explore several areas to build upon the findings of this study:

- Research adult education longitudinally about economic consequences and track the change in the occupational trajectory of the learners in the study through the years.
- An analysis of the effectiveness of adult education programs in various economic sectors or regions to identify best practices and shape policies more effectively.
- Research the exact barriers underrepresented groups face in accessing adult learning to develop interventions designed to break down the walls.

- Study of the technologies of digital transformation in adult education. These technologies can potentially improve results and make learning more accessible to learners.

These recommendations and areas for future research are designed to enhance the understanding and implementation of adult education programs so that they are more effective contributors to individual and national economic development. Implementing the recommendations will improve the structure and outcomes of adult education within the UK, contributing more to the demands of the modern workforce and the economy.

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