

**CHALLENGES OF ADULT LEARNERS IN THE EQUIVALENCY
EXAMINATION: A CASE STUDY AT KALLARA GOVERNMENT
VOCATIONAL HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

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DECLARATION

I, **MUHSINA NAHAS**, hereby declare that the dissertation titled“**CHALLENGES OF ADULT LEARNERS IN THE EQUIVALENCY EXAMINATION : A CASE STUDY AT KALLARA VOCATIONAL HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**” is based on the original work carried out by me and submitted to the Department of Sociology , Loyola College of Social Sciences (Autonomous) , University of Kerala during the year 2024-2026 towards partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Sociology Degree Examination. It has not been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship, or other similar title of recognition before.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “CHALLENGES OF ADULT LEARNERS IN THE EQUIVALENCY EXAMINATION: A CASE STUDY AT KALLARA VOCATIONAL HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM” is a record of genuine work done by **MUHSINA NAHAS**, a fourth-semester Master of Sociology student of this college under my supervision and guidance, and that it is hereby approved for submission.

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ABSTRACT

Education is an important means of improving individual lives and promoting social and economic development. However, many people discontinue their education due to financial difficulties, family responsibilities, early marriage, employment, and other personal circumstances. Equivalency education programmes provide these individuals with a valuable second opportunity to continue their education and improve their future prospects. Despite the growing importance of equivalency education in Kerala, limited research has examined the lived experiences of adult learners enrolled in these programmes. This study was therefore undertaken to explore the motivations, academic challenges, coping strategies, and institutional support experienced by equivalency learners at Kallara Government Vocational Higher Secondary School (GVHSS), a rural school that has been successfully conducting equivalency classes over the past four years.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach using a case study research design to gain an in-depth understanding of learners' experiences. Purposive sampling was employed to select adult learners enrolled in the SSLC, Plus One, and Plus Two equivalency programmes. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews and field observations, while secondary data were obtained from books, journals, reports, theses, and other relevant literature. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, which helped identify the major patterns and themes emerging from the participants' experiences.

The findings reveal that equivalency learners face several academic, psychological, social, and institutional challenges, including long educational gaps, memory and comprehension difficulties, fear of examinations, and balancing family responsibilities with studies. At the same time, supportive teachers, peer interaction, family encouragement, and learners' own determination played a significant role in helping them continue their educational journey. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a qualitative understanding of the lived experiences of equivalency learners in the Kerala context, where such studies remain limited. The findings are expected to support educators, policymakers, and programme coordinators in strengthening equivalency education through learner-centred practices and improved institutional support, thereby promoting lifelong learning and educational inclusion among adult learners.

Key words : Equivalency Education, Adult Learners, Lived Experiences, Lifelong Learning

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Education is universally acknowledged as a basic human right and a key driver of social transformation, individual growth, and economic development (United Nations, 1948; Freire, 1970). It plays a vital role in enhancing people's abilities, improving their standard of living, and fostering inclusive development within societies (UNESCO, 2020). Despite its importance, access to education exhibits disparities and, for numerous individuals, a lack of continuity. Various socio-economic, cultural, and individual factors contribute to the prevention of formal education completion for a substantial population cohort within normative age parameters (National Sample Survey Office, 2021). Consequently, a multitude of individuals remain excluded from the formal education system, a circumstance which may constrain their prospects for employment, upward mobility, and personal empowerment.

In an endeavor to mitigate this challenge, adult education and equivalency programs have assumed considerable salience as alternative learning pathways. These programs are designed to furnish individuals whose prior educational trajectories were truncated with a subsequent opportunity for the completion of their studies and the acquisition of requisite qualifications (Kerala State Literacy Mission Authority, 2017). One such initiative is the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) equivalency examination, which facilitates the attainment by adult learners of a qualification equivalent to formal secondary education (Joseph & Anbazhagan, 2021). Beyond academic certification, participation in such programs may frequently engender increased self-confidence, improved self-worth, and enhanced livelihood prospects (Gutiérrez-Carvajal et al., 2021, p. 510).

Adult learners are distinct from traditional school students in many ways. They bring with them a wide range of life experiences, responsibilities, and motivations that influence their learning process multiple respects. They typically possess a broad spectrum of life experiences, responsibilities, and motivations, which subsequently influence their learning processes (Knowles, 1980). A considerable proportion of these individuals return to educational pursuits following an extended hiatus, a circumstance that may render the transitional period particularly arduous. Unlike their younger counterparts, adult learners are typically compelled to manage a multiplicity of roles – including professional endeavors, familial duties and societal commitments – concurrently with their academic pursuits (CAEL, 2022); these

competing demands may often constrain the temporal and energetic resources allocable to learning.

Academic challenges are among the most common difficulties faced by adult learners. A prolonged break from education often results in a loss of foundational knowledge and study habits (Wang & Hanafi, 2024). As a result, learners may find it difficult to understand academic content, particularly in subjects that require continuous learning. Additionally, unfamiliarity with current teaching methods, examination formats, and academic expectations can create further obstacles. Language barriers and limited exposure to formal education settings can also hinder their learning experience.

Another significant issue is time management. Adult learners may frequently struggle to balance their studies with work and household responsibilities. Irregular attendance, insufficient study time, and physical exhaustion can negatively affect their academic performance (Damalie et al., 2023, p. 445; Xavier & Meneses, 2022, p. 3). Financial constraints further complicate the situation, as many learners come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and may find it difficult to afford educational expenses such as fees, study materials, and travel costs (GUNEN & Vural, 2023, p. 9) (Mkwanzani & Vargas, 2024, p. 12).

Social and family-related factors also play an important role in shaping the educational experiences of adult learners. While some individuals receive encouragement and support from their families, others may face discouragement or lack of understanding. Cultural expectations and traditional gender roles can pose additional challenges, especially for women learners, who often have to balance educational aspirations with household responsibilities (Dabugat, 2025, p. 107) (Dhlamini et al., 2025, p. 606). Such factors can influence both participation and persistence in educational programs.

Psychological aspects are equally important in understanding the experiences of adult learners. Many individuals returning to education may experience feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of failure (Sharp, 2023) (Adano & Bunn, 2024, p. 2). They may hesitate to participate actively in classroom discussions due to a lack of confidence. However, despite these challenges, adult learners often display strong determination and internal motivation. Their desire for personal growth, better employment opportunities, and social recognition drives them to continue their educational journey.

Institutional factors significantly influence the success of adult education programs. The availability of flexible schedules, supportive teaching approaches, and relevant learning

materials can make a substantial difference may substantially influence in learners' experiences (Assaf et al., 2022, p. 1167) (Henrikson & Baliram, 2023, p. 3). A positive and inclusive learning environment, where learners feel respected and encouraged, appears integral to the facilitation of effective learning. Educators assume a pivotal role in this process through the adoption of teaching strategies that are responsive to the needs of adult learners.

In Kerala, the equivalency program implemented through initiatives such as the Kerala State Literacy Mission has become an important means of promoting may constitute a significant modality for the promotion of educational inclusion (Joseph & Anbazhagan,2021). It offers individuals who missed formal schooling an avenue for re-entry into the education system, potentially enhancing their socio-economic conditions. However, the success of such programs is largely contingent upon the efficiency of their challenge mitigation strategies faced by learners.

This study focuses on adult learners enrolled in the equivalency program at Kallara GVHSS. By adopting a case study approach (Yin, 2018), the research seeks to explore the various challenges experienced by learners, including academic, economic, social, and psychological factors myriad challenges encountered by learners, encompassing of academic, economic, social and psychological dimensions. It also endeavors to delineate the strategies employed by learners for the amelioration of these difficulties, alongside the available institutional support systems.

The importance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the improvement of adult education practices. By examining the real-life experiences of learners, the study may yield invaluable insights for educators, policymakers, and institutional bodies. It can help in designing more effective teaching methods, developing supportive learning environments, and formulating the development of supportive learning environments , and the formulation of policies that address the specific needs of adult learners .

Furthermore, the study underscores the pertinence of lifelong learning within the context of contemporary global flux (UNESCO,2020). The perpetuation of learning appears indispensable for individuals to acclimatize to emergent challenges and opportunities. Adult education programs, such as the equivalency examination, assume a pivotal function in ensuring the sustained accessibility of education to all individuals, irrespective of chronological age or socio-economic provenance.

Ultimately, adult learners pursuing the equivalency program may be observed to exemplify resilience and determination within the educational milieu. Their educational journeys are often shaped by numerous challenges, but also by strong motivation and a desire for self-improvement. Understanding these experiences is essential for creating inclusive and supportive educational environments. This study, therefore, aims to elucidate the circumstances encountered by adult learners at Kallara GVHSS and contribute to the broader discussion on adult education, equity, and lifelong learning.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Education is widely regarded as a basic human right and a pivotal determinant in both individual development and societal progress. It equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to facilitate effective participation in social, economic and political spheres. However, despite continuous efforts to promote universal education, many individuals are unable to complete their formal schooling due to a variety of socio-economic and personal challenges not withstanding persistent endeavors to promote universal education, a substantial proportion of individuals demonstrably encounter an inability to complete their formal schooling, largely attributable to a diverse array of socio-economic and personal impediments . As a result, a considerable portion of the adult population remains without secondary-level education, which significantly limits their access to better employment opportunities, social advancement, and personal development .

In the Indian context, the phenomenon of educational attrition remains a persistent concern within the education system. This predicament is often exacerbated by a multiplicity of interconnected factors, including, but not limited to, penury, premature engagement in income-generating activities, familial obligations, gender-based inequity, and circumscribed access to quality educational provisions. Although the government has introduced several policies and programs to address educational exclusion, many individuals still remain outside the formal schooling system even today proactively introduced numerous policies and programs designed to address educational exclusion, a substantial number of individuals nonetheless appear to persist outside the purview of the formal schooling system, even in the contemporary era (Venkatesan & Mappilairaju, 2023,p.1).

To tackle this issue, alternative educational pathways such as equivalency programs have been introduced by Kerala State Literacy Mission to provide a second opportunity for learning. The Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) equivalency examination is one such initiative

designed to facilitate adult learners acquisition of a qualification commensurate with formal secondary education. These programs are fundamentally intended to promote inclusive education and encourage lifelong learning by enabling individuals to re-enter the education system and improve their overall quality of life (National Institute of Open Schooling, 2019).

However, enrolling in such programs does not automatically ensure successful completion. Adult learners often encounter numerous challenges that affect their ability to learn effectively and perform well academically. These challenges are not limited to a single dimension but are instead complex and multifaceted, involving academic, economic, social, psychological, and institutional aspects (Damalie et al., 2023,p.446) (Mejia,2026). A clear understanding of these issues is essential for improving the effectiveness of equivalency programs and supporting adult learners in achieving their educational goals.

One of the major difficulties faced by adult learners is related to academic adjustment. Many of them return to education after a long break, which results in a loss of basic knowledge and study habits. This gap makes it difficult for them to cope with academic content, particularly in subjects that require continuous learning and practice. In addition, adapting to a structured classroom environment and examination system can be challenging, as these are often designed with younger students in mind (Knowles, 1980).

Another significant problem is the challenge of balancing education with other responsibilities. Adult learners are often engaged in multiple roles, including employment, household duties, and caregiving. Managing these responsibilities alongside their studies can be extremely demanding. Due to limited time and energy, many learners face difficulties in maintaining regular attendance and dedicating sufficient time for study. This often leads to inadequate preparation and increased levels of stress, ultimately affecting their academic performance (OECD, 2019).

Financial constraints also act as a major barrier for many adult learners. Individuals from economically weaker sections may struggle to afford the costs associated with education, such as fees, study materials, and transportation. In some cases, the need to earn a livelihood takes priority over education, forcing learners to either reduce their study time or discontinue their education altogether. Such financial pressures can significantly hinder their participation and progress in equivalency programs (GUNEN & Vural,2023,p.8)(Cumminset al.,2021p.151).

Social and familial influences further shape the learning experiences of adult learners. While some individuals receive encouragement from their families, others may face lack of support

or even opposition. Cultural expectations and traditional gender roles can create additional obstacles, especially for women learners who are often expected to prioritize household responsibilities over education. These social pressures can affect learners' confidence, motivation, and willingness to continue their studies (Maceke et al.,2025)(Dabugat,2025,p.105).

Psychological factors also exert a significant influence in the learning process. Many adult learners experience anxiety, fear of failure, and low self-confidence when they return to education after a long gap. Past negative educational experiences and the pressure to succeed can lead to feelings of insecurity and hesitation regarding active participation in the classroom. Such emotional challenges may consequently contribute to a diminution of engagement and an adverse impact upon academic performance (Nieuwenhove & Wever, 2024, p. 23) (Sharp, 2023).

Institutional factors add another layer of complexity to the problem. In many cases, the structure and delivery of equivalency programs are not fully aligned with the needs of adult learners. Traditional teaching methods, rigid curricula, and standardized assessment systems may not effectively support adult learning. Adult learners generally benefit more from flexible, practical, and learner-centered approaches. However, the absence of such methods, along with limited availability of trained educators who understand adult learning principles, can make the learning process more difficult (Shousha, 2021, p. 145) (Habiba & Lodhi, 2023, p. 56).

In addition, access to adequate learning resources and support services is often limited. Adult learners may not have sufficient study materials, academic guidance, or access to digital resources. In today's technology-driven educational environment, lack of digital literacy and limited exposure to online learning tools can further disadvantage adult learners, particularly those from rural or economically weaker backgrounds (Chauhan et al., 2025)(Ditlhale& Berg,2024,p.290).

These challenges become even more significant when examined within a specific institutional context, such as Kallara GVHSS. While the SSLC equivalency program provides an important opportunity for adult learners in this setting, the effectiveness of the program depends on various institutional factors, including teaching practices, availability of learning resources, peer support, and overall learning environment. These factors can vary from one institution to another and play a crucial role in shaping learners' experiences and outcomes.

Despite the growing importance of adult education, there is limited research that focuses on the specific challenges faced by adult learners at the local level. Many studies provide a general understanding of adult education but do not adequately capture the unique experiences of learners within particular institutional contexts (Maceke,2025). This highlights the need for a more detailed and context-specific investigation into the problems faced by adult learners.

Therefore, the present study aims to examine the challenges experienced by adult learners enrolled in the equivalency program at Kallara GVHSS. By adopting a case study approach, the research seeks to explore the various academic, economic, social, psychological, and institutional factors that influence learners' educational experiences. It also aims to understand how these challenges affect their participation, performance, and overall progress in the program.

By focusing on a specific case, this study intends to provide a deeper understanding of the problem and generate insights that can contribute to improving adult education practices. The findings are expected to help educators and policymakers design more effective strategies, develop supportive learning environments, and implement learner-centered approaches that address the unique needs of adult learners.

Thus, the problem addressed in this study centers on the multiple challenges faced by adult learners in the equivalency examination. These challenges not only affect individual learners but also influence the overall success of adult education programs. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive and systematic approach, which this study seeks to undertake in the context of Kallara GVHSS.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study, titled *“Challenges of Adult Learners in the Equivalency Examination: A Case Study at Kallara Government Vocational Higher Secondary School, Thiruvananthapuram”* holds substantial importance within the field of education, particularly in the area of adult and continuing education. In today's rapidly evolving socio-economic context, education is no longer confined to a specific stage of life but is increasingly viewed as a continuous, lifelong process. Adult education programs, including equivalency examinations, play a vital role in offering second-chance opportunities for individuals who were unable to

complete their formal education. Against this background, the significance of this study can be understood from multiple perspectives, including learners, educators, institutions, policymakers, and society as a whole.

One of the key contributions of this study is its focus on adult learners, a group that has often received limited attention in educational research. While a large body of research exists on school and youth education, the experiences of adult learners—especially at the local level—remain relatively underexplored (Rotar,2023,p.10)(Gal,2024,p.301). By examining the specific challenges faced by adult learners in the equivalency program, the study provides meaningful insights into their learning needs, motivations, and difficulties. Such insights are essential for developing educational approaches that are responsive to the unique characteristics of adult learners (Knowles, 1980).

The study is particularly significant in bringing attention to the practical challenges encountered by adult learners during their educational journey. These challenges are diverse and include academic struggles, time constraints, financial difficulties, social expectations, and psychological barriers (Human, Technologies and Quality of Education,2023,p.380)(Maceke,2025) . By identifying and analyzing these issues in a systematic manner, the study deepens the understanding of the factors that influence adult learning outcomes. This understanding can support educators and administrators in designing strategies that effectively address these challenges and enhance the overall quality of equivalency programs.

Another important dimension of the study lies in its relevance to educational institutions that offer equivalency programs. Institutions such as Kallara GVHSS play a crucial role in facilitating adult education by providing opportunities for individuals to re-enter the formal education system. However, the success of these programs largely depends on how well institutions are able to respond to the specific needs of adult learners. The findings of this study can help institutions identify gaps in their current practices and make necessary improvements in areas such as teaching methodologies, curriculum design, and learner support services.

The study also has important implications for educators who work with adult learners. Teaching adults requires a different approach compared to teaching younger students, as adult learners bring diverse experiences, expectations, and learning preferences into the classroom. By highlighting the challenges faced by learners, the study can guide educators in adopting more effective and learner-centered teaching strategies. This may include the use of interactive and

participatory methods, flexible instructional techniques, and continuous assessment practices that enhance engagement and learning outcomes (Crowder& Clark, 2022).

From a policy perspective, the study offers valuable insights that can contribute to the development and improvement of adult education initiatives. Governments and educational authorities have increasingly emphasized the importance of inclusive and equitable education through policies such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. However, the effectiveness of such policies depends on their successful implementation at the grassroots level. By focusing on a specific institutional context, this study provides practical insights into the challenges faced by adult learners and highlights areas where policy implementation can be strengthened .

Furthermore, the study contributes to the broader objective of promoting lifelong learning. In a knowledge-driven society, continuous learning is essential for individuals to adapt to changing economic and social conditions. Adult education programs like the equivalency examination play a critical role in enabling individuals to update their knowledge and skills, thereby improving their employability and quality of life. By identifying barriers to participation and success, the study supports efforts to make learning opportunities more inclusive and accessible for people of all ages .

The social significance of the study is equally noteworthy. Education serves not only as a means of acquiring knowledge but also as a tool for empowerment and social change. For adult learners, achieving an SSLC equivalency qualification can lead to increased self-confidence, improved employment prospects, and enhanced social recognition. By addressing the challenges faced by these learners, the study contributes to the promotion of social justice and inclusion, particularly for individuals from marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds.

In addition to its educational and social relevance, the study also has implications for community development. Educated individuals are better positioned to contribute positively to their communities through active participation in social, economic, and civic activities. Adult learners who successfully complete their education can inspire others to pursue learning, thereby creating a ripple effect that encourages community-wide development. In this way, the study indirectly supports the broader goal of empowering communities through education.

The methodological approach of the study also adds to its significance. By adopting a case study method, the research provides a detailed and context-specific understanding of the challenges faced by adult learners. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of the

complex interactions between various factors influencing learning experiences. The study can serve as a useful reference for future researchers interested in conducting similar studies in the field of adult education.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of support systems in facilitating the success of adult learners. These support systems may include academic assistance, financial aid, counseling services, and flexible learning arrangements. By highlighting the need for such support mechanisms, the study underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach to adult education—one that addresses not only academic requirements but also the social and emotional well-being of learners.

Another important contribution of the study is its role in raising awareness about the value of adult education. Many individuals and communities may not fully recognize the importance of continuing education beyond the traditional schooling years. By documenting the experiences of adult learners and the challenges they face, the study draws attention to the need for greater investment and support for adult education programs.

In conclusion, the significance of this study lies in its comprehensive examination of the challenges experienced by adult learners in the equivalency program at Kallara GVHSS. It contributes to the fields of adult education, institutional practice, and policy development by offering valuable insights into learners' experiences and needs. The study highlights the importance of adopting learner-centered approaches, strengthening support systems, and promoting inclusive educational practices. Ultimately, it aims to contribute to the enhancement of adult education programs and the realization of the broader goals of lifelong learning, equity, and social development.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Adult learning and lifelong learning have become central components of educational development across the world, particularly following the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Adult education is no longer viewed merely as a means of improving literacy but as a lifelong process that enhances individuals' knowledge, skills, employability, personal development, and social participation. In countries such as India, where educational inequalities continue to exist because of gender, socio-economic status, caste, and geographical disparities, adult education plays an important role in promoting empowerment, social inclusion, and sustainable development (Grotlüschen et al., 2024).

The concept of lifelong learning is strongly supported by adult learning theories, particularly Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy. Knowles (1979) argued that adults learn differently from children because they are self-directed, draw upon their life experiences, and prefer learning that is relevant to solving real-life problems. Contemporary scholars continue to recognize andragogy as a foundational framework for understanding adult learners while also acknowledging that adult learning is influenced by social, cultural, technological, and institutional contexts (Merriam, 2018; St. Clair, 2024; Loeng, 2018).

Recent developments in adult education have expanded beyond formal educational institutions to include community learning centres, non-formal education programmes, online learning platforms, vocational education, and technology-assisted learning environments. Research indicates that adult learners benefit not only from acquiring academic knowledge but also from improved psychological well-being, social participation, employability, cognitive development, and quality of life (Gaia et al., 2024; Wenzel et al., 2024). At the same time, adult learners encounter numerous challenges, including academic difficulties, financial constraints, institutional barriers, technological limitations, family responsibilities, and psychological stress.

The existing literature demonstrates that successful participation in adult education depends upon multiple interconnected factors. Learners' motivation, institutional support, family encouragement, government policies, and community participation all contribute to educational success, whereas academic deficiencies, social inequalities, discrimination,

inadequate infrastructure, and psychological barriers often hinder participation. Despite these challenges, adult learners frequently demonstrate resilience by utilizing social support networks, adapting to technological changes, and engaging in lifelong learning opportunities.

Based on the existing body of literature, the present review is organized into six major themes: (1) Motivation and Support Systems, (2) Academic Challenges, (3) Psychological Challenges, (4) Social Challenges, (5) Institutional and Infrastructural Barriers, and (6) Coping Strategies and Resilience. This thematic organization provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing adult learners and establishes the theoretical foundation for the present study.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.2.1 Motivation and Support Systems

Motivation is widely recognized as one of the strongest determinants of participation, persistence, and achievement in adult education. Unlike younger learners, adults generally enter educational programmes with clearly defined personal, professional, or social goals. Their motivation often arises from the desire to improve employment opportunities, gain economic independence, enhance self-confidence, fulfill personal aspirations, or contribute more effectively to their families and communities. Research consistently indicates that adult learners are more likely to continue their educational journey when supported by encouraging family members, educational institutions, government policies, community organizations, and peer networks.

Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy provides an important foundation for understanding adult learners' motivation. Knowles (1979) proposed that adults are internally motivated and learn best when education is immediately relevant to solving practical life problems. Adult learners value autonomy, draw upon their previous experiences, and expect educational activities to address their personal and occupational needs. Subsequent scholars have reinforced these assumptions by emphasizing that adult education should adopt learner-centred approaches that encourage self-direction and experiential learning (Merriam, 2018; St. Clair, 2024). Loeng (2018) further explained that adult learning extends beyond classroom instruction and encompasses continuous personal and professional development throughout life.

Several contemporary studies demonstrate that education itself serves as a powerful source of motivation. Mondal (2023) observed that education enhances women's self-confidence, decision-making ability, and self-reliance, thereby encouraging greater participation in

economic and social activities. Similarly, Chadha et al. (2018) found that adult literacy programmes significantly improved women's self-esteem, mobility, and community participation, motivating them to continue learning even after completing basic literacy courses. Deshpande et al. (2020, 2021) likewise reported that adult literacy programmes in rural India increased women's confidence, bargaining power, mobility, and involvement in their children's education, illustrating how educational participation creates positive motivational cycles within families.

Government initiatives also play an essential role in sustaining learner motivation. Pandey et al. (2019) demonstrated that programmes such as Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP), and Mahila E-Haat strengthened women's confidence by providing financial assistance, vocational training, and entrepreneurship opportunities. These programmes encouraged women to participate more actively in education while simultaneously improving their economic independence. Similarly, Saif and Kumar (2023) highlighted the significant contribution of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs), which provide vocational training, legal awareness, educational opportunities, and social support for women from marginalized communities. Such initiatives create enabling environments that sustain learners' motivation beyond the classroom.

Community participation has also emerged as an important motivational factor in adult education. Almeida et al. (2024) found that participatory and community-based non-formal education programmes encourage active learner engagement by fostering collaboration, volunteering, and collective problem-solving. Their study showed that educational programmes become more effective when local communities actively participate in planning and implementing learning activities. Likewise, Grotluschen et al. (2024), through an international comparative study across eight countries, emphasized that educational networks, professional associations, and advocacy organizations strengthen adult education systems by promoting collaboration, sharing resources, and influencing educational policies. Although SDG 4 was not always the primary driver of adult learning initiatives, these networks played a vital role in supporting lifelong learning opportunities across different national contexts.

Older adults also demonstrate strong intrinsic motivation for lifelong learning. Gaia et al. (2024) reported that participation in higher education contributes to improved mental health, enhanced cognitive functioning, greater social integration, and active ageing. Similarly, Wenzel et al. (2024) observed that lifelong learning programmes increased older adults' sense of

purpose, cognitive reserve, successful ageing, and overall life satisfaction. These findings suggest that motivation among older learners extends beyond occupational goals and includes aspirations related to personal fulfillment, intellectual engagement, and social connectedness.

Technological innovations have further transformed learner motivation by creating more flexible and personalized learning opportunities. Teles et al. (2024) demonstrated that STEAM-based educational programmes increased older adults' enthusiasm, creativity, and willingness to continue learning by incorporating interactive and practical learning experiences. Likewise, Bayly-Castañeda et al. (2024) argued that artificial intelligence can enhance learner motivation by providing personalized learning pathways tailored to individual abilities, preferences, and learning pace. Personalized educational technologies have the potential to improve learner engagement while accommodating diverse educational backgrounds.

Recent literature on non-formal education further emphasizes that practical learning experiences significantly enhance motivation among adult learners. Community-based educational initiatives that focus on volunteering, empowerment, sustainability, and practical problem-solving have been shown to encourage continuous participation by making learning directly relevant to everyday life (Almeida et al., 2024). Such programmes enable learners to apply newly acquired knowledge immediately within their families, workplaces, and communities, thereby reinforcing intrinsic motivation.

Overall, the literature indicates that motivation among adult learners is multidimensional and influenced by both internal aspirations and external support systems. Personal goals such as self-improvement, economic independence, and enhanced quality of life interact with family encouragement, community participation, institutional support, government initiatives, and technological innovations to sustain educational engagement. The evidence suggests that creating supportive learning environments is essential for promoting lifelong learning and improving educational outcomes among diverse adult learner populations.

2.2.2. Academic Challenges

Academic challenges represent one of the most significant barriers affecting adult learners' participation, persistence, and successful completion of educational programmes. Unlike traditional students, adult learners often return to education after prolonged interruptions due to employment, family responsibilities, financial constraints, or social circumstances. As a result, many adults experience difficulties in adapting to academic environments, overcoming

learning gaps, developing digital competencies, and managing examination-related stress. These challenges become even more pronounced among individuals from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, women, older adults, and marginalized communities. The literature consistently indicates that academic barriers are multidimensional and require comprehensive institutional and pedagogical support to ensure successful lifelong learning.

One of the primary academic challenges identified in the literature is the persistence of literacy disparities. Despite significant improvements in educational access over recent decades, India continues to experience considerable inequalities in literacy across gender, caste, income groups, and geographical regions. Motkuri (2013) observed that literacy rates remain uneven, particularly among rural populations, women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and economically disadvantaged communities. These inequalities create substantial barriers for adults attempting to re-enter formal or non-formal educational programmes. Similarly, Iftekhhar et al. (2015) argued that although India has made remarkable progress in expanding educational opportunities, adult illiteracy remains a major developmental challenge that limits participation in lifelong learning and skill development initiatives.

Low prior educational attainment further complicates adult learning. Many adult learners begin educational programmes with limited foundational knowledge in reading, writing, numeracy, and problem-solving skills. These deficiencies make it difficult to comprehend new concepts, complete academic assignments, and perform successfully in assessments. Deshpande et al. (2017) examined a computer-assisted literacy programme in India and found that learners who entered the programme without any prior literacy skills demonstrated significantly lower learning gains than participants who already possessed basic literacy. The findings suggest that foundational educational deficits continue to influence learning outcomes even when innovative teaching methods are employed. This emphasizes the importance of providing preparatory and bridge courses that strengthen basic literacy before introducing advanced educational content.

The transition from traditional learning environments to technology-based education presents another major academic challenge. Digital transformation has significantly expanded educational opportunities through online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, artificial intelligence, and mobile learning applications. However, these innovations have also created new inequalities among adult learners. Oteng et al. (2024) found that inadequate digital literacy skills, limited access to technological devices, poor internet connectivity, and insufficient

training prevent many adult learners from fully participating in digital learning environments. Older adults, in particular, often encounter difficulties in navigating digital platforms because of limited previous exposure to technology.

Similarly, Bayly-Castañeda et al. (2024) acknowledged that although artificial intelligence has the potential to personalize educational experiences according to individual learning needs, its effectiveness depends upon learners possessing adequate digital competence. Without proper technological support and training, AI-based educational systems may unintentionally widen existing educational inequalities rather than reduce them. These findings indicate that digital literacy has become an essential academic competency within contemporary adult education.

Academic challenges are also closely associated with psychological factors, particularly examination anxiety and fear of academic failure. Returning to formal education after several years often creates feelings of uncertainty among adult learners, who may question their academic abilities and worry about competing with younger students. Lavanya and Mary (2020) reported significantly higher levels of test anxiety among students from government schools, resulting in lower academic performance and reduced confidence. Although their study focused primarily on school students, the findings remain relevant for adult learners who frequently experience similar anxieties when re-entering educational institutions after long educational interruptions. Fear of failure, lack of confidence, and negative previous educational experiences can discourage learners from actively participating in classroom discussions and assessments.

Another academic challenge concerns adapting to contemporary teaching and learning methods. Adult education has evolved considerably with the increasing use of learner-centred pedagogies, collaborative learning, online instruction, project-based learning, and competency-based assessment. While these approaches provide flexibility and encourage active participation, many adult learners require additional time and guidance to adjust to unfamiliar instructional methods. Merriam (2018) argued that adult learning cannot be explained through a single theory because learning is shaped by diverse social, cultural, emotional, and experiential factors. Consequently, adult education programmes should employ flexible teaching strategies that acknowledge learners' varied educational backgrounds and previous experiences.

Knowles' theory of andragogy offers valuable insights into addressing these academic challenges. According to Knowles (1979), adults learn most effectively when educational

experiences are relevant to real-life situations, build upon existing experiences, and encourage self-directed learning. Rather than relying solely on traditional lecture methods, educators should create problem-centred learning environments where learners actively participate in discussions, practical exercises, and collaborative activities. Contemporary scholars continue to recognize andragogy as an effective framework for designing adult education programmes while acknowledging that modern learning environments also require greater attention to technological competence, cultural diversity, and social inclusion (St. Clair, 2024; Loeng, 2018).

Recent literature further highlights the importance of flexible educational delivery systems in overcoming academic barriers. Almeida et al. (2024) found that participatory non-formal education programmes provide practical learning experiences that enable adults to acquire new competencies without the rigid structures commonly associated with formal education. Community-based educational initiatives encourage collaborative learning, practical problem-solving, and learner participation, making education more accessible for adults with diverse educational backgrounds. Such approaches reduce academic pressure while simultaneously promoting confidence and skill development.

Institutional support also plays a crucial role in minimizing academic difficulties. Grotlüschen et al. (2024) emphasized that adult education systems become more effective when educational institutions, government agencies, community organizations, and professional networks collaborate to provide comprehensive academic support services. These services may include literacy enhancement programmes, digital skills training, academic counselling, mentoring, and flexible curriculum design. Strong institutional collaboration helps learners overcome educational disadvantages while improving retention and academic success.

Furthermore, adult learning theories increasingly emphasize that learning should be viewed as a continuous developmental process rather than merely the acquisition of academic knowledge. Pogson and Tennant (2020) argued that adult learning occurs through multiple perspectives, including reflective learning, experiential learning, practice-based community learning, and embodied learning. This broader understanding recognizes that adults bring valuable life experiences into educational settings, and these experiences should be integrated into teaching practices rather than ignored. Such learner-centred approaches reduce academic anxiety and enhance learner engagement by making education more meaningful and relevant.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that academic challenges among adult learners extend beyond deficiencies in literacy or subject knowledge. These challenges include interrupted educational histories, inadequate foundational skills, digital illiteracy, technological adaptation, examination anxiety, unfamiliar teaching methods, and insufficient institutional support. Nevertheless, research also indicates that learner-centred pedagogies, flexible educational programmes, digital literacy initiatives, community-based learning, and comprehensive academic support systems can significantly improve educational participation and learning outcomes. Addressing these academic challenges is therefore essential for ensuring equitable access to lifelong learning and achieving the broader objectives of inclusive adult education.

2.2.3 Psychological Challenges

Psychological challenges are among the most influential factors affecting adult learners' participation, persistence, and academic success. Unlike younger students, adult learners often balance education with multiple responsibilities such as employment, family commitments, financial obligations, and caregiving roles. These competing demands can create considerable emotional and psychological pressure, affecting learners' motivation, concentration, confidence, and overall well-being. Existing literature indicates that psychological factors such as anxiety, low self-esteem, fear of failure, stress, depression, cognitive decline, and lack of self-confidence significantly influence adult learners' educational experiences. At the same time, research demonstrates that participation in adult education can substantially improve psychological well-being by enhancing confidence, self-worth, resilience, and life satisfaction.

One of the most commonly reported psychological barriers is academic anxiety. Adult learners who return to education after long interruptions often experience uncertainty regarding their academic abilities. Many fear that they may be unable to cope with contemporary educational standards, technological requirements, or formal examinations. Lavanya and Mary (2020) identified test anxiety as a significant factor affecting learners' academic performance. Their study revealed that students experiencing high levels of examination anxiety demonstrated lower confidence and poorer academic outcomes. Although the research focused primarily on school students, similar forms of anxiety are frequently observed among adult learners who return to educational settings after prolonged gaps. Fear of making mistakes, negative previous

educational experiences, and concerns about academic failure often discourage adults from actively participating in learning activities.

Closely associated with anxiety is the issue of low self-esteem. Many adult learners, particularly those with limited educational backgrounds, initially doubt their capacity to succeed in formal learning environments. Previous academic failures, prolonged absence from education, or social stigma related to illiteracy may reduce learners' confidence in their abilities. However, several studies indicate that educational participation itself becomes an important mechanism for rebuilding self-esteem. Chadha et al. (2018) found that adult literacy programmes significantly enhanced women's self-confidence, social participation, and sense of personal achievement. As learners developed literacy skills and gained greater independence, they also experienced increased confidence in interacting with others and participating in community life. These findings demonstrate that education serves not only as an academic process but also as a source of psychological empowerment.

Similarly, Mondal (2023) emphasized that education strengthens women's self-reliance, decision-making capacity, and confidence, enabling them to participate more actively in family and community affairs. Increased educational attainment allows women to challenge traditional gender roles, express their opinions more confidently, and make informed decisions regarding their personal and professional lives. Deshpande et al. (2020, 2021) likewise observed that participation in adult education programmes improved women's confidence, bargaining power, mobility, and willingness to engage with individuals outside their immediate families. These psychological benefits illustrate how education contributes to personal empowerment while simultaneously encouraging continued participation in lifelong learning.

Another important psychological concern among adult learners relates to emotional stress arising from multiple social roles. Adult learners frequently attempt to balance educational responsibilities with employment, parenting, household management, and caregiving duties. The pressure of fulfilling these competing roles may lead to emotional exhaustion, reduced motivation, and difficulty maintaining consistent educational participation. Merriam (2018) argued that adult learning should not be viewed solely as a cognitive process but as a holistic experience influenced by emotions, social relationships, personal identity, and life experiences. Consequently, educational programmes must recognize learners' emotional circumstances and provide supportive learning environments that reduce stress rather than intensify it.

Psychological well-being becomes increasingly significant among older adult learners. As populations age globally, lifelong learning has emerged as an important strategy for promoting healthy and active ageing. However, older adults often encounter psychological challenges such as cognitive decline, memory loss, reduced confidence, loneliness, and fear of ageing. Sharma et al. (2024) found that lower educational attainment was associated with higher levels of depression and cognitive frailty among older adults. The study suggested that education acts as a protective factor by strengthening cognitive functioning and reducing psychological vulnerability.

Similarly, Gaia et al. (2024) reported that participation in higher education contributes significantly to older adults' psychological well-being. Their review found improvements in self-esteem, mental health, cognitive functioning, social connectedness, and overall quality of life among older learners engaged in university education. Educational participation also reduced feelings of loneliness and social isolation while promoting active ageing and lifelong intellectual engagement. These findings suggest that education provides older adults with meaningful opportunities for personal growth, social interaction, and continued cognitive stimulation.

Supporting these observations, Wenzel et al. (2024) examined older adults participating in lifelong learning programmes and found that they reported higher levels of mental health, cognitive reserve, life satisfaction, and sense of purpose than the general ageing population. Lifelong learning was associated with successful ageing by encouraging continuous intellectual activity, enhancing psychological resilience, and maintaining cognitive abilities. The study illustrates that adult education contributes not only to knowledge acquisition but also to positive mental health outcomes throughout later life.

Psychological well-being is also strengthened through learner-centred educational approaches. Knowles' theory of andragogy emphasizes respect for adult learners' experiences, autonomy, and self-directed learning (Knowles, 1979). When learners are treated as active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge, they develop greater confidence and intrinsic motivation. St. Clair (2024) similarly argued that adult education should acknowledge learners' previous experiences and encourage collaborative learning environments where adults feel respected and valued. Such educational practices foster positive psychological outcomes by creating supportive and inclusive learning spaces.

Technological innovation has introduced both opportunities and psychological challenges for adult learners. While digital learning environments offer flexibility and accessibility, they may also create feelings of inadequacy among individuals with limited technological competence. Bayly-Castañeda et al. (2024) suggested that personalized artificial intelligence-supported learning systems can reduce learner anxiety by adapting educational content to individual learning needs and pace. Personalized instruction enables learners to progress according to their abilities, thereby minimizing fear of failure and improving confidence. Nevertheless, the authors caution that adequate technological support and training remain essential to prevent digital learning from becoming a source of additional psychological stress.

Community participation further contributes to psychological resilience. Almeida et al. (2024) found that participatory non-formal education programmes create supportive social environments where learners collaborate, share experiences, and encourage one another throughout the learning process. Such community-based learning reduces feelings of isolation and strengthens learners' confidence by fostering a sense of belonging. Similarly, Grotlüschen et al. (2024) highlighted the role of educational networks and professional associations in providing emotional support, advocacy, and collaborative learning opportunities that strengthen adult learners' persistence and psychological well-being.

Women's empowerment programmes provide additional evidence of education's psychological benefits. Tiwari (2025) concluded that adult education significantly improves women's psychological health, life satisfaction, and emotional well-being by increasing knowledge, reducing uncertainty, and enhancing confidence in decision-making. Government welfare schemes and NGO-led educational programmes further contribute to psychological empowerment by providing supportive environments in which women develop leadership skills, social awareness, and economic independence (Pandey et al., 2019; Saif & Kumar, 2023). These programmes demonstrate that psychological empowerment and educational participation reinforce one another, creating positive cycles of lifelong learning.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that psychological challenges constitute a major determinant of adult learners' educational experiences. Anxiety, fear of failure, low self-esteem, emotional stress, cognitive decline, and social isolation frequently hinder educational participation and achievement. Nevertheless, evidence consistently shows that adult education itself serves as a powerful intervention for improving psychological well-being. Learner-centred teaching, supportive educational environments, community participation,

technological adaptation, and empowerment initiatives enhance confidence, resilience, mental health, and life satisfaction among adult learners. Addressing these psychological dimensions is therefore essential for promoting sustained participation in lifelong learning and ensuring that adult education contributes to both personal development and broader social well-being.

2.2.4 Social Challenges

Social challenges constitute one of the most significant barriers affecting adult learners' participation, retention, and success in lifelong learning programmes. Although education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right and an important instrument for social transformation, access to adult education remains unequal because of deeply rooted social, cultural, and economic inequalities. Adult learners, particularly women, older adults, marginalized communities, and economically disadvantaged groups, often encounter obstacles that extend beyond the classroom. These challenges include gender discrimination, caste-based inequalities, poverty, family responsibilities, social exclusion, cultural stereotypes, and limited community support. The literature consistently demonstrates that these social barriers not only restrict educational opportunities but also influence learners' motivation, confidence, and long-term educational aspirations.

Gender inequality continues to be one of the most persistent social barriers to adult education, especially in developing countries such as India. Despite considerable progress in educational policies and literacy programmes, women continue to experience lower literacy rates, reduced access to higher education, and fewer opportunities for skill development than men. Mondal (2023) observed that substantial disparities remain in female literacy, workforce participation, and educational attainment, limiting women's ability to achieve economic independence and social empowerment. The study emphasized that education enables women to challenge traditional gender roles, improve decision-making abilities, and participate more actively in economic and community life. However, unequal educational opportunities continue to restrict these outcomes for many women.

Similarly, Mittal (2021) argued that socio-cultural norms continue to prioritize marriage and domestic responsibilities over women's education, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged communities. Families often invest fewer resources in girls' education because of traditional beliefs that women primarily perform domestic roles after marriage. Such attitudes discourage women from pursuing higher education, vocational training, or lifelong

learning opportunities. These findings illustrate that educational inequality is influenced not only by economic limitations but also by long-standing cultural expectations regarding gender roles.

Adult education programmes have nevertheless demonstrated considerable potential in addressing gender inequality. Deshpande et al. (2020, 2021) found that participation in adult literacy programmes significantly improved women's confidence, mobility, bargaining power, and involvement in their children's education. Although the programmes did not immediately improve children's academic performance, they enhanced mothers' knowledge, communication skills, and participation in household decision-making. Similarly, Chadha et al. (2018) reported that adult literacy programmes strengthened women's self-esteem, increased social participation, and encouraged continued engagement in education. These findings suggest that education functions as an important mechanism for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

Economic disadvantage represents another major social barrier to adult learning. Poverty frequently limits individuals' ability to access educational resources, transportation, learning materials, digital technologies, and training programmes. Adults from economically disadvantaged households often prioritize income-generating activities over educational participation because of immediate financial needs. Motkuri (2013) highlighted persistent socio-economic inequalities that continue to influence literacy attainment across India. The study found that poverty remains closely associated with lower educational participation, particularly among rural populations and marginalized social groups. Similarly, Iftekhhar et al. (2015) argued that adult illiteracy in India is strongly linked to broader socio-economic inequalities, making lifelong learning inaccessible for many disadvantaged communities.

The relationship between education and poverty is cyclical. Limited educational opportunities reduce employment prospects and income, while economic hardship restricts further educational participation. Breaking this cycle therefore requires educational policies that address both financial and social barriers simultaneously. Government welfare programmes, scholarships, vocational training, and community learning centres have emerged as important interventions that enable economically disadvantaged adults to continue their education.

Government and non-governmental organizations have played an important role in reducing these socio-economic barriers. Pandey et al. (2019) reported that initiatives such as Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP), and Mahila

E-Haat enhanced women's economic independence by providing financial assistance, entrepreneurship training, and vocational education. These programmes increased learners' confidence while creating opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. Likewise, Saif and Kumar (2023) highlighted the significant contribution of NGOs and Self-Help Groups (SHGs), which provide educational opportunities, vocational training, legal awareness, and social support for women belonging to minority and marginalized communities. Such initiatives not only improve educational participation but also strengthen social inclusion and community empowerment.

Caste-based discrimination and social exclusion remain significant obstacles within the Indian educational context. Individuals belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other socially marginalized communities frequently experience unequal educational opportunities because of historical discrimination and structural inequalities. Chakraborty et al. (2024) found that older adults from lower caste groups, economically disadvantaged households, and female populations reported higher levels of perceived discrimination than socially privileged groups. Importantly, the study also demonstrated that higher educational attainment reduced experiences of discrimination by improving social inclusion, confidence, and community participation. Education therefore functions both as a means of personal development and as a mechanism for reducing social inequality.

Social exclusion is also particularly evident among older adults. Retirement, declining health, reduced mobility, and shrinking social networks often limit older adults' opportunities to participate in educational and community activities. Gaia et al. (2024) observed that social isolation remains one of the major barriers preventing older adults from participating in higher education programmes. The absence of supportive peer networks frequently reduces motivation and increases feelings of loneliness. Similarly, Wenzel et al. (2024) found that lifelong learning programmes significantly improved older adults' social engagement, psychological well-being, and sense of belonging by encouraging regular interaction with peers and educational communities.

Community-based educational programmes have proven effective in addressing these forms of social exclusion. Almeida et al. (2024) found that participatory non-formal education programmes encourage collaboration, volunteering, and collective problem-solving, thereby strengthening community relationships while improving educational participation. Such programmes enable learners from diverse backgrounds to share experiences, support one

another, and develop practical skills relevant to their daily lives. The study emphasized that community participation enhances both educational effectiveness and social cohesion.

Family responsibilities represent another important social challenge for adult learners. Many adults, particularly women, are expected to balance educational activities with childcare, household management, employment, and caregiving responsibilities. These competing demands often reduce the time and energy available for educational participation. Traditional gender expectations frequently place a disproportionate burden on women, making it difficult for them to attend classes regularly or complete academic assignments. Flexible learning schedules, community-based education, and online learning opportunities have therefore become increasingly important in supporting adult learners with multiple family responsibilities.

Migration, minority status, and cultural marginalization also influence educational participation. Minority women and socially disadvantaged populations frequently experience limited access to educational institutions because of language barriers, discrimination, inadequate infrastructure, and reduced awareness of available educational programmes. Saif and Kumar (2023) emphasized that educational empowerment among minority women requires integrated support systems involving government agencies, NGOs, vocational training centres, and community organizations. Such collaborative efforts promote educational inclusion while addressing broader issues of social inequality.

Recent international literature similarly recognizes that non-formal education contributes significantly to social inclusion by reaching populations that are often excluded from formal educational systems. Almeida et al. (2024) reported that non-formal educational initiatives emphasize empowerment, sustainability, practical learning, and community participation, enabling marginalized learners to acquire valuable knowledge and skills in accessible learning environments. These programmes are particularly important in developing countries where formal educational institutions may not adequately serve remote or disadvantaged communities.

Educational policy also plays a critical role in reducing social inequalities. Grotlüschen et al. (2024), through their comparative study of adult education across eight countries, found that educational networks, professional associations, and advocacy organizations contribute significantly to strengthening lifelong learning systems by promoting inclusive educational policies and supporting disadvantaged learner groups. Their findings suggest that effective

adult education requires collaboration among governments, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and local communities to address structural barriers affecting educational participation.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that social challenges significantly influence adult learners' educational experiences. Gender discrimination, poverty, caste inequalities, family responsibilities, social isolation, minority status, and cultural stereotypes continue to restrict access to lifelong learning opportunities. However, evidence also indicates that adult education functions as a powerful instrument for promoting social inclusion, gender equality, community participation, and economic empowerment. Government initiatives, community-based programmes, non-governmental organizations, learner-centred educational practices, and inclusive policies collectively contribute to reducing social barriers and expanding educational opportunities for marginalized populations. Addressing these social challenges is therefore essential for achieving equitable lifelong learning and promoting inclusive social development.

2.2.5 Institutional and Infrastructural Barriers

Institutional and infrastructural barriers play a crucial role in determining the accessibility, quality, and effectiveness of adult education and lifelong learning programmes. While individual motivation and social support encourage adults to participate in education, institutional shortcomings often limit learners' ability to access, continue, and successfully complete educational programmes. In many developing countries, including India, adult education continues to face challenges such as inadequate funding, insufficient educational infrastructure, weak policy implementation, shortage of trained educators, limited technological facilities, poor coordination among institutions, and unequal access between urban and rural areas. The literature consistently suggests that overcoming these institutional barriers is essential for achieving inclusive and equitable lifelong learning, as envisioned under Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4).

One of the major institutional challenges identified in the literature is the inadequate implementation of adult education policies. Although governments have introduced several educational reforms to promote lifelong learning, the translation of these policies into effective educational practices remains inconsistent. Tikader (2023) observed that the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 continues to face significant obstacles, including inadequate infrastructure, limited outreach, insufficient financial support, and unequal access

to educational services. While NEP 2020 recognizes lifelong learning as an important component of national development, practical implementation varies considerably across different regions of the country, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.

Similarly, Ahammad (2024) emphasized that the success of NEP 2020 depends not only on policy formulation but also on effective implementation mechanisms. The study argued that stronger institutional coordination, adequate funding, continuous monitoring, and improved administrative support are essential for expanding lifelong learning opportunities. Without effective implementation, educational policies may fail to reach the populations they are intended to benefit.

Funding remains another major institutional barrier affecting adult education programmes. Adult education often receives lower financial priority than formal school and higher education systems. Limited financial investment affects infrastructure development, learning materials, technological resources, teacher training, and learner support services. Tikader (2023) identified insufficient funding as one of the primary obstacles limiting the expansion and sustainability of adult education initiatives under NEP 2020. Inadequate financial resources reduce programme quality and restrict the establishment of learning centres in underserved areas.

Institutional inequality between formal and non-formal education systems further affects educational accessibility. Grotlüschen et al. (2024), in their comparative study across eight countries, found that formal education generally receives greater policy attention, funding, and institutional support than non-formal adult education programmes. Despite the important contribution of community learning centres, literacy campaigns, and vocational training initiatives, these programmes frequently operate with limited financial resources and administrative support. The study emphasized that stronger collaboration among governments, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and professional associations is necessary to strengthen lifelong learning systems.

The unequal distribution of educational infrastructure also creates considerable barriers for adult learners. Many rural and remote communities continue to experience shortages of educational institutions, libraries, community learning centres, transportation facilities, and qualified educators. Motkuri (2013) highlighted persistent regional disparities in literacy and educational infrastructure across India, with rural populations facing significantly greater barriers than urban communities. These geographical inequalities limit educational

participation among adults who may be unable to travel long distances to access learning opportunities.

Technological infrastructure has become increasingly important within contemporary adult education. The rapid expansion of online learning, digital platforms, mobile applications, and artificial intelligence has transformed educational delivery. However, access to these technologies remains highly unequal. Oteng et al. (2024) found that inadequate digital infrastructure, poor internet connectivity, limited access to computers and smartphones, and insufficient digital training significantly restrict older adults' participation in lifelong learning. Learners residing in rural areas often encounter additional challenges because of unreliable internet services and inadequate technological facilities.

Similarly, Iftekhhar et al. (2015) argued that effective integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) remains one of the major priorities for strengthening adult education in India. The authors suggested that expanding ICT infrastructure would improve educational accessibility, enhance instructional quality, and support flexible learning opportunities for adults who cannot attend traditional classroom-based programmes. However, successful digital transformation requires both technological investment and continuous digital literacy training for learners and educators.

Artificial intelligence and personalized learning technologies present promising opportunities but also highlight existing infrastructural inequalities. Bayly-Castañeda et al. (2024) argued that AI-supported learning systems can improve educational outcomes by adapting learning materials to individual learner needs, abilities, and learning pace. Nevertheless, such innovations require adequate technological infrastructure, reliable internet connectivity, and digitally competent educators. Without these prerequisites, technological innovations may widen educational disparities rather than promote inclusive learning.

Another institutional barrier concerns the shortage of trained adult educators. Adult learners possess educational needs that differ significantly from those of children and adolescents. Consequently, educators require specialized knowledge of adult learning theories, learner-centred pedagogies, experiential learning, counselling, and technological instruction. Knowles (1979) emphasized that adult educators should function primarily as facilitators of learning rather than traditional instructors, recognizing learners' experiences and encouraging self-directed education. Contemporary scholars similarly argue that adult educators require

continuous professional development to address the evolving educational needs of diverse learner populations (St. Clair, 2024; Merriam, 2018).

Panda (2011) further highlighted several institutional weaknesses affecting lifelong learning in India, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate coordination among educational agencies, limited ICT integration, and insufficient capacity-building initiatives. The study argued that fragmented administrative structures often reduce programme effectiveness and delay policy implementation. Stronger coordination among government departments, educational institutions, community organizations, and civil society agencies is therefore essential for creating integrated lifelong learning systems.

Institutional support services also influence learner retention and academic success. Adult learners frequently require academic counselling, career guidance, mentoring, financial assistance, childcare support, flexible scheduling, and psychological counselling. Educational institutions that provide comprehensive learner support services generally demonstrate higher learner retention and completion rates. Grotlüschen et al. (2024) emphasized that educational networks and professional associations contribute significantly to strengthening adult education by facilitating knowledge sharing, policy advocacy, and institutional collaboration.

Recent research on non-formal education further illustrates the importance of institutional flexibility. Almeida et al. (2024) found that community-based non-formal education programmes effectively address educational inequalities by providing practical, participatory, and locally relevant learning opportunities. Unlike rigid formal educational systems, non-formal programmes often adapt their curriculum, teaching methods, and schedules to meet learners' specific needs. Such flexibility enables adults with employment responsibilities, family commitments, or limited educational backgrounds to participate more successfully in lifelong learning.

Educational quality also depends upon institutional commitment to inclusive learning environments. Vir and Kumar (2024) argued that access, equity, and educational quality continue to dominate educational discourse in India. The authors emphasized that improving adult education requires institutional reforms that promote equitable resource allocation, teacher training, curriculum modernization, and technological integration. Strengthening institutional capacity is therefore essential for ensuring that educational opportunities are accessible to all sections of society.

International perspectives similarly highlight the importance of institutional partnerships. Grotlüschen et al. (2024) demonstrated that collaboration among governments, universities, community organizations, and international educational networks contributes significantly to strengthening adult education systems. Such partnerships facilitate policy development, professional training, curriculum innovation, research collaboration, and resource sharing. They also improve advocacy for lifelong learning at national and international levels, supporting the achievement of SDG 4.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that institutional and infrastructural barriers significantly affect the accessibility and effectiveness of adult education programmes. Weak policy implementation, inadequate funding, limited educational infrastructure, insufficient technological facilities, shortages of trained educators, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and unequal institutional support continue to hinder lifelong learning opportunities. Nevertheless, research consistently suggests that stronger institutional collaboration, improved infrastructure, technological investment, educator training, flexible programme design, and effective policy implementation can substantially enhance adult education systems. Addressing these institutional barriers is therefore essential for creating inclusive, accessible, and sustainable lifelong learning opportunities that contribute to individual empowerment and national development.

2.2.6 Coping Strategies and Resilience

Despite facing numerous academic, psychological, social, and institutional barriers, adult learners consistently demonstrate resilience in pursuing education and lifelong learning. Resilience refers to an individual's ability to adapt positively to adversity, overcome obstacles, and continue progressing toward personal and educational goals. In the context of adult education, resilience is developed through personal determination, supportive relationships, community participation, institutional assistance, technological adaptation, and empowerment initiatives. Rather than allowing barriers to prevent educational participation, many adult learners actively employ coping strategies that enable them to balance competing responsibilities while continuing their educational journey. The literature consistently demonstrates that resilience plays a significant role in promoting learner persistence, academic success, psychological well-being, and lifelong personal development.

One of the most effective coping strategies identified in the literature is the development of strong social support systems. Family members, peers, teachers, community organizations, and

educational institutions provide emotional encouragement, practical assistance, and academic guidance that help learners overcome educational challenges. Almeida et al. (2024) found that participatory community-based learning programmes create collaborative environments in which learners support one another through shared experiences, collective problem-solving, and mutual encouragement. Such environments reduce feelings of isolation while strengthening learners' confidence and motivation to continue their education.

Similarly, Grotlüschen et al. (2024) emphasized that educational networks, professional associations, and community organizations play an important role in strengthening adult education systems by facilitating collaboration, advocacy, knowledge sharing, and learner support. These networks enable adult learners to access educational resources, mentorship, and institutional assistance that improve their ability to overcome academic and social barriers. Collaborative learning environments therefore contribute significantly to learner resilience by creating a sense of belonging and shared responsibility.

Lifelong learning itself functions as an important resilience-building strategy. Continuous participation in educational activities enhances learners' ability to adapt to changing personal, social, and occupational circumstances. Wenzel et al. (2024) found that older adults participating in lifelong learning programmes demonstrated higher levels of cognitive reserve, psychological well-being, physical health, and successful ageing than the general older population. Educational participation helped learners maintain cognitive functioning, develop meaningful social relationships, and sustain a strong sense of purpose throughout later life. These findings suggest that lifelong learning not only improves knowledge and skills but also strengthens individuals' capacity to cope with the challenges associated with ageing.

Gaia et al. (2024) similarly reported that higher education contributes significantly to active ageing by improving older adults' mental health, cognitive functioning, social participation, and overall quality of life. Educational engagement reduced feelings of loneliness and social isolation while encouraging greater confidence and independence. Participation in university education also enabled older learners to develop new social networks and maintain intellectual stimulation, illustrating the important relationship between lifelong learning and psychological resilience.

Technological adaptation has emerged as another important coping strategy within contemporary adult education. Although digital technologies initially present challenges for many adult learners, research indicates that learners gradually develop digital competencies

that improve educational participation and daily living. Oteng et al. (2024) observed that older adults creatively adapted mobile technologies to sustain their livelihoods despite limited digital literacy and infrastructural challenges. Through continuous learning and practical experience, participants became increasingly confident in using digital tools for communication, financial transactions, and educational purposes. Their ability to adapt demonstrates the resilience of adult learners in responding to rapidly changing technological environments.

Bayly-Castaneda et al. (2024) further suggested that artificial intelligence-supported personalized learning systems can strengthen learner resilience by adapting educational content according to individual learning needs and pace. Personalized learning reduces academic frustration by allowing learners to progress gradually while receiving immediate feedback and individualized support. Such technological innovations enable learners with diverse educational backgrounds to overcome academic challenges more effectively, provided adequate technological infrastructure and training are available.

Women's empowerment programmes provide additional evidence of resilience through education. Gupta (2021) found that NGO-led entrepreneurial training and vocational education significantly strengthened women's confidence, economic independence, and leadership abilities. Educational participation enabled women to develop new skills, establish small businesses, and participate more actively in community decision-making. These outcomes illustrate how education enhances resilience by increasing learners' capacity to respond effectively to social and economic challenges.

Similarly, Pandey et al. (2019) reported that government welfare programmes such as Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP), and Mahila E-Haat enhanced women's self-efficacy, confidence, and decision-making capacity. Financial assistance, vocational training, and entrepreneurship support enabled women to overcome structural barriers while improving their educational and economic opportunities. These programmes demonstrate that institutional support can strengthen resilience by providing learners with practical resources that encourage educational persistence.

Adult education also promotes resilience by enhancing learners' self-confidence and psychological well-being. Chadha et al. (2018) found that literacy programmes significantly improved women's self-esteem, communication skills, and social participation. Similarly, Mondal (2023) concluded that education enhances women's ability to make independent decisions, solve problems, and participate actively in family and community life. As learners

acquire knowledge and develop new competencies, they become increasingly capable of managing personal, occupational, and social challenges with greater confidence.

Community participation remains another important resilience-building mechanism. Almeida et al. (2024) observed that non-formal education programmes encourage volunteering, collaborative learning, and practical problem-solving within local communities. These participatory approaches allow learners to apply educational knowledge directly to everyday situations while strengthening community relationships and collective responsibility. Learners therefore develop resilience not only as individuals but also as active members of supportive communities.

Adult learning theories further explain how resilience develops through educational participation. Knowles (1979) argued that adult learners possess valuable life experiences that become important resources for learning and problem-solving. Rather than viewing previous hardships as obstacles, learner-centred educational approaches encourage adults to draw upon their experiences to understand new concepts and address practical challenges. Merriam (2018) similarly emphasized that adult learning involves emotional, social, and experiential dimensions that collectively strengthen learners' capacity for adaptation and lifelong development.

The literature also suggests that resilience is influenced by institutional flexibility. Flexible learning schedules, distance education, online learning platforms, blended learning approaches, and community-based educational programmes enable adults to balance education with employment and family responsibilities. Such flexibility allows learners to continue their education despite changing personal circumstances, thereby strengthening persistence and long-term educational achievement.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that adult learners possess remarkable resilience despite facing multiple educational challenges. Supportive relationships, lifelong learning, technological adaptation, community participation, government initiatives, empowerment programmes, and learner-centred educational practices collectively enable learners to overcome academic, psychological, social, and institutional barriers. Resilience therefore emerges as both an outcome and a driving force of adult education, allowing individuals to achieve personal growth, social inclusion, and lifelong learning.

2.3 RESEARCH GAP

Although several studies have examined adult education, lifelong learning, women's empowerment, and literacy programmes in India, only a limited number have specifically focused on equivalency education in Kerala. Most existing studies emphasize educational policies, literacy outcomes, or large-scale programmes, while the experiences of learners enrolled in equivalency education remain underexplored. Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of school-level qualitative case studies that examine the day-to-day experiences of adult learners within specific institutional settings. Consequently, the educational realities of learners studying in schools such as Kallara GVHSS have received little scholarly attention.

Another important gap identified in the literature is the limited understanding of the lived experiences of adult learners after returning to education following long interruptions. Previous studies have paid comparatively less attention to the academic, psychological, social, and institutional challenges encountered by equivalency learners, including memory difficulties, fear of failure, family responsibilities, and the role of institutional support. In addition, although adult learning theories such as Andragogy and Lifelong Learning are widely discussed in adult education literature, their application to equivalency education in the Kerala context remains limited. Therefore, the present study seeks to address these gaps by exploring the lived experiences of equivalency learners at Kallara GVHSS through a qualitative case study approach, thereby contributing context-specific knowledge to the fields of adult education, lifelong learning, and equivalency education in Kerala.

2.4 CONCLUSION

The review of literature highlights that adult education and lifelong learning play a vital role in promoting personal development, social inclusion, and sustainable development. The studies reviewed indicate that adult learners are motivated by aspirations for self-improvement, economic empowerment, and enhanced quality of life, while their educational experiences are influenced by various academic, psychological, social, and institutional factors. Despite facing numerous challenges such as limited educational opportunities, financial constraints, gender inequality, technological barriers, and psychological stress, adult learners demonstrate remarkable resilience through supportive relationships, community participation, and lifelong learning opportunities.

The literature further emphasizes the importance of learner-centred educational approaches, effective institutional support, inclusive policies, and technological integration in improving access to and participation in adult education. However, the review also identifies gaps in existing research, particularly regarding the combined influence of multiple challenges and coping strategies experienced by adult learners in different contexts. These findings provide a strong theoretical and empirical foundation for the present study and justify the need to further examine the experiences of adult learners to contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective lifelong learning policies and practices.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research methodology provides the overall framework that guides a study by explaining the methods and procedures used to collect, analyse, and interpret data. It ensures that the research is conducted systematically and that the findings are credible and relevant to the research problem. Since the present study seeks to understand the lived experiences of adult learners pursuing equivalency education, a qualitative approach was adopted. This chapter describes the research methodology employed in the study, including the research approach, research design, research questions, sampling technique, sources of data, methods and tools of data collection, area of the study, data analysis, and limitations of the study.

3.2 TITLE OF THE STUDY

CHALLENGES OF ADULT LEARNERS IN THE EQUIVALENCY EXAMINATION: A CASE STUDY AT KALLARA GOVERNMENT VOCATIONAL HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

The present study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore the lived experiences of adult learners enrolled in the Equivalency Programme at Kallara Government Vocational Higher Secondary School. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges within their real-life context. Through face-to-face interviews, the study explored the academic, psychological, social, and institutional challenges experienced by adult learners, as well as the factors that motivated and supported their educational journey.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study adopted a qualitative case study research design. A case study design is appropriate when a researcher intends to explore a phenomenon in depth within its real-life context. Since this study focuses on understanding the lived experiences of adult learners enrolled in the Equivalency Examination Programme at Kallara Government Vocational Higher Secondary School, the case study design provided an opportunity to examine their experiences comprehensively.

The case study approach enabled the researcher to investigate how academic, psychological, social, and institutional factors influence the educational journey of adult learners. It also

helped in understanding the unique circumstances of learners studying in a rural educational institution that has been offering equivalency programmes for several years. By focusing on a single educational setting, the study generated rich and detailed insights that would not have been possible through large-scale quantitative methods.

3.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.5.1 General Research Question

What are the lived experiences of adult learners enrolled in the SSLC Equivalency Examination Programme at Kallara Government Vocational Higher Secondary School, Thiruvananthapuram?

3.5.2 Specific Research Questions

- What factors motivate adult learners to enroll in the SSLC Equivalency Examination Programme?
- What academic challenges do adult learners experience while pursuing the SSLC Equivalency Examination Programme?
- What psychological and social challenges influence the learning experiences of adult learners enrolled in the SSLC Equivalency Examination Programme?
- What institutional and infrastructural barriers affect the educational experiences of adult learners in the SSLC Equivalency Examination Programme?
- How do adult learners cope with and overcome the challenges they encounter while participating in the SSLC Equivalency Examination Programme?

3.6 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

3.6.1 SSLC Equivalency Learner –

It refers to an adult or individual who is enrolled in or has completed the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) Equivalency program , designed to provide those who have not completed formal secondary education an opportunity to attain an equivalent qualification

3.6.2 Adult Learner –

It means any individual aged 25 years or above who participates in organized learning activities beyond traditional schooling , for the purpose of gaining knowledge , skills , attitudes , or competencies for personal , social or professional development.

3.6.3 Adult Learning (Andragogy) –

According to Malcolm Knowles, adult learning or andragogy is the art and science of helping adults learn. Knowles argued that adults learn differently from children (Pedagogy). Adult learners are generally self-directed, bring a wealth of life experiences to learning situations, and are motivated by practical needs and real life problems.

3.7 SOURCES OF DATA

The study was based on both primary and secondary sources of data.

3.7.1 PRIMARY SOURCES

Primary data were collected directly from adult learners enrolled in the SSLC, Plus One, and Plus Two Equivalency Programmes at Kallara Government Vocational Higher Secondary School. The data were obtained through in-depth interviews and field observations, which enabled the researcher to understand the learners lived experiences, challenges, motivations, and coping strategies.

3.7.2 SECONDARY SOURCES

Secondary data were collected from books, peer-reviewed journals, research articles, theses and dissertations, government reports, policy documents, newspapers, magazines, and other relevant academic publications. These sources helped establish the theoretical foundation of the study and provided supporting evidence for interpreting the research findings.

3.8 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was conducted before the main data collection to assess the suitability of the interview guide and the feasibility of the research process. Initially, the study was planned to include only learners enrolled in the SSLC Equivalency Programme. As part of the pilot study, an interview was conducted with an SSLC equivalency learner to evaluate the relevance of the research questions and the adequacy of the data obtained.

The pilot study revealed that limiting the study to SSLC learners alone would not provide sufficient information to comprehensively understand the lived experiences of adult learners. It was observed that learners who had progressed to the Higher Secondary Equivalency Programme (Plus One and Plus Two) were able to reflect more deeply on their educational journey, including their motivations, academic challenges, psychological experiences, social responsibilities, and coping strategies

3.9 SAMPLE SIZE

The sample size of the study consisted of six adult learners enrolled in the Equivalency Programme at Kallara Government Vocational Higher Secondary School, Thiruvananthapuram.

3.10 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their willingness to participate and their ability to provide rich and relevant information related to the objectives of the study. The sample included learners from the SSLC, Plus One, and Plus Two Equivalency Programmes, enabling the researcher to gain diverse perspectives on their educational experiences. Since the study adopted a qualitative case study design, a small sample size was considered appropriate for obtaining detailed and in-depth information from each participant.

3.11 TOOLS OF DATA COLLECTION

To collect comprehensive and meaningful data, the researcher used multiple data collection tools.

3.11.1 INTERVIEW GUIDE

A semi-structured interview guide was prepared based on the objectives of the study and the research questions. The guide consisted of open-ended questions that encouraged participants to describe their educational experiences, motivations, challenges, and coping strategies in detail. The flexible nature of the interview guide also enabled the researcher to ask additional probing questions whenever clarification or deeper understanding was required.

3.11.2 FIELD OBSERVATION

Field observation was conducted during visits to the study setting to understand the natural learning environment of adult learners. The researcher observed classroom interactions, learner participation, communication patterns, attendance, and the general educational atmosphere. These observations provided valuable contextual information that complemented the interview findings.

3.11.3 FIELD NOTES

Field notes were maintained throughout the research process to record observations, participants' non-verbal expressions, reflections, and significant events that occurred during interviews and observations. These notes enriched the data by capturing details that could not always be recorded through interviews alone.

3.12 AREA OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted at Kallara Government Vocational Higher Secondary School (GVHSS), Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. The school was selected because it has been offering SSLC, Plus One, and Plus Two Equivalency Programmes continuously for the past four years. Unlike many schools that do not provide equivalency education, Kallara GVHSS has established itself as an important learning centre for adult learners seeking to continue their education.

Although the school is situated in a rural area, it has consistently enrolled a comparatively higher number of equivalency learners than many other institutions offering similar programmes. Adult learners enrolled in the programme come from different educational, occupational, and socio-economic backgrounds, making the school an ideal setting for exploring diverse lived experiences within the context of equivalency education.

3.13 DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected through interviews, field observations, and field notes were analysed using thematic analysis. After each interview, the responses were carefully transcribed and read several times to develop familiarity with the data. Meaningful statements related to the research questions were identified and coded.

The codes were then grouped into broader categories based on similarities and recurring patterns. Finally, these categories were organized into major themes that reflected the lived experiences of adult learners. The findings were interpreted by comparing the emerging themes with the existing literature on adult education and lifelong learning.

Thematic analysis was selected because it allows the researcher to identify, organize, and interpret patterns of meaning within qualitative data while remaining faithful to participants' own experiences.

3.14 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was confined to Kallara Government Vocational Higher Secondary School, Thiruvananthapuram, and therefore the findings represent the experiences of adult learners within this particular educational setting. The results may not be generalized to all equivalency learners in Kerala or other regions.

The study adopted a qualitative approach with a relatively small number of participants. Although this allowed for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, it limits the possibility of statistical generalization.

The findings are based primarily on participants' personal narratives and perceptions. Since qualitative research relies heavily on participants' willingness to share their experiences honestly, individual responses may have been influenced by personal beliefs, emotions, or memory.

Time constraints also limited the duration of fieldwork and the number of participants who could be included in the study. Despite these limitations, careful planning, multiple sources of data, field observations, and systematic analysis were employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of the study based on the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and field notes from adult learners enrolled in the SSLC, Plus One, and Plus Two Equivalency Programmes at Kallara Government Vocational Higher Secondary School, Thiruvananthapuram. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved carefully reading the interview transcripts, identifying meaningful codes, and grouping similar ideas into broader themes.

The purpose of this analysis is to understand the lived experiences of adult learners and explore the various challenges they encounter while pursuing equivalency education. The findings are presented under five major themes that emerged from the participants' narratives. Direct quotations from the participants are included to preserve the authenticity of their experiences and to provide a deeper understanding of their perspectives.

4.2 CASE NARRATIONS

4.2.1 Case 1 (38 years)

She is a married housewife enrolled in the SSLC Equivalency Programme at Kallara GVHSS in 2024, shows the various difficulties faced by adult learners who return to education after a long break. She had earlier studied up to Class 10 at Tholicode GHSS but could not pass due to lack of interest in studies. After marriage, she often felt a sense of discomfort in social situations because she did not have an SSLC certificate, especially when she was asked about her qualification in places like surveys and banks. This experience, along with her wish to complete +2 and get a job in the future, encouraged her to join the equivalency course. Even though she does not face financial difficulties due to the government-supported nature of the programme, and her home environment is stable with her husband's support, she still struggles with several learning challenges. She finds it difficult to manage time during exams, has issues with handwriting, and experiences problems with memory, stress, and headaches due to mental pressure. She also has a strong fear of failing the exam, which makes her anxious. Her toughest subjects include Mathematics, English, and Science at the SSLC level, and English and Economics at the higher secondary level. At the same time, she feels that the teaching at Kallara GVHSS is very helpful, as teachers first provide basic foundation classes before moving to the textbook, and also supply useful study materials like notes and previous question papers. She

mainly depends on self-study and also uses YouTube classes to support her learning, especially because she sometimes forgets what is taught in class. Her main learning method is repeated writing, which helps her understand and remember lessons better. She also feels that regular attendance is very important for understanding the subjects properly. Overall, her experience shows that adult learners in equivalency education face emotional stress, memory-related issues, and academic difficulties due to long gaps in studying, but with proper teaching support, family encouragement, and personal effort, they can continue and succeed in their education. She also shared that her earlier school experience was not very encouraging, and she feels that if she had been taught in a similar supportive way back then, she would have likely passed her SSLC. Because of the long break in her studies, she now finds it difficult to regain confidence in subjects that need regular practice and continuity. She often struggles while trying to revise lessons, especially when she studies alone at home, as it becomes hard to remember everything taught in class. Despite these difficulties, she makes sure to attend classes regularly because she strongly believes that regular learning is important for understanding the lessons better. Overall, her experience shows gradual improvement through dedication and persistence, even while facing emotional and academic challenges.

4.2.2 Case 2 (28 years)

She is a married woman with two children who is currently unemployed, reflects the experience of an adult learner in the +2 Equivalency Programme at Kallara GVHSS after completing +1 in 2025. She had a good academic record during her school days and studied well, but her education was interrupted during her +2 period due to a deeply painful family situation, including the death of her mother and serious issues within her family. After this, she lost interest in continuing her studies and stepped away from education for a long time, partly because she felt uncomfortable studying alongside younger students. Later in life, after marriage, she began to feel the pressure of family responsibilities and the need for a stable income, which slowly motivated her to return to studies. This pushed her to join the Equivalency Programme, where she completed +1 and is now continuing with +2. Even after rejoining studies, she faces many difficulties due to the long break. She often suffers from headaches, stress, and lack of sleep because of the pressure of balancing studies with daily life. Managing household work and taking care of her children while also attending classes is challenging for her, especially since she travels nearly one and a half hours to reach the institution. She mostly studies at night after her children fall asleep, which leaves her with very little time for proper revision. Despite these struggles, she receives strong support from her

husband and family, which keeps her going. The course is also financially manageable for her since it involves only basic fees. She finds the classes at Kallara GVHSS simple and easy to follow, and she gets help from teachers through practice questions and from classmates who share notes and materials. Overall, her story shows how strong determination, family support, and flexible learning opportunities can help a person continue education even after facing emotional pain and heavy life responsibilities.

4.2.3 Case 3 (38 years)

She is a married housewife and tailor, reflects the journey of an adult learner who completed the SSLC Equivalency Programme at Kallara GVHSS. She remembers her school days as a very happy time, where she used to walk long distances to school with her friends. However, she discontinued her studies after failing the SSLC exam, as she was only focused on passing at that time and did not think much about further education. After a long gap, when she joined the equivalency programme, she initially found it very difficult to cope with the subjects because she had been away from studies for many years. She also faced problems with memory and understanding basic concepts, which made learning more challenging for her. Subjects like Mathematics and English were especially tough, while she was comparatively more comfortable with Science subjects. Despite these difficulties, she felt that the teaching methods at Kallara GVHSS were very supportive, and the study materials provided were simple and easy to understand, which helped her a lot. At the same time, she struggled to balance her studies with her daily responsibilities. She had to manage household work, tailoring, and her own shop, along with family duties, which often left her very tired. She also found it difficult to take care of her children while attending classes, which added to her stress. Unlike some other learners, she did not receive much support from her husband and children, making her educational journey more demanding. Even though she had time to study, she often felt sleepy or exhausted when trying to revise lessons. She also faced common difficulties such as poor handwriting, time pressure during exams, and fear of failure, especially after such a long break from studies. To handle these challenges, she relied mainly on repeated writing and continuous practice to improve her memory and understanding. She attended most of her classes regularly since the timings were convenient for her. However, she felt that managing Sunday-only classes for important responsibilities was sometimes very difficult without family support. She also suggested that the programme could be improved by giving more time between examinations, increasing class hours, and including additional class days such as Saturdays. Overall, her experience shows that while equivalency education gives a second chance to learners, success

depends greatly on personal effort, supportive teaching, and a learning system that is flexible enough to suit the needs of adult students.

4.2.4 Case 4 (46 years)

She is a married housewife currently studying in the +2 Equivalency Programme at Kallara GVHSS, reflects the experience of an adult learner who has returned to education after a long break. She studied up to SSLC at GLPS Aruvippuram, where she used to walk around 1.5 km daily to attend school, but during her school days she was not very focused on studies. After SSLC, she discontinued her education due to marriage and stayed away from academics for nearly 30 years. Later in life, she slowly developed an interest in learning again and joined the equivalency programme in 2025. She mainly joined to make good use of her time, rather than with a strong aim for higher education or employment. Her husband encouraged her to study, especially because he had also completed SSLC through an equivalency programme, which made him understand her situation better and support her decision. In class, she feels that the lessons are easy to understand and appreciates the supportive teaching at Kallara GVHSS. At the same time, she struggles with several difficulties that come from the long gap in her education, such as memory problems, anxiety, tension, and difficulty remembering what she studies. She finds Economics and English particularly challenging subjects. One of her biggest struggles is managing her studies along with family responsibilities, especially supporting her children and taking care of their needs while also focusing on her own education. Although her husband is supportive, her children are not fully comfortable with her studying at this stage, and this affects her emotionally as they feel embarrassed about it. She also has a strong fear of failing exams, which sometimes lowers her confidence and affects her health. To cope with her memory issues, she mainly depends on repeatedly writing and reading lessons again and again. Overall, she is satisfied with the current learning system and does not suggest major changes, but she feels she would do even better if she received more encouragement from her children. Her story shows the emotional strength and challenges involved in returning to education later in life.

4.2.5 Case 5 (33 years)

He is a religious scholar (ustad), reflects the journey of an adult learner who joined the +1 Equivalency Programme in 2025 and is currently continuing in +2 at Kallara GVHSS. His early education was somewhat uneven, shaped largely by his strong interest in religious studies. He studied well in his primary years at Govt LPS Aruvippuram, and later completed 5th to 7th standard at Govt Boys School Mithrmala with average performance. However, during his higher classes at Poovachal School, his attendance became irregular as he focused more on memorizing the Quran (Hifz), attending school only occasionally and showing less interest in formal academics. For him, religious learning always took priority over school education. Later, he decided to join the equivalency programme with the aim of obtaining a +2 qualification, which he felt would be useful for future opportunities, along with a genuine interest in continuing his studies. He finds the teaching at Kallara GVHSS very engaging and easy to understand, and he appreciates that the classes are never boring, with clear notes, textbooks, and printed materials that support learning. His difficult subjects are English and Economics. He also mentions in a light and humorous way that, despite the long gap in his studies, he does not struggle much to understand the lessons. His family responsibilities do not disturb his studies, and he receives good support from his family, especially his wife. The class timings are also convenient for him. However, he sometimes faces difficulties due to irregular attendance, which affects his continuity in learning certain topics. He openly shares his mild exam anxiety, especially regarding classroom exam supervision, which he expresses in a humorous manner. To manage stress, he often talks with his wife, which helps him feel calm and supported. His main exam strategy is focused on studying important “bits” and short questions to score better in exams. He also suggests that increasing the number of class periods from two subjects to four could improve learning effectiveness. Overall, his story reflects how personal interests, religious commitments, and formal education can come together later in life, and how supportive teaching and family encouragement help him continue his academic journey successfully.

4.2.6 Case 6 (41 years)

Case 6 is a 41-year-old married woman working in a private company and currently pursuing the Higher Secondary Equivalency Programme at Kallara GVHSS. She joined the SSLC Equivalency Programme in 2024, completed Plus One in 2025, and is presently studying Plus Two in 2026. Her educational journey reflects determination and a strong desire to complete the education that was interrupted many years ago.

During the interview, she explained that she had always been interested in studies and attended school regularly during her childhood. However, she experienced severe examination anxiety, which affected her academic performance. She recalled, *“In my childhood schooling, I had so much tension and anxiety about exams and because of this I forgot everything that I studied.”* As a result, she failed the SSLC examination. Although she wished to write the failed subjects again, her marriage prevented her from continuing her education. She said, *“When I wrote the failed papers again, maybe I would have passed. But my family didn't support that.”*

She also explained that social and family expectations played a major role in discontinuing her education. According to her, girls' education was not given much importance at that time, and early marriage was considered more important. She shared, *“At that time there was no importance for studies; Muslim girls after the SSLC got married.”* She further added, *“At that time there was no concept of job or self-independency.”* She also remembered a discouraging comment from a relative who said, *“If I studied also I don't pass it. So get her married as soon as possible.”* Such experiences affected her confidence and interrupted her educational aspirations.

The main reason for joining the equivalency programme was to overcome the embarrassment of not having an educational qualification. She explained, *“Wherever the situation asked for qualification, I felt ashamed to tell others. So that was the main reason I joined the equivalency programme.”* For her, completing Higher Secondary education is a matter of self-respect and personal satisfaction rather than employment alone.

Returning to education after a long gap has not been easy. She experiences difficulties in understanding English, remembering lessons, and preparing for examinations. She also finds subjects such as English, Economics, and Political Science difficult. To improve her learning, she follows self-study methods such as repeated writing and regular revision, which help her remember the lessons better.

Managing multiple responsibilities is another major challenge in her educational journey. As a working woman, wife, and mother, she finds it difficult to balance work, household responsibilities, childcare, and studies. However, she receives continuous encouragement from her husband and elder daughter, which motivates her to continue her education. Since classes are conducted on Sundays, she is able to attend regularly without affecting her job.

She expressed satisfaction with the teaching methods adopted at Kallara GVHSS. She appreciated the teachers for explaining lessons clearly and providing useful study materials,

notes, and previous question papers. According to her, these resources make learning easier and improve examination preparation. She also suggested increasing the number of subject periods and arranging regular revision classes to help adult learners perform better.

Overall, this case illustrates that adult learners face several academic, psychological, and social challenges after returning to education. At the same time, it shows that determination, family support, and a supportive learning environment can help them overcome these difficulties. Her journey demonstrates how the equivalency programme provides adult learners with a valuable second opportunity to continue their education, rebuild confidence, and achieve their personal goals.

4.3 DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS – THEMATIC

4.3.1 Motivation and Support Systems

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the analysis is the motivation that encouraged adult learners to return to education and the various support systems that sustained them throughout their educational journey. The participants' narratives revealed that their decision to enrol in the equivalency programme was influenced by a combination of personal aspirations, economic needs, emotional encouragement, and institutional support. Although each participant had unique reasons for resuming education, they shared a common determination to improve their lives despite the challenges they encountered. The findings indicate that motivation among adult learners is strengthened by both intrinsic factors, such as self-esteem and personal fulfilment, and extrinsic factors, including family, teachers, and peers. This finding is consistent with Knowles (1980), who argues that adult learners are generally self-directed and motivated by life experiences, personal goals, and practical needs.

4.3.1.1 Self-esteem

A major motivating factor identified in the study was the desire to improve self-esteem and regain confidence. Several participants viewed education as an opportunity to overcome feelings of inadequacy resulting from discontinuing their studies at an early age. Completing the equivalency programme was perceived as a personal achievement that would restore their confidence and provide a sense of dignity.

Case 1 (38 years) explained that completing the equivalency examination had always been a personal dream and believed that obtaining the qualification would increase confidence and self-respect. Similarly, Case 3 (46 years) stated that returning to education helped overcome the feeling of being left behind when compared to others who had completed their education.

These responses indicate that education was valued not merely as an academic qualification but as a means of rebuilding personal identity and confidence. Merriam (2018) similarly observes that adult learning often contributes to personal growth, improved self-esteem, and greater confidence in managing everyday life.

Field observations also reflected this change in confidence. During classroom interactions, learners who were initially hesitant gradually became more willing to answer questions, participate in discussions, and share their opinions with classmates. The researcher's field notes indicated that participants appeared more confident as they progressed through the programme, suggesting that continued participation in education positively influenced their self-belief.

4.3.1.2 Socio-economic Mobility

The findings also reveal that improving socio-economic conditions was a significant motivation for enrolling in the equivalency programme. Many participants believed that educational qualifications would increase their opportunities for employment, career advancement, and financial stability. Education was therefore viewed as a pathway towards improving both personal and family well-being.

Case 5 (33 years) explained that completing the equivalency programme would enable better employment opportunities and provide greater financial security for the family. Likewise, Case 4 (45 years) believed that obtaining the qualification would improve future prospects and provide opportunities that had previously been unavailable due to the lack of formal education. These findings suggest that adult learners associate education with social mobility and improved quality of life. Similar observations were reported by UNESCO (2022), which highlights adult education as an important mechanism for enhancing employability, social inclusion, and economic development.

Field notes further indicated that participants frequently discussed future plans such as securing stable employment, qualifying for higher education, or obtaining government jobs after completing the programme. These aspirations demonstrate that learners viewed education as an investment in their future rather than simply obtaining a certificate.

4.3.1.3 Companionship

Another important source of motivation was the sense of companionship developed among learners. Studying alongside individuals with similar life experiences created a supportive

atmosphere where participants felt accepted and understood. Many learners explained that sharing common struggles reduced feelings of isolation and encouraged regular attendance.

Case 6 explained that interacting with classmates facing similar challenges created a sense of belonging and motivated continued participation in the programme. Likewise, Case 3 (46 years) shared that learning together with other adult learners increased confidence because everyone encouraged one another during difficult periods. These experiences demonstrate that peer companionship contributes to emotional well-being and educational persistence. According to Almeida et al. (2024), collaborative learning environments enhance learners' confidence and reduce feelings of isolation among adult learners.

During field observations, learners were frequently seen discussing lessons before classes, exchanging notes, and helping one another prepare for examinations. The researcher also observed that participants openly shared personal experiences, creating a friendly and cooperative classroom environment.

4.3.1.4 Teacher Support

Teacher support emerged as one of the strongest motivating factors influencing learners' educational experiences. Participants consistently described teachers as patient, encouraging, and approachable. Rather than simply delivering lessons, teachers motivated learners to remain confident and continue their studies despite experiencing academic difficulties.

Case 1 (38 years) stated, *"Teachers first give base classes and then only start the textbook, which makes understanding easier."* Similarly, Case 4 (45 years) remarked, *"The teachers' classes were very good and the study materials were very easy to understand."* These responses indicate that teachers adopted instructional strategies appropriate for adult learners who had experienced long educational interruptions. This finding supports Almeida et al. (2024), who argue that supportive teachers significantly enhance adult learners' engagement and confidence.

Field observations confirmed that teachers patiently repeated explanations, clarified doubts individually, and encouraged learners to participate actively in classroom discussions. The researcher's field notes further recorded that teachers regularly appreciated learners' efforts, which appeared to strengthen their motivation and self-confidence.

4.3.1.5 Peer Support

The findings also demonstrate that peer support played an important role in sustaining learners' motivation. Participants frequently relied on classmates for academic assistance, emotional encouragement, and examination preparation. Learning alongside peers with similar experiences reduced feelings of fear and created opportunities for collaborative learning.

Case 5 (33 years) explained that classmates regularly discussed important questions and shared learning strategies before examinations, making preparation easier. Similarly, Case 2 (28 years) reported that encouragement from fellow learners helped maintain confidence during stressful periods. These findings suggest that peer relationships create a supportive learning community that promotes persistence and reduces educational stress. Grotlüschen et al. (2024) similarly emphasize that peer interaction is an important factor contributing to successful participation in adult education programmes.

Field observations showed that learners frequently exchanged notes, revised lessons together, and discussed examination strategies before and after classes. The researcher also observed that learners willingly assisted classmates who experienced difficulties in understanding particular topics, reflecting a strong culture of cooperation and mutual support.

4.3.2 ACADEMIC CHALLENGES

Academic challenges emerged as one of the central themes in understanding the lived experiences of adult learners enrolled in the equivalency programme. The findings reveal that returning to formal education after a prolonged interruption presented several learning-related difficulties. Most participants reported challenges in remembering previously learned concepts, understanding academic subjects, and preparing for examinations. These difficulties were closely associated with the long educational gap, age-related changes in learning, and the pressure of balancing education with other responsibilities.

4.3.2.1 Memory and Retention Difficulties

One of the most frequently reported academic challenges was difficulty in remembering lessons and retaining information. Most participants explained that the long gap in their education affected their ability to recall previously learned concepts and remember newly taught lessons. This made the learning process slower and required repeated revision and practice.

Case 1 (38 years) described this challenge by stating, *"After the long gap in education, I faced difficulties such as memory loss, tension and anxiety."* This response indicates that the interruption in education affected not only memory but also the participant's confidence in learning. Likewise, Case 4 (45 years) explained, *"I didn't understand anything and I had memory loss also."* The participant found it difficult to retain information and often required repeated explanations before understanding the lessons.

Case 3 (46 years) also shared that returning to education after nearly three decades made remembering lessons extremely difficult during the initial stages of the programme. However, regular revision and continuous classroom participation gradually improved confidence and memory. These findings suggest that prolonged educational discontinuity significantly influences learners' cognitive readiness and ability to retain academic content. Similar observations have been made by Wenzel et al. (2024), who reported that adult learners returning to education often experience difficulties in memory and knowledge retention due to long educational interruptions.

Field observations supported these findings. During classroom sessions, many learners were observed writing detailed notes, repeatedly reading study materials, and revising previously taught lessons before beginning new topics. Field notes also indicated that learners frequently depended on repeated writing and regular practice as strategies for improving memory retention.

4.3.2.2 Difficulties in Subject Comprehension

Another major academic challenge identified in the study was difficulty in understanding academic subjects. Many participants explained that they initially struggled to comprehend lessons because they had forgotten the basic concepts learned during their earlier schooling. As a result, understanding new topics required additional effort and continuous guidance from teachers.

Case 4 (45 years) explained that after returning to education, even simple lessons appeared difficult because of the long interruption in studies. Similarly, Case 1 (38 years) appreciated the teaching approach adopted by the school by stating, *"Teachers first give base classes and then only start the textbook, which makes understanding easier."* This response demonstrates that learners benefited from a gradual and structured teaching approach that helped them rebuild their academic foundation.

Case 3 (46 years) also explained that although understanding lessons was difficult initially, patient explanations from teachers gradually improved comprehension. These findings indicate that learning difficulties experienced by adult learners can be reduced through learner-centred teaching methods and continuous academic support. This finding is consistent with Almeida et al. (2024), who observed that flexible teaching strategies significantly improve adult learners' understanding and classroom participation.

4.3.2.3 Examination-related Difficulties

Examinations emerged as another significant source of academic difficulty among the participants. Many learners explained that preparing for examinations became stressful because they lacked confidence in remembering lessons and completing the syllabus within the available time. The fear of poor performance often increased the pressure associated with examination preparation.

Case 1 (38 years) expressed this concern by stating, *"I have a strong fear of failure in the exam; it feels like a shame if I fail."* Although this statement reflects emotional anxiety, it also illustrates the academic pressure associated with examinations. Similarly, Case 4 (45 years) explained that the long educational gap reduced confidence during examinations because of uncertainty about remembering important points.

Case 5 (33 years), however, adopted a practical strategy to overcome examination difficulties. The participant explained that identifying important questions and focusing on key topics helped improve examination preparation and reduce academic stress. This finding demonstrates that learners gradually develop their own strategies to cope with examination demands.

Field observations indicated that learners frequently remained in the classroom after sessions to clarify doubts, revise important questions, and discuss examination strategies with classmates. The researcher's field notes also revealed that teachers conducted regular revision sessions and model examinations, which helped learners become familiar with the examination pattern and reduced their anxiety.

4.3.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Psychological challenges emerged as another significant theme in understanding the lived experiences of adult learners enrolled in the equivalency programme. The findings reveal that

returning to formal education after a long interruption was accompanied by various emotional and psychological difficulties. Many participants experienced fear of failure, anxiety, emotional distress arising from past educational experiences, and stress associated with managing multiple social roles. These challenges often affected their confidence, concentration, and overall learning experience.

4.3.3.1 Fear of Failure

One of the most common psychological challenges reported by the participants was the fear of academic failure. Many learners perceived success in the equivalency examination as a personal achievement and an opportunity to fulfil long-held educational aspirations. Consequently, the possibility of failure created feelings of fear, embarrassment, and self-doubt.

Case 1 (38 years) expressed this concern by stating, *"I have a strong fear of failure in the exam; it feels like a shame if I fail."* This statement reflects that failure was not viewed merely as poor academic performance but as a personal disappointment that could affect the participant's confidence and self-respect. Likewise, Case 4 (45 years) explained that the long educational gap reduced confidence during examinations, making the participant constantly worry about the possibility of failing. These experiences indicate that adult learners often carry emotional pressure because they view education as a second opportunity to achieve their personal goals.

Field observations also supported these findings. Before class tests and examinations, several learners appeared nervous and frequently sought reassurance from teachers regarding important topics and examination patterns. The researcher's field notes further indicated that many learners repeatedly revised their notes immediately before examinations, reflecting their anxiety about academic performance.

4.3.3.2 Anxiety and Tension

Another important psychological challenge identified in the study was anxiety and emotional tension associated with balancing educational responsibilities and daily life. Most participants explained that returning to education after several years created uncertainty and stress, particularly during examinations and assignment preparation.

Case 2 (28 years) explained, *"I get headaches, sleeplessness, and stress because of the pressure of studies and family responsibilities."* This response illustrates that the participant's psychological stress was influenced not only by academic demands but also by the responsibility of managing family life alongside education. Similarly, Case 4 (45 years) shared that feelings of tension often affected concentration while preparing for examinations because of concerns about remembering lessons after a long educational gap.

The findings suggest that anxiety among adult learners arises from the combination of academic expectations and multiple personal responsibilities. Similar observations were reported by Wenzel et al. (2024), who found that adult learners returning to education often experience increased anxiety because of concerns regarding academic performance and self-confidence.

During classroom observations, learners were seen discussing examination-related concerns with teachers and classmates. Field notes also revealed that teachers regularly encouraged learners, reminding them that gradual progress was more important than perfection. Such encouragement appeared to reduce learners' anxiety and increase their willingness to participate in classroom activities.

4.3.3.3 Emotional Impact of Past Experiences

The analysis also revealed that previous educational experiences continued to influence learners' emotional well-being. Several participants described how earlier experiences of educational discontinuation, financial hardship, family problems, or social circumstances affected their confidence when returning to education. These past experiences often created feelings of regret and uncertainty regarding their academic abilities.

Case 3 (46 years) explained that returning to education after nearly thirty years was emotionally challenging because the participant initially believed it would be impossible to continue learning at this stage of life. Similarly, Case 1 (38 years) shared that the long interruption in education created feelings of insecurity and self-doubt during the initial stages of the programme. These findings suggest that past educational experiences continue to shape adult learners' perceptions of themselves even after they return to formal education.

However, the study also found that participation in the equivalency programme gradually transformed these negative feelings into confidence and hope. As learners experienced academic progress and received encouragement from teachers and classmates, many began to

believe in their ability to succeed. Merriam (2018) similarly emphasizes that adult education provides opportunities for personal transformation by enabling learners to reconstruct positive self-identities through meaningful educational experiences.

Field observations indicated that participants who were initially hesitant gradually became more active in classroom discussions and willingly interacted with teachers and classmates. This behavioural change suggests that continuous participation in the programme contributed positively to learners' emotional well-being.

4.3.3.4 Role-related Stress

The study further revealed that adult learners experienced considerable stress due to the multiple roles they performed in their daily lives. Unlike younger students, participants were simultaneously responsible for family care, employment, household management, and educational participation. Managing these responsibilities often resulted in physical fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and limited study time.

Case 2 (28 years) explained that balancing childcare and studies was emotionally demanding because she constantly worried about fulfilling both responsibilities effectively. Likewise, Case 4 (45 years) stated that managing household work, tailoring, and business responsibilities alongside education often left little time for revision and created continuous stress.

In contrast, Case 5 (33 years) explained that support from family members made it easier to balance work and studies, reducing stress and enabling greater focus on education. These findings indicate that the intensity of role-related stress varies according to the level of family and social support available to learners. Similar findings were reported by Gupta (2021), who observed that balancing multiple social roles is one of the major psychological challenges affecting adult learners, particularly women.

Field observations further revealed that several participants arrived at classes immediately after work or household responsibilities. Although many appeared physically tired, they actively participated in classroom activities and remained committed to their studies. The researcher's field notes also indicated that learners frequently discussed time management and strategies for balancing their responsibilities during informal interactions before and after class.

This theme demonstrates that psychological challenges form an important part of the lived experiences of adult learners enrolled in the equivalency programme. Fear of failure, anxiety, emotional effects of past educational experiences, and role-related stress significantly

influenced learners' educational journeys. Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that supportive teachers, encouraging classmates, positive family relationships, and learners' personal determination helped them gradually overcome these emotional challenges and continue their education with greater confidence. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which emphasize that emotional support and learner-centred educational environments are essential for promoting resilience and persistence among adult learners (Merriam, 2018; Gupta, 2021; Wenzel et al., 2024).

4.3.4 SOCIAL CHALLENGES

The analysis revealed that social challenges significantly influenced the educational experiences of adult learners enrolled in the equivalency programme. Beyond academic and psychological barriers, participants encountered various social expectations and responsibilities that affected their ability to continue their education. The findings indicate that gender norms, family responsibilities, and limited social encouragement shaped learners' educational participation and often influenced their confidence and motivation. Although these challenges varied across participants, they collectively demonstrate that adult learning is deeply embedded within social and cultural contexts. Similar findings have been reported by Mondal (2023), who argues that social expectations and family environments play a crucial role in determining adults' participation in continuing education.

4.3.4.1 Gender Expectations

Gender expectations emerged as an important social challenge, particularly among female participants. The findings suggest that women were expected to prioritise household responsibilities and childcare over their personal educational aspirations. These traditional expectations often made it difficult for them to dedicate sufficient time to their studies and, in some instances, led to feelings of guilt for pursuing education.

Case 2 (28 years) explained that balancing the responsibilities of motherhood and education was emotionally challenging, stating, *"I can't look after my children properly when I give importance to my study."* This response reflects the conflict experienced by many women who attempt to fulfil both family and educational responsibilities simultaneously. Similarly, Case 3 (46 years) shared that returning to education at an older age was not readily accepted by everyone in the family, creating emotional discomfort and reducing confidence. These findings support the observations of Gupta (2021), who notes that traditional gender roles continue to

influence women's educational participation by placing greater emphasis on domestic responsibilities than personal development.

4.3.4.2 Family Responsibilities

Family responsibilities were another major social challenge experienced by the participants. Most learners explained that managing household work, childcare, employment, and studies simultaneously often left very little time for revision and academic preparation. The competing demands of family life frequently interrupted their study schedules and increased physical and emotional exhaustion.

Case 4 (45 years) explained that managing household responsibilities, tailoring work, and a small business alongside her studies made it difficult to devote adequate time to learning. Similarly, Case 2 (28 years) reported that family responsibilities often reduced the time available for examination preparation and revision. These findings suggest that adult learners constantly negotiate between educational goals and family commitments, making persistence in education particularly demanding. Similar observations were made by Pandey et al. (2019), who found that balancing family responsibilities remains one of the most significant challenges affecting adult learners' educational progression.

However, the experiences of the participants also indicate that family support can positively influence educational participation. Case 1 (38 years) and Case 5 (33 years) explained that encouragement from their spouses and family members motivated them to continue their education despite facing several challenges. Their experiences demonstrate that positive family support strengthens learners' confidence and commitment to completing the programme.

Field observations further supported these findings. Several participants were observed arriving directly from work or household responsibilities, often appearing physically tired but remaining actively engaged in classroom activities. Informal conversations also revealed that learners frequently discussed the difficulties of balancing education with family and work commitments.

4.3.4.3 Lack of Social Encouragement

Another challenge identified in the study was the lack of encouragement from certain sections of society. Some participants explained that returning to education during adulthood was not always viewed positively by relatives or members of the community. Negative comments and

unsupportive attitudes sometimes affected learners' confidence and created feelings of hesitation during the initial stages of the programme.

Case 3 (46 years) explained that some family members questioned the need to continue education at an older age, which reduced motivation and created emotional distress. Similarly, Case 6 stated that societal perceptions regarding adult education initially created self-doubt, although continuous encouragement from teachers and classmates gradually strengthened confidence. These findings indicate that social attitudes can either encourage or discourage adults from pursuing educational opportunities. Mondal (2023) similarly argues that societal perceptions regarding age, gender, and education continue to influence adults' decisions to participate in lifelong learning.

Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated remarkable resilience. Many explained that achieving their educational goals became more important than responding to negative social opinions. Over time, positive feedback from teachers, classmates, and supportive family members helped reduce the impact of these discouraging experiences.

This theme demonstrates that social challenges are an important dimension of the lived experiences of adult learners enrolled in the equivalency programme. Gender expectations, family responsibilities, and the lack of social encouragement often created obstacles to educational participation and academic progress. Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that supportive family relationships, positive peer interactions, and encouraging teachers enabled learners to overcome these barriers and continue their educational journey with confidence. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which emphasize that supportive social environments significantly contribute to adult learners' persistence, motivation, and educational success (Gupta, 2021; Mondal, 2023; Pandey et al., 2019)

4.3.5 INSTITUTIONAL AND INFRASTRUCTURAL BARRIERS

The findings of the study reveal that institutional and infrastructural factors also influenced the educational experiences of adult learners enrolled in the equivalency programme. Although Kallara Government Vocational Higher Secondary School provided a supportive learning environment, participants identified several institutional and practical barriers that affected their academic participation. These challenges included difficulties in readjusting to formal education after a prolonged interruption, transportation and accessibility issues, and the need for additional academic support. These findings suggest that adult learners require flexible educational practices and continuous institutional assistance to successfully complete their

studies. Similar observations have been reported by Grotluschen et al. (2024), who emphasize that institutional support and accessible learning environments are essential for sustaining adult learners' participation in continuing education programmes.

4.3.5.1 Long Educational Gap and Readjustment Difficulties

One of the major institutional challenges identified in the study was the difficulty of readjusting to formal education after a prolonged interruption. Most participants had discontinued their education for several years, while some had returned after more than two decades. As a result, adapting to classroom routines, academic expectations, and regular study habits required considerable effort.

Case 1 (38 years) explained, *"After the long gap in education I faced difficulties such as memory loss, tension and anxiety."* Similarly, Case 4 (45 years) stated, *"I didn't understand anything and I had memory loss also."* These responses indicate that prolonged educational discontinuity affected learners' confidence and made the transition back to formal education particularly challenging. Likewise, Case 3 (46 years) explained that returning to studies after nearly thirty years initially seemed overwhelming because many concepts had been forgotten. These findings suggest that the readjustment process extends beyond academic learning and involves rebuilding learners' confidence and study habits.

However, participants also acknowledged that structured teaching methods adopted by the institution gradually helped them adapt to classroom learning. Case 1 (38 years) explained that teachers first introduced basic concepts before beginning the prescribed syllabus, making it easier to understand the lessons. This finding supports the observations of Almeida et al. (2024), who argue that learner-centred instructional approaches significantly improve adult learners' adaptation and academic engagement.

Field observations also supported these findings. During classroom sessions, learners were observed taking detailed notes, revising previously taught topics, and seeking clarification whenever they experienced difficulty. The researcher's field notes indicated that teachers regularly revised earlier lessons before introducing new concepts, enabling learners to gradually rebuild their academic foundation.

4.3.5.2 Transportation and Accessibility Challenges

Transportation and accessibility emerged as another challenge influencing learners' educational participation. Some participants explained that travelling to the study centre required

considerable time and financial resources, particularly for those residing in rural areas or balancing employment with education. Regular attendance sometimes became difficult because of transportation-related issues and other practical responsibilities.

Case 6 explained that travelling long distances to attend classes occasionally created difficulties, especially while managing family responsibilities. Likewise, Case 2 (28 years) stated that balancing household responsibilities with travel to the study centre reduced the amount of time available for revision and self-study. These findings indicate that accessibility issues can influence learners' attendance and participation, particularly among adult learners who already face multiple responsibilities.

Field observations revealed that several learners arrived at the classroom shortly before the commencement of sessions after travelling from different localities. Some participants also mentioned during informal conversations that transportation expenses and travel time occasionally affected their regular attendance. These observations suggest that infrastructural challenges can become barriers to consistent educational participation, particularly in rural settings.

4.3.5.3 Need for Additional Academic Support

The findings further reveal that adult learners require continuous academic support to overcome the learning difficulties associated with prolonged educational discontinuity. Most participants explained that they benefited from additional guidance, repeated explanations, revision classes, and simplified study materials provided by the teachers. Such academic assistance helped them regain confidence and gradually improve their understanding of various subjects.

Case 4 (45 years) appreciated the efforts of the teachers by stating, *"The teachers' classes were very good and the study materials were very easy to understand."* Similarly, Case 3 (46 years) explained that repeated explanations from teachers enabled the participant to understand lessons that initially appeared difficult. Case 5 (33 years) also mentioned that printed notes, revision classes, and classroom discussions significantly supported examination preparation and improved learning.

The participants further suggested that additional revision sessions, practice examinations, and individual academic guidance would further strengthen their learning experience. These findings indicate that adult learners require instructional approaches that recognize their diverse

educational backgrounds and learning needs. Similar findings were reported by Bayly-Castaneda et al. (2024), who observed that continuous academic support, individualized guidance, and learner-centred teaching practices significantly improve educational outcomes among adult learners.

This theme demonstrates that institutional and infrastructural factors significantly influence the educational experiences of adult learners. Long educational gaps, transportation challenges, and the need for continuous academic support affect learners' participation and academic progress. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that the supportive educational practices adopted by Kallara Government Vocational Higher Secondary School, including learner-centred teaching, accessible study materials, and continuous academic guidance, helped participants overcome these barriers. These findings are consistent with previous research, which emphasizes that flexible institutional support and inclusive educational practices are essential for promoting successful adult learning and lifelong educational participation (Grotluschen et al., 2024; Almeida et al., 2024; Bayly-Castaneda et al., 2024)

4.3.6 COPING STRATEGIES AND RESILIENCE

The findings of the study reveal that despite experiencing numerous academic, psychological, social, and institutional challenges, the participants demonstrated remarkable resilience in continuing their educational journey. Rather than allowing these barriers to prevent their progress, the learners developed various coping strategies that enabled them to manage stress, improve their learning, and remain committed to achieving their educational goals. Their experiences indicate that resilience among adult learners is shaped not only by personal determination but also by the support they receive from teachers, family members, and peers. The analysis identified two major sub-themes: personal coping strategies and resilience through social and institutional support. These findings are consistent with Merriam (2018), who argues that adult learners often draw upon their life experiences, self-direction, and perseverance to overcome educational challenges.

4.3.6.1 Personal Coping Strategies

One of the major coping mechanisms adopted by the participants was the use of self-directed learning strategies to overcome academic difficulties. Most learners explained that they relied on repeated writing, continuous revision, note-taking, and regular practice to improve memory

and understanding. These methods enabled them to compensate for the long interruption in their education and gradually build confidence in their academic abilities.

Case 1 (38 years) explained, *"I write and study again and again to overcome memory loss."* This statement reflects the participant's determination to address learning difficulties through consistent practice rather than giving up. Similarly, Case 4 (45 years) explained that repeatedly writing important points and revising lessons helped improve memory and subject understanding. These findings suggest that adult learners actively develop learning strategies that suit their individual needs and educational backgrounds.

Case 5 (33 years) adopted a practical approach to examination preparation by focusing on important questions and organizing study materials according to examination requirements. This strategy enabled the participant to manage academic pressure more effectively and remain confident during examinations.

4.3.6.2 Resilience Through Social and Institutional Support

Another important aspect of resilience identified in the study was the role of social and institutional support in helping learners cope with various challenges. Participants consistently acknowledged that encouragement from teachers, family members, and classmates strengthened their confidence and motivated them to continue their education despite facing difficulties.

Case 2 (28 years) explained that emotional support from family members encouraged the participant to continue studying even while balancing childcare and household responsibilities. Likewise, Case 5 (33 years) reported receiving continuous encouragement from the spouse, which helped maintain motivation during periods of academic stress. These findings suggest that positive family relationships contribute significantly to learners' resilience by providing emotional stability and encouragement.

Institutional support also played a crucial role in strengthening resilience. Case 1 (38 years) appreciated the teachers' approach by stating, *"Teachers first give base classes and then only start the textbook, which makes understanding easier."* Similarly, Case 4 (45 years) remarked, *"The teachers' classes were very good and the study materials were very easy to understand."* These responses indicate that supportive teachers and learner-centred instructional practices helped learners gradually overcome their fears and rebuild confidence.

Peer relationships further contributed to resilience. Participants explained that studying alongside other adult learners facing similar challenges created a sense of belonging and mutual encouragement. Sharing experiences, discussing lessons, and preparing together for examinations reduced feelings of isolation and strengthened their commitment to completing the programme.

This theme demonstrates that resilience is a defining characteristic of the educational experiences of adult learners enrolled in the equivalency programme. Although participants encountered multiple academic, psychological, social, and institutional challenges, they adopted effective coping strategies and relied on strong support systems to continue their education. Personal determination, self-directed learning, family encouragement, supportive teachers, and positive peer relationships collectively enabled learners to overcome barriers and remain committed to achieving their educational goals. These findings support previous research, which suggests that resilience among adult learners is strengthened through the interaction of personal agency, social support, and inclusive educational environments (Merriam, 2018; Knowles, 1980; UNESCO, 2022).

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter brings together the key findings of the study based on the experiences of equivalency learners at Kallara GVHSS. It also presents the overall conclusion of the research and offers practical suggestions for improving the equivalency education programme. The discussion is based on the real-life experiences of adult learners who returned to education after a long break, highlighting both their struggles and the factors that supported their learning journey.

5.2 MAJOR FINDINGS

5.2.1. Learning Difficulties Due to Long Educational Gaps

The study found that prolonged interruptions in formal education significantly affected the learning experiences of adult learners. Most participants experienced difficulties in remembering previously learned concepts, understanding new lessons, and adapting to classroom learning. Memory-related challenges and reduced confidence made the learning process more demanding, particularly during the initial stages of the programme. Many learners reported that they had forgotten basic concepts because of the long gap between their previous schooling and their return to education. As a result, they required repeated explanations and continuous revision before they could understand new topics. The findings also indicate that learners progressed gradually through consistent classroom participation and regular practice. Supportive teaching methods and learner-friendly instruction helped them rebuild their academic foundation over time. Although the initial adjustment was difficult, most participants demonstrated improvement in their learning abilities through determination and continuous effort.

5.2.2 Emotional Stress and Fear of Examinations

The findings reveal that many adult learners experienced psychological challenges, including anxiety, stress, sleeplessness, and fear of academic failure. Participants viewed success in the equivalency examination as an important personal achievement, making the possibility of failure emotionally distressing. These psychological pressures often affected their confidence and examination performance. Many learners expressed concern that failing the examination would reduce their self-confidence and disappoint their family members. The fear of forgetting lessons during examinations further increased their anxiety and emotional pressure. In addition, balancing academic expectations with personal responsibilities contributed to mental stress and emotional exhaustion. Despite these challenges, encouragement from teachers and family

members helped many participants gradually overcome their fears. Continuous classroom support also enabled learners to develop greater confidence in their academic abilities.

5.2.3 Challenges in Balancing Family Responsibilities and Education

The study found that balancing educational pursuits with family responsibilities was a major challenge for many participants, particularly women. Household duties, childcare, and employment responsibilities frequently limited the time available for studying and revision. These competing responsibilities created role conflicts that affected learners' academic participation and consistency. Several participants explained that they often had to complete domestic work before finding time to study, resulting in physical fatigue and reduced concentration. Women learners, in particular, found it difficult to balance their responsibilities as mothers, wives, and students simultaneously. Time constraints often prevented them from attending classes regularly or preparing adequately for examinations. However, participants who received emotional support from their spouses and family members were better able to manage these responsibilities. The findings suggest that family support plays a crucial role in helping adult learners continue their education successfully.

5.2.4 Positive Influence of Institutional Support

The findings indicate that the supportive learning environment at Kallara Government Vocational Higher Secondary School played a significant role in facilitating learners' educational progress. Learner-friendly teaching methods, patient and encouraging teachers, and accessible study materials helped participants understand lessons more effectively, rebuild their confidence, and remain motivated throughout the programme. Teachers were found to be highly supportive, providing repeated explanations whenever learners experienced difficulty in understanding concepts. The practice of teaching basic concepts before introducing the prescribed syllabus helped learners gradually regain their academic confidence. Participants also appreciated the availability of simplified study materials and revision classes, which made examination preparation easier. The positive relationship between teachers and learners created a comfortable classroom environment where participants felt confident to ask questions and express their doubts. Overall, the institutional support provided by the school contributed significantly to learners' academic progress and educational persistence.

5.2.5 Importance of Motivation and Self-directed Learning

The study found that personal motivation and self-directed learning strategies contributed significantly to learners' educational persistence. Participants adopted techniques such as repeated writing, regular revision, note-taking, and peer learning to improve their

understanding and memory. In addition, emotional encouragement from family members, particularly spouses, and continuous support from teachers helped learners remain committed to completing the equivalency programme despite the challenges they faced. Many learners demonstrated a strong desire to complete their education in order to improve their self-esteem and create better opportunities for themselves and their families. They showed resilience by continuing their studies despite experiencing academic and personal difficulties. Peer interaction and collaborative learning also helped learners remain motivated and exchange useful study strategies. The findings indicate that a combination of personal determination, effective self-study habits, and supportive relationships enabled learners to successfully continue their educational journey.

5.2.6. Majority of Participants Were Muslim Women

The study found that the majority of the participants were Muslim women who had returned to education after discontinuing their studies for various personal and family-related reasons. Many of them had interrupted their education due to early marriage, childcare responsibilities, financial constraints, or other domestic commitments. Their participation in the equivalency programme reflects the important role of second-chance education in enabling women to resume their educational journey and improve their future opportunities.

5.3 SUGGESTIONS

5.3.1 Academic Support for Learners with Long Educational Gaps

The study revealed that many adult learners experienced difficulties in remembering previously learned concepts and adapting to formal education after a prolonged break. Therefore, special bridge courses and foundation programmes should be introduced before the commencement of regular classes to help learners rebuild their basic academic knowledge. Regular revision classes, remedial teaching, and practice sessions should also be conducted throughout the programme to strengthen subject understanding and improve memory retention. Such academic support will help learners adjust more easily to the curriculum and increase their confidence in learning.

5.3.2 Strengthening Mental Well-being and Emotional Support

The findings indicate that many learners experienced examination anxiety, fear of failure, stress, and emotional pressure while pursuing their education. Therefore, counselling services and motivational programmes should be made an integral part of the equivalency programme.

Regular sessions on stress management, confidence building, and emotional well-being can help learners cope more effectively with psychological challenges. Educational institutions should also create a supportive environment where learners feel comfortable discussing their concerns with teachers and counsellors. Such initiatives can contribute to improving learners' mental well-being and academic performance.

5.3.3 Providing More Flexible Learning Opportunities

Since most adult learners have to balance education with family responsibilities and employment, greater flexibility in class schedules is essential. Additional classes on weekends, especially Saturdays, or flexible timing arrangements would enable learners to attend classes without affecting their work and family commitments. Institutions may also consider providing supplementary online learning resources or recorded classes for learners who are unable to attend regularly. Flexible learning opportunities would encourage greater participation and reduce the likelihood of learners discontinuing their education.

5.3.4 Promoting Family Awareness and Support

The study highlights the important role of family support in the educational success of adult learners. Therefore, awareness programmes should be organized to educate family members about the value of adult education and the positive impact of their encouragement. Families should be encouraged to provide emotional support, create a favourable home environment for studying, and motivate learners to continue their education. Greater family involvement can reduce learners' stress and improve their confidence and persistence. A supportive family environment is essential for helping adult learners successfully complete the equivalency programme.

5.3.5 Improving Study Materials and Learning Resources

Learners would benefit from study materials that are specifically designed to meet the needs of adult learners. Simplified notes, easy-to-understand textbooks, digital learning resources, video lessons, and additional practice materials should be developed to support independent learning and effective revision. Providing question banks, model examinations, and subject-wise revision guides would further enhance learners' examination preparedness. Access to diverse learning resources can improve subject comprehension and promote self-directed learning among adult learners.

5.3.6 Encouraging Regular Attendance and Continuous Participation

Regular attendance is essential for maintaining continuity in learning and improving academic performance. Educational institutions should adopt measures to encourage consistent attendance by creating a welcoming and supportive learning environment. Teachers should regularly monitor learners' attendance and provide timely encouragement to those who are absent frequently. Motivational programmes, periodic follow-up with learners, and recognition of consistent attendance may further strengthen learners' commitment to the programme. Continuous participation in classroom activities enables learners to improve their understanding, remain motivated, and successfully complete the equivalency programme.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The present study examined the lived experiences of adult learners enrolled in the Equivalency Programme at Kallara Government Vocational Higher Secondary School, Thiruvananthapuram. The findings reveal that returning to education after a long break is both a challenging and rewarding experience. Adult learners faced a range of academic, psychological, social, and institutional challenges that influenced their educational journey. Memory and retention difficulties, examination anxiety, family responsibilities, and the need to readjust to classroom learning emerged as some of the major obstacles experienced by the participants. Despite these challenges, the learners displayed remarkable determination and a strong desire to complete their education.

The study also highlights that the success of adult learners depends not only on their individual efforts but also on the support they receive from educational institutions, teachers, family members, and peers. The learner-friendly teaching methods, supportive classroom environment, and guidance provided by the teachers at Kallara GVHSS played a significant role in helping learners overcome their academic difficulties and regain confidence. Similarly, emotional encouragement from family members and classmates motivated the participants to continue their studies even during difficult situations. These findings demonstrate that a supportive learning environment is essential for promoting successful adult education.

Another important finding of the study is the resilience shown by the participants. Rather than allowing personal and social challenges to discourage them, they adopted various coping strategies such as repeated revision, note-taking, peer learning, and effective time management to achieve their educational goals. Their experiences reflect that adult education is not merely

about obtaining an academic qualification but also about rebuilding self-confidence, improving self-esteem, and creating better opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Overall, the study concludes that the Equivalency Programme serves as an important second chance for individuals who could not complete their formal education earlier in life. It provides opportunities for lifelong learning, personal empowerment, and social inclusion. However, to ensure the continued success of such programmes, greater attention should be given to strengthening academic support, counselling services, flexible learning opportunities, and family and community awareness. By addressing these needs, equivalency education can become more inclusive and effective, enabling adult learners to overcome barriers and realise their educational aspirations. Ultimately, the study reaffirms that education has the power to transform lives and that learning should remain accessible to every individual, regardless of age or past educational experiences.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Section A: Socio-Demographic Profile

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Marital status
4. Occupation
5. Religion
6. Educational qualification before joining the equivalency programme
7. Year of enrolment in the SSLC Equivalency Programme
8. Family type (Nuclear/Joint)
9. Number of family members
10. Source of family income

Section B: Educational Background and Motivation

11. Can you describe your educational journey before joining the SSLC Equivalency Programme?
12. What were the main reasons for discontinuing your formal education?
13. What motivated you to resume your education through the equivalency programme?
14. What were your expectations when you joined the programme?
15. How important is completing SSLC for your personal, social, or professional life?
16. What are your future educational or career aspirations after completing the programme?

Section C: Academic Learning Experiences

17. How would you describe your learning experience in the equivalency programme?
18. What academic challenges have you faced after returning to education?

19. Which subjects do you find most difficult, and what makes them challenging?
20. How has the long gap in education affected your ability to understand and remember lessons?
21. Do you experience difficulties in concentration, memory, or revision? Please explain.
22. How do you prepare for classroom learning and examinations?
23. What learning methods or study techniques help you understand lessons better?

Section D: Psychological and Emotional Experiences

24. How has returning to education affected your confidence and self-esteem?
25. Do you experience fear, anxiety, or stress related to examinations? If yes, why?
26. Have any personal life experiences influenced your educational journey? Please explain.
27. How do you cope with emotional stress while continuing your studies?

Section E: Social and Family Support

28. How do your family responsibilities influence your studies?
29. What kind of support do you receive from your spouse, children, parents, or other family members?
30. How do people in your community or neighbourhood view your decision to continue education?
31. Have you experienced any form of discouragement or social barriers while pursuing your studies?
32. How do classmates and peers contribute to your learning experience?

Section F: Institutional Experiences

33. How would you describe the teaching methods used by the teachers?
34. Are the study materials and classroom activities appropriate for adult learners? Why?
35. How supportive are the teachers in helping learners overcome academic difficulties?

36. Do you receive adequate academic guidance, counselling, or motivation from the institution?
37. What institutional challenges do you experience, such as class timings, transportation, attendance, or learning resources?

Section G: Coping Strategies and Resilience

38. What strategies do you use to overcome academic and personal challenges?
39. How do you maintain motivation during difficult periods?
40. Have your experiences in this programme changed your outlook on education or life?
Please explain.

Section H: Suggestions and Reflections

41. In your opinion, what are the strengths of the SSLC Equivalency Programme?
42. What improvements would you suggest to make the programme more effective for adult learners?
43. What additional support would help adult learners successfully complete the programme?
44. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as an adult learner in the SSLC Equivalency Programme?