

Educational and Employment Opportunities Through Literacy Programs: A Case Study of The Gambia's Second Chance Education Program (SCEP)

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to examined the Gambia's SCEP to understand its contribution to the employability and educational advancement of its beneficiaries. Given that adult literacy have been broadly discussed within human capital framework, I adopt the framework as my analytical lens in this study. The theory presumes that education improves productivity and generates better economic returns. I adopted a qualitative case study design using semi-structured telephone interviews, document review, and beneficiaries' testimony from website. Additionally, I used analysed secondary data (enrolment and examination result) from the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE). The study found that SCEP offers some participants an opportunity to reintegrate in formal education and enhance their employment prospect. Most participants had the opportunity to enter into formal workforce, mainly in education as teachers and health (nurse). Additionally, some participants reported pursuing higher education (The Gambia College and The University of the Gambia). Notwithstanding, the study found some challenges potentially limits the program from reaching its full potential, including double-burden, social stigma, gender roles, and resource constraints. The study underscored the transformative potential of SCEP, improving human capital while showing the need for localized intervention strategies to be adopted to address systemic barriers and cultural issues. Moreover, expanding and institutionalizing SCEP may increase its impact on national development and lifelong learning goals.

Keywords: Second Chance Education, The Gambia, Economic Return, Adult Literacy, Human Capital.

Abstrak. Tujuan penelitian ini untuk mengkaji SCEP di Gambia guna memahami kontribusinya atas peningkatan keterkerjaan dan perkembangan pendidikan para penerimanya. Mengingat literasi orang dewasa telah banyak dibahas dalam kerangka modal manusia, saya mengadopsi kerangka tersebut sebagai lensa analitis dalam penelitian ini. Teori ini berasumsi bahwa pendidikan meningkatkan produktivitas dan menghasilkan keuntungan ekonomi yang lebih baik. Saya menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif dengan wawancara semi-terstruktur melalui telepon, telaah dokumen, dan testimoni penerima manfaat dari situs web. Selain itu, saya menganalisis data sekunder (data pendaftaran dan hasil ujian) dari Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah (MoBSE). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa SCEP memberikan sebagian peserta kesempatan untuk kembali ke pendidikan formal dan meningkatkan prospek kerja mereka. Sebagian besar peserta memperoleh peluang untuk memasuki dunia kerja formal, terutama di sektor pendidikan sebagai guru dan di sektor kesehatan sebagai perawat. Selain itu, beberapa peserta melaporkan melanjutkan pendidikan tinggi di Gambia College and University of The Gambia. Kendati demikian, penelitian ini menemukan adanya sejumlah tantangan yang berpotensi membatasi program untuk mencapai potensi penuhnya, termasuk beban ganda, stigma sosial, peran gender, dan keterbatasan sumber daya. Studi ini menegaskan potensi transformatif SCEP dalam meningkatkan modal manusia, sekaligus menunjukkan perlunya strategi intervensi yang terlokalisasi untuk mengatasi hambatan sistemik dan persoalan budaya. Lebih jauh, perluasan dan institusionalisasi SCEP berpotensi meningkatkan dampaknya terhadap pembangunan nasional dan tujuan pembelajaran sepanjang hayat.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Kesempatan Kedua, Gambia, Keuntungan Ekonomi, Literasi Dewasa, Modal Manusia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, education has been recognized as a critical tool that helps in realizing sustainable development goals. This is because it is found to be crucial for human capital/social development (Abubakar et al., 2024; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2021). This implies that through education, individuals are enabled to realize upward social mobility through the acquisition of a form of power.

The acquisition of upward social mobility through either social hierarchy or setting stands to be a form of capital. This logic aligns well with the human capital framework. They believed that through education, productivity and labor market mobilization improved (Becker, 1993; Oljira & Hailu, 2021; Olopade et al., 2019). With this rationale, the global commitment has moved towards ensuring that there is access and equity in educational provision for everyone. The global responses tend to zero in on bridging the gap that currently exists in educational provision for adult learners, individuals who lacked access to educational opportunities when they were still in their childhood (Oljira & Hailu, 2021). This has resulted in the emergence and growth in popularity of adult literacy programs, identified to play a significant role in bridging the existing gap. Literacy programs provide necessary skills to adult learners to improve their employability prospects. Thus eventually result in higher income opportunities, improve social status, and human capital both individually and socially.

However, adult literacy remains a challenge, with more than 750 million adults having poor reading and writing skills, with the majority being female (UNESCO GEM Report, 2020). The difference in literacy skills is observable, especially when it comes to developing countries. One can argue that illiterate individuals tend to continue creating poverty and inequality in a given social setup. Rather, people without literacy skills tend to face poor employment opportunities and limited social participation (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2008, 2021).

In Sub-Saharan African, literacy rate among adults is still low compared to other parts of the world. This is as exacerbate the

existing problems, including poverty, gender inequality, child marriage, and poor educational structures (UNESCO GEM Report, 2020). This not only affects educational participation, especially for the child, but also contributes to child dropout rates, making literacy problems in adulthood worse. Research has shown a direct relationship between education levels and income; indeed, each extra year of schooling generates considerable earnings and productivity returns (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004b, 2018; Schmidt et al., 2015).

Second Chance Education

Second-chance education is perceived to be an effective tool to remedy the educational deficit among adult learners. This concept might differ from country to country. It is one of the terms used in the literature to characterise an educational program that offers individuals an opportunity to participate in learning that transcends the mainstream educational framework to advance adult literacy (Savelsberg et al., 2017). For instance, the European Commission adopted a White Paper on education and training in 1995 called "Teaching and Learning: Toward the Learning Society." It had five main objectives, the third of which was "Combating Exclusion" (European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2001; Seyfried, 2007).

For second-chance schools, the European Commission suggested an experimental program under this objective. Young people who are excluded yet possess the necessary skills and qualifications to gain access to further education or job markets are educated and trained under the strategy. Numerous nations expressed interest in the initiative once the White Paper was released. Thirteen second-chance schools were established in eleven European nations following several consultations. Though it is important to note that some of these projects did not begin operations until 2000 (European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2001).

This is not to suggest that the European Commission's white paper championed the notion of second chance education. However, it plays a significant role in its widespread adoption in contemporary societies. Initial

studies on the concept (second chance education) could be traced back to the work of Inbar & Sever (1989). Recently, an increase in scholarly discussion has been observed on second chance education, as its implementation grows worldwide. Details on this can be found in the following works: Keita & Lee (2022), Komatsu (2019), Lukáč (2022), Nordlund et al. (2013), Ollis et al. (2017), Pasternáková et al. (2023), Ross & Gray (2005), and Savelsberg et al. (2017).

In Africa, fewer nations participated in second-chance education between the 1990s and 2003 (Keita & Lee, 2022). Though these programs were not explicitly called second chance education, but are within its framework. For instance, Malawi's village-based school, Ghana's school for life, Ethiopia's Complementary Schooling, Egypt's community schools, Mali's, and Zambia's schools (DeStefano et al., 2007; Keita & Lee, 2022). Now, several African nations have started second-chance education programs, including The Gambia, which, according to (Bakalevu, 2011) and (Ross & Gray, 2005), are designed to give school dropouts another shot.

Second Chance Education in The Gambia

In The Gambia, literacy remains a challenge, with the national rate at 59% (World Population Review, 2024). Accordingly, the male literacy rate is at 65.2% while the female literacy rate remains at 51.2%. Moreover, the completion rate of students, mainly from Upper Basic School (65.3%) to Senior Secondary School (46.6%), drops drastically compared to the lower basic level (87.8%) as of 2023, according to the Ministry of Basic and Education's Year Book details, see (MoBSE, 2023). On the other hand, the national study on out-of-school in 2016, suggested that approximately 30% of children of lower basic education age are out of school, 28.9 % of UBS age children are out of school, and 42.8% of senior secondary school age level are out of school (UNICEF, 2017). Accordingly, this trend has the potential to rise as per the study if not checked.

In recognition of these problems, the government of the Gambia, through the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education,

introduced the Second Chance Education Program for those mature learners who did not have the chance to complete their formal education during childhood. On February 20, 2018, the program was launched at Mansakonko's Regional Education Directorate Four (Keita & Lee, 2022). The rationale of this initiative is to give the participants threshold skills in literacy, numeracy, and employability, thus shaping their contributions to national development. This aligns with global efforts through sustainable development goals, particularly SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 4 (Quality Education), and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), towards lifelong learning.

The second chance program was piloted in two phases. Phase one of the program gave a chance to those who completed or failed to sit the terminal examination of the Basic Education cycle, The Gambia Basic Education Certificate (GABECE), and could not proceed to the Senior Secondary Level. While phase two gave a chance to those who completed or are yet to complete senior secondary level to sit the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), but could not proceed to tertiary institutions. The former includes teaching subjects such as English Language, Mathematics, Science, and Social and Environmental Studies. While the latter teaches broader subjects, including English language, Mathematics, General Science, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Economics, Financial Economics, Business Management, Government, History, Literature in English, and Agricultural Science (MoBSE, 2021). Such an initiative draws its inspiration from the Gambia's education policy 2016-203, which showcases a potential to complement the government's efforts in the areas of access, equity, and quality (MoBSE, 2016).

Moving on, empirical evidence from other contexts lends weight to the possible benefits of adult literacy programs (Blunch & Pörtner, 2011; Cameron & Cameron, 2006; Oxenham et al., 2002; Reder, 2010, 2014). Oxenham et al. (2002) emphasized the wider benefits of community development because of such programs, including a culture of learning and better household decision-making, especially by women. These findings, however, are very context-specific, and therefore, localized

research is really necessary to understand the efficacy and impact of similar initiatives in The Gambia.

Notwithstanding government efforts, little is known about the benefits of the Second Chance Program in The Gambia. Generally, limited studies were conducted on this program. Based on my search, only a single study was found about this program by Keita & Lee (2022). Their study focused on the perspectives and experiences of participants in the Lower River Region of the Gambia. While the current study focuses on the Central River region for qualitative interview data, and nationally for secondary quantitative data. In this way, I offer insights for Policymakers and stakeholders who seem to have limited evidence as to whether the employment opportunities of graduates from the program increase, the income levels improve, or economic productivity widens. This knowledge gap restricts their ability to assess effectiveness, optimally design, or continue justifying the investment in such a program.

Therefore, the current study examines the educational and employment benefits of The Gambia's Second Chance Program through its effect on its beneficiaries' employment prospects and educational attainment. Situating within the human capital framework. The current study is aim to provide an insight for policymakers, program implementers, and donors. They author belief that the findings will be crucial in making sure that the programs like this contributes effectively to addressing the literacy and economic problems of its participants. With is aims, the study attempts to answer the following question: *how does the completion of Second Chance Program increase participants' employment prospects? And how does it improve beneficiaries' educational opportunities?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adult literacy programs like second-chance offers a chance to people who missed or dropped out of schools during early age. Though programs like this are outside the conventional frameworks of basic and secondary education, but bridges gap in learning. Additionally, provide opportunities for both personal and professional growth. Furthermore, second chance improves learning opportunities and engagement in

education. Savelsberg and his associates proposed that second chance educations are founded upon three major principles, namely accessibility, efficiency, and equity in opportunities. Equally, it is important to evaluate it in relation to first chance education (Savelsberg et al., 2017). The participants' chances to achieve similar educational opportunities and results as the rest of people lie at the heart of such programs. This aims to overcome any inequality derived from either structural or particular circumstances.

Literature on second chance education reflects important advantages, which have the potential to ensure social inclusion, equality, and improvement in skills level (Hargreaves, 2011; Keogh, 2009; Nordlund et al., 2013). Keogh (2009) argued that second chance to education remedies deficiencies accumulated during past education. The programs train people for further education, and finally, for betterment in employment. On similar lines, Nordlund et al., (2013) and Hargreaves (2011) also explain how second chance educational programs play a crucial role in enhancing community development and empowering people belonging to marginalized societies. Both authors discussed the importance of second chance education programs, and that is the central theme present in the present study, namely understanding its relevance to educational achievement and better employment. A similar study has also been carried by Keita and Lee in 2022 on Gambia's SCEP. The study presents valuable comprehension from participants, directly pointing out beneficial implications, thereby clearly depicting an important transformation for adults, aimed at benefits from the particular schooling. The study concentrates on the general feelings and implications for participants from the 'Lower River Region' in Gambia, thereby emphasizing the importance for individuals to undergo crucial transformation from second chance schooling, thereby paving way for triumph beyond social and economic problems. The study is important, albeit lacks strength to present implications from participants present in different regions. The present study will, therefore, attempt to generate from that study, thereby generating comprehension from participants present in different regions, specifically concentrating on

educational achievement and employment opportunities.

However, despite the advantages that can be accrued from second chance education programs, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential challenges that may arise, for example, retaining adult learners. To ensure that second chance education programs are successful, it is important for them to ensure that strategies for retaining the learners are implemented. The various factors that could lead to adult learners' failure to enrol in educational programs include, for example, lack of money, lack of time, or even feeling embarrassed (Osam et al., 2017). The benefit of incorporating relevance through motivation will lie in the assertion that apart from access, factors that will ensure the process of learning takes place.

Adult Literacy and Human Capital Development

There has been considerable debate on the linkage between adult literacy and the development of human capital. The focus here has been on the extent to which adult literacy enables individuals to expand their potential to contribute to economic growth and social development. Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write and perform simple mathematics to enable individuals aged 15 and older to engage personally and socially to a greater extent (Cameron & Cameron, 2006). Freire (1970) viewed literacy as a means of empowering people for social change and advocated for the teaching of critical literacy. Building on this idea, Kirsch and Guthrie (1977) argued that literacy extends beyond the acquisition of basic skills and encompasses functional, cultural, and critical dimensions that are essential for participation and performance in modern societies.

Human capital theory, advanced by Becker (1993), describes education, training, and health as crucial investments that enhance individual productivity and ultimately economic returns. Schultz also asserted that human capital is a key component of economic growth, particularly in underdeveloped economies and during times of economic scarcity. Apart from contributing to economic and social developments positively, literacy and educational frameworks provide adults the

potential to positively contribute to social and economic changes (1961). Also, as Khamidah, Yusuf, Shofwan, and Sabah emphasize the importance of education in attaining perpetual well-being, "managers and employees recognize the important role of education in achieving long-term well-being and use their income to fund various learning opportunities, including formal and informal education for their children, such as school fees, tutoring, and religious programs like TPQ" (Khamidah et al., 2024). Building on the study's framework, the case of the second chance education program fulfils the social capital development theory. Khamidah et al. emphasize the role of education as the SCEP aspires to provide to the social economically stable beneficiaries.

Relationships between Adult Literacy and Human Capital Development

The relationships between adult literacy and human capital development are multilevel. The first major positive impact of adult literacy pertains to economic productivity. Literacy is associated with higher wages, greater productivity, and greater job mobility (Fute et al., 2023; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004a). The adaptability for technological or structural changes makes the active, financially productive engagement of adult literacy an imperative factor in economic development. An equally important aspect would be the concept of mobility. According to Sen, literacy enhances the potential of individuals in making choices, thus their overall 'quality of life' (Sen, 2001). Providing opportunities of better jobs, literacy stands as an effective key in reducing inequities in society. Moreover, it satisfies the need of gender equity as well and offers opportunities or autonomy to women regarding participation in economic matters (Akello et al., 2017; Stromquist, 1997).

There is also evidence from empirical research suggesting the transformative power of adult literacy in the accumulation of human capital. For instance, Eric A. Hanushek & Ludger Woessmann, in 2008, highlighted the significance of the positive association of cognitive abilities, including literacy, and economic growth (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2008). The effectiveness of adult literacy programs in sub-Saharan regions of Africa shows an improvement in agricultural

productivity as well as the abilities of the entrepreneurs themselves, and thus it verifies the significance of literacy in agricultural economics (Blunch & Pörtner, 2011; Oljira & Hailu, 2021). Kiran Bhatty, in the case of Indian society, demonstrated the effectiveness of adult literacy programs in improving the awareness levels of literacy in the domains of health as well as politics, apart from literacy itself (Bhatty, 1998).

However, adult literacy campaigns remain challenged despite the benefits accrued. Resources continue to hamper adult literacy, as argued by (Oxenham et al., 2002). Cultural factors remain an important determinant. Societal values continue to undermine adult literacy education. Also, there remain gaps in policies, as most countries continue not to incorporate adult literacy into their development policies (The Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2017).

For adult literacy development to find its proper place in human capital development, there is a need for innovative approaches. Healthy approaches involving literacy training programs along with vocational training seem to increase the benefits of employability as well as economic benefits (Reder, 2010). Moreover, the participation of a particular community in the design or implementation of a literacy program seems beneficial. The use of cyber technology appears to provide an innovative terrain in broadening the horizon of literacy programs, particularly in remote and most challenged societies (Bhola, 1992).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

To explore educational attainment and employment prospect of the Second Chance Program, I used qualitative case study to investigate the experiences of the beneficiaries. Utilizing qualitative approach allows me to gain deep insight into the social and economic impacts of the program. By examining how participants perceive changes in their employment and educational prospect. As highlighted by Creswell 2018, a qualitative approach allows researchers to explore people's feelings, opinions, behavior, cultures, values, and social phenomena to gain a deeper

understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I believe qualitative is the most suitable approach. However, it is crucial to note that some quantitative secondary data was used to enrich my data source. This data was mainly analyzed from exam registration and results of the participants by gender and subject, second chance centers nationwide, and enrollment statistics.

Participant Selection

A purposeful sampling technique was used in selecting participants, who possess content knowledge and experience on the SCEP. Purposeful sampling allows researchers to "intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This technique was best suited to the present study. As it allowed me to select participants who had direct experience of the program, hence, it was possible to obtain an in-depth understanding of the program.

Access to the program participants at the beginning of the study was limited, the recruitment process was made possible through referrals. I was referred to the center coordinators by regional education officers at Janjangbureh. The center coordinators had firsthand knowledge about the program beneficiaries. They played a crucial role in identifying those who had completed the program and were ready to talk about their experiences. This form of selection was based on the premise that all the participants satisfy a pre-established criterion, which is the completion of the SCEP. The final stage of my recruitment process was enhanced by the voluntary consent of the nominated members for participation in the study. This signals the researcher's commitment to maintaining ethical consideration, where all the participants gave informed consent.

Table 2.1. List of Participants Interviewed

No.	Names (Initials)	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Second-Chance - Center
1	M.J	F	25	Married	Medina Wassu LBS
2	K.C	F	27	Single	Medina Wassu LBS
3	W.M	M	38	Single	Jarumekoto LBS
4	S.S	F	29	Divorced	Brikamaba LBS
5	B.C	M	24	Single	Bansang LBS
6	M.B	F	22	Married	Jarumekoto LBS
7	J.J	F	25	Divorced	Bansang LBS
8	M.S	F	28	Married	Brikamaba LBS

Data Collection Protocol

I used a semi-structured telephone interview to gather information from participants of the Second Chance Program in Central River Region. During the interview sessions, I explored participants' experiences on the Second Chance Program. How it changes their employment and educational opportunities as mentioned above. I used the telephone interview for several reasons, including that it is economical (Novick, 2008), and particularly suited to the study, because of geographical constraint. An interview guide was developed in connection to research questions. These questions were asked to participants and allow them to respond accordingly. Total of eight people were interviewed including two males and six females. On average each interview lasted for 30 minutes using WhatsApp audio calls, which was recorded. In addition to the interviews, I use online testimonies of the participants published on Unique Foundation' website (Unique Foundation Gambiar). In addition to interviews, I used documents related to SCEP. For example, I used SCEP policy documents and situation report. Using this data source offers additional information to triangulate the data and increase trustworthiness (Bowen, 2009).

Moreover, I used secondary quantitative Data analysis focuses on enrollment, registration, and examination results obtained from the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. This data provides a measurable level of performance related to the participation and success achieved in the program. It is important to note that, integration of analyzed quantitative data adds another layer to the study.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data collected, I used thematic analysis, to identify pattern and generate theme in relations to employment opportunities and shifts in educational attainment (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interviews and document excerpts are systematically coded for important themes. I used manual coding, by reading the interview transcripts, familiarize myself with the data, and assign codes. The coded information was then reduced to produce themes for communicating my research findings. The themes that emerged

from my analysis process include 'Educational Advancement and Reintegration,' 'Enhanced Employability and Income Generation,' and 'Challenges and Resource Constraints.' No analysis was required for the enrolment and students' examination results. This was in descriptive statistic in a table form attached in the report were necessary.

Limitations of The Study

Despite the significance that can be derived from this study, for understanding the employment and educational benefits from the SCEP in The Gambia. Several limitations can be reported limiting the findings. The qualitative nature of the study limits its possibility for generalizing the findings to broader participant beneficiaries. Additionally, it would have helped if the study adopted a quantitative technique to provide a well-defined perspective related to the impacts that can be derived from the program. Most importantly, the impacts related to income, employment rates, and retention rates related to jobs would largely be gauged from economic perspectives. Additionally, the study lacked the actual data, for instance, the pre- and post-economic situations related to participants that could provide longitudinal perspectives.

Although the study has used some secondary quantitative data, such as enrollment figures and test outcomes, it is not sufficient for conclusions to be drawn in general settings. Therefore, it has become important to highlight that, although the dataset has offered good context, it has not offered possibilities for advanced statistical analysis while controlling for various factors that can affect the outcome. The future study will benefit from designing methods for future access to the underlying datasets, for example, earning figures, employment, and socio-economic factors for participants. This will enable mixed-method study design, where both qualitative and quantitative analysis can provide a holistic perspective for studying the outcome for SCEP.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data derived from the interviews, document reviews, and secondary quantitative evidence, indicates that SCEP in The Gambia has been instrumental in reshaping the lives of

program beneficiaries. It equipped them with foundational education and skills to be productive members of the society. Most importantly, the program improves the employment prospects, educational attainment, and income levels of its beneficiaries. These findings are presented in a thematic format that includes Educational Advancement and Reintegration, Enhanced Employability and Income Generation, and Challenges and Resource Constraints.

3.1 Educational Advancement & Reintegration

Information obtained from documents suggested that SCEP played a pivotal role in enabling participants to resume their education and build qualifications essential for employment. To put this into context, the number of candidates registered for the first phase at the senior secondary level was 1,643 across the country. Out of this number, about 971 sat the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) from 2022 to 2023, giving them a chance to complete their senior secondary education program (MoBSE, 2023b).

Participants who completed senior secondary education, had the opportunity to progress to tertiary educational institutions in pursuit of higher education. For example, one participant viewed this as a striking instance of educational advancement and reintegration. W.M., a 38-year-old man who had dropped out of school seventeen years ago due to financial difficulties, found the courage to return to school through SCEP. He expressed his determination and gratitude for the chance to finish his education against all odds, and this is what he had to say: "I never thought I would sit in a classroom again, but the program gave me a second chance to pursue my dreams in higher education today". He completed his program with courage and determination, eventually inspiring many others to follow suit. He recounted his experience during his adult learning journey, describing the mockery and judgements he received from some of his community members.

Additionally, several participants credited the program for allowing them to continue their education. This was not limited to basic and

secondary education, but some had the opportunity to progress into higher education, attending institutions such as the University of the Gambia and the Gambia College teacher training program, according to MoBSE's situational report in 2023. One of the interviewees who is currently attending a diploma program in teacher education at the Gambia College describes his experience on SCEP as its pathway to the formal workforce as follows:

After dropping out of school, I used to follow local masonry workers who paid me D75.00 dalasi per day at the time, which is now equivalent to USD1. Never did I think of having an opportunity that would grant me access to a formal job, but SCEP came through, and now I am becoming a qualified teacher next academic year (Telephone Interview, with B.C., 16th December 2024).

Almost all the participants recounted similar stories, who believed that SCEP had allowed them to continue their education and have a prospect of working in the formal workforce. K.C. described how the program allowed her to attend a nurse training program to qualify for a position she was volunteering for lack of required educational qualifications. Another participant made a similar comment,

After completing this program, I was a teacher with the effective intervention program as a tutor before I enrolled into the Gambia college. This was possible because I had the opportunity to complete my senior secondary education through Second Chance education (Telephone Interview, with M.S., 18th December 2024).

Upon this response, the researcher further questioned the participant by asking whether she was directly recruited and sent to the centers for teaching or underwent some form of training, and she said:

I was not sent to the centers directly. I was recruited based on my performance in my final exams, and I underwent one month of induction training, followed by continuous capacity building throughout the project (Telephone Interview, with M.S., 18th December 2024).

Fuethermore, secondary quantitative data describing candidates' performance based on subject area supports candidates' chances of entering tertiary education and the workforce.

This suggests good performance, highlighting that approximately 90% of candidates passed the exams. See the table below.

Table 3.1. Performance of candidates by subjects (November 2022 series)

Subject	# Registered	# Sat	% Sat	% Pass	% Fail
Business Management	18	18	100	83%	17
F/Accounting	11	11	100	91%	9
Economic	16	16	100	88	13
Geography	12	12	100	92	8
Government	55	55	100	80	20
History	57	55	96	91	9
Islamic Studies	39	39	100	54	46
Literature-in-English	2	2	100	100	0
English Language	101	101	100	85	15
Mathematics	36	35	97	66	34
Agricultural Science	65	65	100	88	12
Biology	8	8	100	100	0
Health Science	14	14	100	100	0
Science	20	20	100	95	5
Physics	1	1	100	100	0

Source: Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education's (MoBSE) Update Report on Second Chance Education Program 2023.

The above table show candidates' performance by subject. Confirming the program's potential to prepare beneficiaries for labor and/or tertiary educational institutions. As indicated in participants' accounts, these results are evident in educational advancement prospects for the participants, potential employment prospects, and income generation. This leads us to our second theme, which deals with candidates' employment and financial conditions.

3.2 Enhanced Employability and Income Generation

Data suggest the program's direct impact on the employment situation of candidates, as evidenced could be sought from remarks from participants who transitioned into meaningful roles after completion. The Luminous Funds and Effective intervention have provided employment opportunities for some participants to serve as facilitators for The Gambia classes for the Open Learning Project, according to MoBSE's unpublished situational report. It is indicated that some had found employment in other areas within Gambia's civil services, including healthcare, education, and security. For instance, a participant who dropped out of school at Grade 11, and later volunteered at KT health center as a helper to a

nurse, is now a trained nurse thanks to SCEP. She said;

Without SCEP, I would have remained unemployed. The skills and knowledge I gained gave me the confidence to apply for a position I once thought was out of reach (Telephone Interview with K.C., 14 December 2024).

The Ministry's report corroborated this remark, indicating that some participants had found jobs in the health sector and credited the program for it. "Some security personnel, Nurses, and teachers who benefited from the program have attested that the program has afforded them the opportunity for lifelong learning" (MoBSE's Report). Another participant maintained that the SCEP has prepared her to enter into formal workforce. After completing the program, she was recruited by Effective Intervention (IE) as a classroom teacher. IE targets communities that are perceived to have a low literacy rate, and access to schools is hard for younger children. She described this opportunity as a life-changing one, as he had the chance to contribute to developing young minds. Another participant described how the program allowed her to serve as a role model in her teaching role. He maintained that being a native of this community, where the majority are aware of his circumstances, as he had no hope of completing formal education, or employment prospects. Until the SCEP came through, making his dream come true. This was possible because he was determined to better his life.

The program had equally given chances to individuals who felt the need to upgrade themselves and enhance their chances of future employment opportunities by improving their WASSCE results. Several teachers credited the program for enhancing their career trajectories through lifelong learning opportunities. For instance, M.J., who is now a trained early childhood educator, made the following remarks.

I was sitting at home as a housewife without a formal job. But after completing SCEP, I enrolled in an ECD teacher training program at The Gambia College, and I am now an employed classroom teacher (Telephone Interview, with M.J., 17th December 2024)

B.C. also describes his employment status before the program by stating that he had no formal job. He was only focusing on the masonry job, which was hard labor, and the earnings were very low. Upon asking to comment on his current situation and of prospect of having a formal job, he made the following statement;

I am still under training, though I do occasional teaching. I help children in my neighborhood, and their parents give me some allowance. Those lessons pay, and it is better than the money I earned as a mason (Telephone Interview, with B.C., 16th December 2024).

By targeting disadvantaged groups, unemployed individuals, women, and those from marginalized backgrounds, the SCEP has not only fostered economic independence but also disrupted cycles of poverty, as majority of the participants had ascended into the formal workforce or formal education into tertiary education. Thus, the findings suggested that SCEP has contributed to enhancing the employment prospects of candidates and has eventually affected their economic return. However, in any success story, there must be some bottlenecks, which are also discovered through this study, leading us to the next theme presented.

3.3 Challenges and Resource Constraints

While the Second Chance Education Program (SCEP) in the Central River Region suggests a transformative result based on participants' experiences. Several participants noted some sort of social, logistical, and structural problems that affected the program and most participants and, in some cases, deterred others from completing the program.

3.4 Stigma and Social Judgment

A shared experience among participants, especially women, was social stigma about returning to school as an adult. Many reported that they had been judged or teased by community members who only associated schooling with children and adolescents. A participant recounted her experience, and this is what she had to say:

People made fun of me whenever I was preparing to go to school, carrying my books.

They would say, Isn't she too old for that? I felt embarrassed at first, but I never gave up (Telephone Interview, with M.S., 18th December 2024).

Another participant who identified as a divorcee recounted her experience before separating from her husband.

My husband's family always pressures him, telling him it is unnatural for a grown woman to be sitting in a classroom. That almost made me quit. But I was determined since my husband was not working and I wished to set a better example for my kids (Telephone Interview, with S.S., 20th December 2024).

Similar explanations were recounted by most participants on the issue of judgment and ridicule. W.M. described how his friends made fun of him, labeling him as a wannabe teenager. Furthermore, M.B., one of the adult participants, recounted similar experiences with W.M., who claimed to be bullied by people for getting into something they had no business with. These experiences, especially for married women, were complemented by domestic responsibility expectations. Many indicated that the idea of a woman performing housework and going to school was deemed "irresponsible" by some elders in the community.

3.5 Managing Roles and Time Limits

This is a recurring theme mentioned by many participants who claimed facing challenges in balancing their role as caregivers, domestic chores, manpower laborers, and continuing their education. Considering that women are naturally assigned domestic roles in most Gambian communities, particularly in rural areas. Almost all women participants involved in this study recounted similar stories. For instance, M.J. reflects on her experience in balancing their responsibilities and this is what she had to say:

There were days when I skipped class because my children got sick or because there was nobody to cook. Sometimes, I would do household chores until late in the evening and study after everyone slept (Telephone Interview with M.J., 17th December 2024).

Additionally, another participant recounted her experience with his husband's parents (in-laws). According to her, the in-laws never gave their blessings to her newfound opportunity, and the husband couldn't go

against his parents' wishes. Thus, made it difficult for her to balance between home and school responsibilities, S.S. said. Additionally, J.J., a female participant who completed her program at the Bansang center, reflected on the timing and schedules of the class, which made it difficult for her to balance their domestic chores and academic commitments during a telephone interview.

Interestingly the challenges of balancing domestic responsibilities with academic commitment was not unique to only women. Male participant equally narrates similar experience, for instance, B.C. recounted the challenges he faced in striking a balance between family responsibility especially on farms and school. These challenges limit participants' participation in the program in the central river region among the selected centers and participants.

3.6 Resource Limitations

Challenges on limited resources such as learning materials was described by some participants as a potential hindrance of their learning process. These included a lack of textbooks and the absence of practical mock exams before national testing. "We had to share textbooks, three or four of us per book. It made lessons slower as we had to take turns reading" K.C. said in an interview. J.J. also made comments on their preparation for West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination. We did not do mock exams like regular schools. When the actual test arrived, I was not ready for it. I passed, but it would have been better with practice, she said.

In an attempt to verify some information given by participants especially on the issue of resource limitation, I engaged a regional coordinator, and he confirmed their claims on the subject of resource constraint. This was also complemented through document review and the official report included some of these challenges. Particularly, the January 2023 intake did not fare better due to late material distribution and decreased tutoring hours.

On the other hand, the secondary quantitative data shows disparities in examination results between 2022 and 2023. This disparity was associated with the unavailability of resources. For instance,

candidates of the November 2022 examination outperformed those who sat to the January 2023 series. This is mainly because of insufficient preparatory materials and logistical support a regional program coordinator added.

DISCUSSION

The study results confirm the efficacy of the Second Chance Education Program (SCEP) in acting as an agent for educational integration and socio-economic transformation in The Gambia. Through anchoring the study within the concept of Human Capital (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961), the study demonstrates that adult literacy educational programs, such as SCEP, improve educational accessibility and earning potentials by endowing learners with the needed educational and skills human capital. This concurs with the assertions by Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2004) that additional years of education provide substantial gains in productivity and economic benefits, particularly in developing countries.

The presence of the ability to shift to higher education and employment for the participants in the program clearly portrays its transformation potential, complementing Keita and Lee (2022) study outcomes. The importance of the second-chance educational paradigm through adult literacy clearly proves that it has the unique ability to offset structural exclusion, ensuring that opportunities for improvement are availed to previously excluded individuals (Psacharopoulos, & Patrinos, 2004a). The significance also substantiates that learning for life has become the philosophy for advancing sustainable growth, human capital, and labor market inclusivity, according to UNESCO (2020) and Cameron, & Cameron (2006). How the participants in the learning process for becoming teachers, nurses, and civil servants proves that second-chance learning or adult literacy, in general, has the ability to compensate, apart from its fresh production mechanism, by ensuring that it produces the next frontier human capital for growth, thereby speaks for itself. Theoretical undertones in the study made Beker (1993) assert that investments in health, education, and training enabled improvements in human productivity. With the same introduction, investment in education was carried out by proving the

human capital potential for growth, according to the study's theoretical framework.

The notable aspect, however, is that the second chance opportunity showed its potential for enhancing the participants' employability and earning potential, since it placed them in various educational, health, and civil services sectors. This supports the view that Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2004a) presented in proving the economic benefits derived from literacy by showing that the upward pull of wages and productivity were greater. On the other hand, there is the account by Hanushek and Woessmann (2008) that presented a better link that can be identified between economic growth and the acquisition of cognitive skills. The human capital concept, by Becker (1993), asserts that through education, individuals enhance their productivity and, by implication, become better situated in the economy. This can also be related to how the participants responded, since SCEP aims to equip them for a second chance in life.

However, it is important to note that the success achieved by the program is marred by logistics and resource constraints, such as a lack of study materials and limitations on preparations, that are inherent in the discrepancies that are apparent in the programme's implementation. The constraints that are in operation can therefore confirm that resource inadequacy is a determinant that global adult literacy programs fail when matched, as found by Oxenham et al. (2002).

3.7 Social Stigma and the Gendered Burden in Adult Education

One theme that has also presented interest through the study and requires its own consideration is that of social stigma and gendered roles, particularly for female participants. The study presents a clear indication of the way in which education, gender, and culture intersect, whereby becoming educated as an adult female challenges societal norms related to femininity, maternity, and housewifery. Stories related to ridicule, opposition from family, and conflict related to social roles were indicative of the way in which cultural capital, as proposed by

Bourdieu (1986), impacts educational participation.

The biggest majority expressed double burdens, that is, controlling domestic factors and learning in un-supportive contexts. This reflects what Stromquist (1997) identifies that literacy for women must extend beyond its functional goals, 'to include the transformation of gender social relations.' Controlling domestic and other factors can constitute an invisible barrier that affects educational persistence and success. This would present a challenge for social justice advocacy for the involvement of women in various educational and employment engagements without limitations. This reflects Paulo (Freire, 1970) work that literacy has the ability to produce empowered individuals for social transformation when it emphasizes critical thinking and social justice. Such programs, therefore, such as adult literacy through SCEP, are important for offering the opportunities for women to emancipate themselves from the perpetuated traditional gender socialization that made them practice double burdens.

Moreover, it is pertinent to address that social stigma, outnumbered by the majority female participants and thereby men by implication, has implications related to greater findings in adult education literature, whereby "older female learners appear particularly susceptible to facing resistance from family, both actual and imagined, and from the larger social context (Street, 2001; Cookson, 1989). The labeling of participants as "too old" to enroll again in school is a telling example of the belief system that perpetuates age and sex discrimination that hinders lifelong learning. This is particularly true for female participants, whereby it is a "manifesto in perpetuating patriarchy, whereby women are expected to forgo any vision for themselves to depart from defined by 'ladies,' and instead return home to minister to their husband and family." Thus, it emphasizes that enrolment for greater support services targeted at both gender in terms of flexible timing, childcare, and socialization, is critical towards enabling continuous female participation. SCEP has presented a paradigm shift for tremendous opportunities, albeit introduced in a framework whereby greater pressures still remain upon female participants.

The lack of critical responses to overcome the obstacles has thereby limited potentials for transformation for half the variant largely impacted by SCEP.

4. CONCLUSION

The focus of this research was on establishing the level to which The Gambia Second Chance Education Program (SCEP) has expanded job opportunities and education among adults from The Gambia. Based on Human Capital Theory, this research verifies that The Gambia Second Chance Education Program has, to a great extent, been able to provide an avenue for re-entry into mainstream education, the earning of qualifications such as WASSCE, and involvement in higher education as well as mainstream job opportunities, eclipsed in the fields of education teachers as well as the medical field. All this has resulted in enhanced economic and social status among the many beneficiaries, attuned with national as well as international development goals, specifically SDG1, SDG4, and SDG10.

However, the program faces huge levels of challenges. Stigmatization, particularly among adult females, continues to dent participation levels. Female adult students of this program reported a challenge of balancing home chores with school, worsened by the lack of support from the community. Moreover, inadequate levels of resources, including lack of adequate materials as well as inadequate exam preparedness, worsened learning outcomes as well as inequities among different learning institutions. The job outcomes, though promising, continue to remain highly concentrated in a few sectors.

The implications of this research are profound. Firstly, second-chance education can be an immense driving force for mobility and development, including inclusivity, but it will not merely rely on issues of access. Two, it will be a necessity to take a deep dive into issues of gender dynamics and culture in order to address issues of equal participation. Thirdly, in order to ensure that second-chance education enables the most significant impact to be achieved by this program or service, it will be an immense necessity on the part of governments and other authorities concerned with second-chance education in The Gambia to

ensure that gender strategies of flexibility in education timings, gender sensitization of the community, as well as caregiver strategies, become an indispensable component of this service. The syllabus will then need focus on developing second-chance education with skills of vocation, entrepreneurship, and computer skills. Fourthly, Second Chance Education in The Gambia will then become an indispensable service which will ensure that it becomes an intrinsic element of education strategies in The Gambia. Lastly, Second Chance Education Programs can then be considered an icon. Taking into consideration some of the challenges mentioned as well as broadening its horizon, it will then become an immense force or motor in reducing structural issues of inequality in The Gambia.

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