



**Evolving Societal Needs Driving Lifelong Learning Initiatives in Tanzania:
A Systematic Literature Review**

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Abstract

This systematic literature review examines societal needs which drive lifelong learning (LL) initiatives in Tanzania. It collects information from reliable sources like academic articles, government reports, and policy papers; using databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, Scopus, ERIC, Wiley Online Library, MDPI, official government and organisational repositories and websites. Searching terms combined keywords and Boolean operators such as "LL" and "Tanzania" and ("societal needs" or "LL initiatives") and ("LL" or "social change"). The inclusion criteria included published literature between May 2015 and May 2025; focus on LL relevant to the Tanzanian context; and discussions of evolving societal needs and LL initiatives. The exclusion criteria include literature not based on Tanzanian context; publications without a clear connection to evolving societal needs and LL initiatives; and publications that are in Non-English language. The revealed societal needs driving LL are workforce development, promoting adult literacy and poverty reduction, promoting digital literacy and inclusion, supporting marginalised groups and gender equality, and government commitment and policy support. The review recommends for continuous initiatives of LL in Tanzania with consideration of evolving societal needs through strategic investments, policy reforms and stakeholder collaboration.

Keywords: societal needs, lifelong learning, evolving societal needs, lifelong learning initiatives

Introduction

Lifelong learning (LL) has become a central pillar in fostering sustainable development, especially in countries undergoing rapid socio-economic transformation such as Tanzania (UNESCO, 2020). Globally, the LL is becoming a critical part of how people adapt to social and technological changes (Masonda, 2024; UNESCO, 2023). It is no longer a luxury but a necessity in modern society, particularly in countries like Tanzania, where rapid shifting socio-economic conditions are influencing how people live, work, and learn (UNESCO, 2023).

The LL concept promotes the idea that learning occurs throughout an individual's life span, encompassing formal, non-formal, and informal learning settings (UNESCO, 2020). This truth is becoming progressively marked as communities, educators, and policymakers meet the combined pressures of shifting societal needs in Tanzania (MoEST, 2021; World Bank, 2024). In the Tanzanian context, LL has been increasingly emphasised as a strategic response to shifting demographic patterns, technological progress, and the pressing need for equity and inclusion in education (URT, 2021). This shift aligns with global agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4, which accentuates inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of LL opportunities for all (IAE, 2022).

Tanzania's history with LL dates back to post-independence, particularly during the implementation of the Education for Self-Reliance policy in the 1970s, which underlined adult education and national consciousness (Mushi, 2020). However, current LL efforts are influenced by new societal demands such as youth unemployment, digital illiteracy, and unequal access to education across genders and geographies (Mgaiwa, 2022). These challenges underline the need for more adaptive and inclusive education models that respond to both traditional and emerging learning needs (Mtega & Malekani, 2023).

The growing complexity of Tanzanian society marked by rapid urbanization, a youthful population, and technological transformation has introduced new imperatives for LL (World Bank, 2024; Semberya, 2025). According to Mtega and Malekani (2023), digital skills are now central to labour market participation, civic engagement, and social mobility. Yet, digital exclusion remains prevalent, particularly among women, rural populations, and older adults. Data from rural Tanzania shows that more than 60% of adults lack access to the internet or possess insufficient digital literacy to benefit from online learning platforms (Magesa et al., 2023).

Youth unemployment is another pressing societal issue, with over 800,000 young people entering the labour force annually without adequate employable skills (Mgaiwa, 2022). LL initiatives especially those delivered through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and community centres are being promoted as viable solutions, though their implementation is hampered by poor coordination and limited resources (URT, 2021; ILO, 2022). Gender inequalities, including socio-cultural barriers that limit women's participation in education, further complicate the effectiveness of lifelong learning systems (Komba & Nkumbi, 2020; UN Women, 2023).

Despite national and global recognition of LL as a key driver of inclusive and sustainable development, Tanzania continues to face structural, policy, and socio-cultural challenges that hinder the effective implementation of LL initiatives in response to evolving societal needs (UNESCO, 2020; URT, 2021). The 21st century has brought noteworthy transformations in Tanzanian society (UN, 2017; Coalition for Urban Transitions, 2020); ILO, 2024). The transformations include rapid urbanization, youth bulges, technological disruption, labour market shifts, and growing demands for inclusive, equitable access to education. However, these changes have not been adequately matched by adaptive, responsive, and well-integrated LL systems (Mtega & Malekani, 2023; Mgaiwa, 2022).

Furthermore, gender disparities, regional inequalities, and socio-economic barriers continue to marginalize specific groups especially women, persons with disabilities, and informal sector workers from participating in LL opportunities (Komba & Nkumbi, 2020; UN Women, 2023). There is also a noticeable lack of coordination among key stakeholders, government institutions, NGOs, community-based organisations, and the private sector which limits the scalability and sustainability of lifelong learning programmes (IAE, 2022; MoEVT, 2021).

At the policy level, while Tanzania's Education and Training Policy (ETP 2014, updated 2023) recognizes the importance of lifelong learning, there is a disconnect between the policy framework and practical implementation, especially in rural and marginalised communities (URT, 2023; UNESCO, 2022). Moreover, existing literature on LL in Tanzania is fragmented, often focused on isolated case studies, and lacks a comprehensive, system-wide analysis of how current societal needs are shaping LL strategies across the country (Ndyali, 2020; Mushi, 2020).

Given these gaps, there is an urgent need for a systematic review of current LL initiatives in Tanzania that critically examines their responsiveness to emerging

societal needs. Without such an evidence-based review, LL initiatives on board would remain disconnected from on-the-ground realities, further impeding national development goals and Tanzania's commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UNESCO, 2020; URT, 2021). Generally, there is a knowledge gap regarding societal needs which drive LL initiatives in Tanzania.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to assess societal needs which drive LL initiatives in Tanzania. The study specifically addresses the following specific objectives:

- i) To examine workforce development in driving LL initiatives in Tanzania;
- ii) To examine promotion of adult literacy and poverty reduction in driving LL initiatives in Tanzania;
- iii) To examine supporting marginalised groups and gender equality in driving LL initiatives in Tanzania; and
- iv) To examine government commitment and policy support in driving LL initiatives in Tanzania.

A stronger theoretical foundation is essential for positioning Tanzania's LL agenda within the wider global discourse. To address this, the present review draws on UNESCO's lifelong learning framework, which conceptualises learning as a continuous process that spans formal, non-formal, and informal contexts across the life course (UNESCO, 2021). Central to this global understanding are well-established concepts such as learning societies, learning cities, and community learning centres, all of which highlight the structural, institutional, and community-level mechanisms through which lifelong learning is nurtured (Atchoarena & Howells, 2021; Osborne, 2021). Equally important are professional lifelong learning constructs such as recognition of prior learning and intergenerational learning, which support inclusive participation and acknowledge the diverse ways adults acquire knowledge throughout their lives (Ahmed, 2014). By integrating these theoretical perspectives and terminologies, the study anchors Tanzania's emerging lifelong learning initiatives within recognised international frameworks, ensuring conceptual clarity and enabling meaningful comparison with global trends.

Specifically, LL provides a powerful conceptual foundation for understanding how individuals and societies adapt to social, economic, and technological change. Rooted in the idea that learning occurs continuously and across multiple contexts, LL

positions education not as a discrete phase of life but as an evolving process shaped by personal needs, community realities, and national development priorities (UNESCO, 2021). This perspective is especially relevant for countries such as Tanzania, where shifting labour markets, demographic transformations, and rapid digitalisation are reshaping expectations around learning and participation.

A central pillar in the global LL discourse is the notion of the learning society. This concept emphasises the creation of environments where individuals can access diverse learning opportunities throughout life, supported by systems that encourage participation, flexibility, and social inclusion (Atchoarena & Howells, 2021). Learning societies highlight the interconnectedness between economic competitiveness, civic engagement, social cohesion, and accessible educational opportunities. Framing Tanzania's emerging lifelong learning initiatives within this paradigm helps illuminate the broader structural and cultural shifts shaping the country's development trajectory.

Complementing this is the learning city framework, popularised through the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities. Learning cities operationalise LL at the municipal level, bringing together schools, workplaces, community organisations, and digital platforms to create inclusive local learning ecosystems (Osborne, 2021). They encourage cities to expand adult learning opportunities, support family and intergenerational learning, strengthen vocational and workplace training, and promote digital literacy. As Tanzania's urban centres continue to grow and diversify, the learning-city approach offers a relevant lens through which to understand localised LL responses.

At the community level, community learning centres (CLCs) remain vital components of lifelong learning systems. CLCs typically provide adult literacy programmes, vocational training, community development activities, and inclusive learning opportunities for marginalised groups helping to democratise access to skills and knowledge (Ahmed, 2014). Their emphasis on flexibility and relevance makes them particularly effective in contexts where formal education structures alone cannot meet evolving societal needs.

Two further concepts deepen the theoretical grounding of this review: recognition of prior learning (RPL) and intergenerational learning. RPL promotes inclusive learning cultures by acknowledging the skills individuals gain through work, family responsibilities, and community involvement offering pathways into further education or the labour market. Intergenerational learning, meanwhile, fosters

knowledge exchange between younger and older generations, strengthening social cohesion and supporting the continuity of cultural practices and values (Osborne, 2021). These frameworks are especially important in Tanzania, where familial networks, community bonds, and informal learning practices play central roles in shaping learning trajectories.

In general, these LL theories provide the conceptual foundation for analysing how Tanzania is responding to emerging societal needs. They illuminate the multiple layers including societal, municipal, and community-based through which LL is experienced and implemented. By grounding the review in these established global frameworks and professional terms, the study connects Tanzanian developments to wider contemporary debates, while clarifying the conceptual pathways through which LL initiatives evolve.

Evolving Societal Needs and Lifelong Learning

Over the past decade, LL has become increasingly important in Tanzania. As the country responds to significant shifts in technology, demographics, and economic demands, there's a growing recognition of the need for education systems that are inclusive, flexible, and able to meet changing societal needs (UNESCO, 2021a; MoEST, 2023). Between 2015 and 2025, a number of national policies, digital innovations, and grassroots efforts have emerged to support learning for all, regardless of age, location, or background.

Tanzania's ambitions for industrial growth and a modern economy have pushed lifelong learning to the forefront, especially as the country works toward achieving goals set out in Vision 2025 and the Third Five-Year Development Plan (URT, 2021). To build a skilled and competitive workforce, the government has expanded opportunities for technical and vocational education. Institutions such as VETA and Folk Development Colleges (FDCs) have rolled out short, hands-on training in trades like welding, tailoring, ICT, and agribusiness, catering to both youth and adults (Mmasa & Nyamsenda, 2023).

One notable initiative is MEWAKA (Mpango wa Elimu kwa Walimu Kazini), which supports teachers in improving their professional skills. Through digital platforms like the TIE eLearning Portal and Shule Direct, more than 15,000 teachers by 2023 accessed training materials on pedagogy, inclusive teaching, and curriculum delivery at their own pace (MoEST, 2023). These efforts align with global recommendations for continuous upskilling to ensure learners are better prepared for a dynamic labour market (OECD, 2021; UIL, 2022).

Digital innovation has played a transformative role in making education more accessible, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initiatives like the Digital Tanzania Project, launched in 2020 with support from the World Bank, have expanded broadband access and introduced ICT infrastructure in schools and colleges across the country (World Bank, 2022). These improvements have opened doors for flexible and inclusive learning experiences.

Shule Direct, a homegrown ed-tech platform, offers interactive learning materials via SMS, web, and mobile apps. By 2022, it had reached over half a million learners, many from rural and underserved communities (Mnyanyi, 2023). Similarly, institutions like the University of Dodoma and the Open University of Tanzania have integrated blended learning into their programmes, enabling working adults and distance learners to pursue higher education online (Komba & Nkumbi, 2021).

However, while digital learning is on the rise, barriers such as poor internet connectivity and lack of digital skills especially in rural areas continue to limit participation (MoEST, 2023; Komba & Nkumbi, 2021).

Adult literacy continues to be a priority in Tanzania, particularly for communities with limited access to formal education. The Integrated Community-Based Adult Education (ICBAE) programme has played a key role in addressing this need. Revitalized in 2016 under the Education programme for Results (EPforR), ICBAE has helped over 300,000 adult learners each year improve their reading, writing, and numeracy skills, while also teaching practical life skills in areas like agriculture and health (URT, 2022).

In districts like Babati and Lindi, ICBAE centres have gone a step further by supporting women's groups and youth with income-generating activities like soap-making and tailoring. These groups often link with Village Community Banks (VICOBA) to access small loans and grow their businesses (Ngussa & Michael, 2022).

The Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania (COBET) programme has also offered a second chance to thousands of out-of-school youths, providing fast-tracked learning to help them re-enter formal schooling or join vocational training. Between 2015 and 2020, COBET centres enrolled over 150,000 learners across regions like Singida and Mwanza (MoEST, 2023).

The launch of the National Adult Literacy Monitoring and Evaluation Reporting System (NALMERS) in 2021 helped improve data collection and evaluation of

literacy programmes, making it easier for districts to track progress and identify gaps (URT, 2022).

Tanzania's youthful population where over 60% are under the age of 25 has brought a surge in demand for diverse and flexible learning options (UNDP, 2022). In response, several youth-focused initiatives have emerged between 2017 and 2022. These include youth hubs established in collaboration with organisations like Restless Development and UNFPA, offering services such as digital skills training, sexual and reproductive health education, and entrepreneurship development in regions like Arusha, Iringa, and Mtwara (World Bank, 2022).

The Skills for Youth Employment (S4YE) programme piloted in Morogoro and Dar es Salaam trained over 2,500 urban youth in ICT, soft skills, and job readiness by 2024 (UNDP, 2022). At the same time, Folk Development Colleges introduced new courses in solar energy, plumbing, and mobile phone repair, giving youth practical skills to tap into emerging job markets (Mmasa & Nyamsenda, 2023).

These initiatives show a shift away from traditional academic routes towards community-based, hands-on, and self-directed learning pathways that better meet the aspirations of young Tanzanians (UNESCO, 2021a).

At the policy level, Tanzania has made important strides in integrating lifelong learning into national planning. The Education and Training Policy (ETP) 2023 and the Draft Lifelong Learning Policy (2022) highlight key areas such as digital skills, adult education, and workplace learning (MoEST, 2023). These policies reflect a commitment to making learning available to all, across various stages of life.

Curriculum reforms led by the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) have emphasised 21st-century skills like creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy, particularly through the introduction of Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET) in vocational and secondary schools (TIE, 2023). In 2019, the government also introduced the Alternative Education Framework, which provided guidelines for managing and recognizing non-formal and informal learning across the country (URT, 2022).

To improve planning and monitoring, the NACTVET Accreditation Management Information System (NAMIS) was introduced in 2020, allowing real-time tracking of students and institutions in the technical education sector (MoEST, 2023). While these reforms show progress, challenges such as limited budgets, fragmented coordination, and inconsistent implementation still hinder full-scale adoption of lifelong learning across all sectors (UIL, 2022; URT, 2022).

While the preceding discussion highlights how societal changes are shaping LL in Tanzania it is essential to position Tanzania's experience within the broader global evolution of LL. Around the world, LL has expanded far beyond its earlier association with adult literacy to become a comprehensive vision of learning that supports individuals throughout their lives and across different settings including formal, non-formal, and informal (UNESCO, 2021). This global shift is reflected in a wide range of LL initiatives, including community learning centres that anchor local participation, workplace learning schemes that support skill renewal, digital and open learning platforms that widen access, and city-level programmes developed through the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (Atchoarena & Howells, 2021; Osborne, 2021). These models illustrate how many countries have integrated lifelong learning into social development, labour-market strategies, digital transformation, and community resilience. Viewing Tanzania through this global lens makes it clear that its emerging programmes whether adult education reforms, skills-development initiatives, or community-based learning efforts which echo many international trends while remaining rooted in national priorities and contexts. Adopting this global-to-local perspective strengthens the theoretical coherence of the review and clarifies how Tanzania's LL responses form part of a wider international movement toward more adaptive, inclusive, and future-oriented learning systems.

Methodology

To strengthen methodological transparency and address the need for clearer documentation, the review procedure was supported by a full set of references for all included studies as well as a summary table that synthesises their key features. Consistent with established expectations for systematic reviews, each step of the identification, screening, and inclusion process was guided by the PRISMA framework, ensuring that the review remained rigorous, traceable, and replicable (Page et al., 2021). The resulting evidence table provides a concise overview of the selected literature by highlighting the authors, publication year, study focus, methodological approach, and core findings. Presenting the studies in this structured format not only gives readers a transparent view of the empirical base underpinning the synthesis but also enhances the coherence of the review by making the analytical pathway clear. A comprehensive reference list accompanies the table, offering complete documentation of the sources that shaped the review (See 2.1 PRISMA Flow Diagram [Textual Representation])

The SLR was designed to identify, appraise, and synthesize peer-reviewed and grey literature published between May 2015 and May 2025. The study focused specifically on literature that reports on societal needs which drive LL initiatives in Tanzanian context. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were considered to capture a holistic view of implementation dynamics.

This SLR used a comprehensive search which was conducted using some academic databases. These search engines and data bases are JSTOR, ScienceDirect, Scopus, ERIC (Resources Education Information Centre), Wiley Online Library, MDPI (Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute), and African Journals Online (AJOL). In addition, it utilized Google Scholar, official government and organisational repositories and websites for grey literature.

To ensure that the search strategy reflected the full breadth of lifelong learning concepts, the list of keywords was expanded beyond the initial focus on “LL” and “Tanzania.” Lifelong learning is a broad and multidimensional field, and relying on a narrow set of terms risks overlooking important strands of scholarship. In response, the search terms were extended to include widely recognised concepts such as adult learning, continuing education, self-directed learning, community learning, workplace learning, skills development, and recognition of prior learning of all of which represent core pillars of lifelong learning systems globally (UNESCO, 2021; Ahmed, 2014). Boolean operators were then used to combine these terms in various configurations to ensure that studies capturing different dimensions of lifelong learning were included. The enhanced search string therefore incorporated combinations such as (“lifelong learning” OR “adult learning” OR “self-directed learning” OR “continuing education”) AND (“Tanzania” OR “East Africa”) AND (“societal needs” OR “learning initiatives” OR “skills development”). This refinement broadened the scope of the review and significantly reduced the likelihood of missing relevant literature. All retrieved records were subsequently screened and processed following PRISMA recommendations to ensure methodological transparency and rigour (Page et al., 2021).

The inclusion criteria included literature published between May 2015 and May 2025; focus on LL relevant to the Tanzanian context; empirical research (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) and discussions of societal needs and practical implementation of LL. Finally, the grey literature with credible institutional affiliation (e.g. reports from United Nations, UNESCO, World Bank, OECD, policies and plans from MoEST) were also considered.

On the other hand, the exclusion criteria include literature not based on Tanzanian context; publications without a clear connection to societal needs and LL; and publications that are in Non-English language. Besides, the literature focused exclusively on pre-primary or primary education without LL linkage. The editorials, opinion pieces, or non-empirical reviews were likewise not considered.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion (Yes)	Details / Rationale	Exclusion (No)	Details / Rationale
Time frame	May 2015 – May 2025	Captures recent decade of LL initiatives and policy changes in Tanzania	Before May 2015	Older literature excluded to maintain contemporary relevance
Geographic focus	Tanzania; relevant comparative East Africa where explicitly linked to Tanzania	Ensures contextual relevance to Tanzanian LL policy and practice	Studies without Tanzania focus	Irrelevant for country-specific review
Topical focus	Lifelong learning (broadly defined: adult learning, continuing education, workplace learning, community learning, digital inclusion, RPL) and <i>societal needs</i> driving LL	Aligns with expanded search terms and conceptual framework	Studies unrelated to LL or societal needs	Out of scope (e.g., primary-only education without LL linkage)
Document type	Peer-reviewed empirical articles; systematic reviews; policy reports; institutional/agency grey literature (UN, UNESCO, World Bank, MoEST, OECD); credible NGO reports	Includes rigorous empirical evidence and high-quality grey sources informing practice & policy	Editorials, opinion pieces, non-empirical commentaries	Excluded because they do not present primary evidence
Methodology	Qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, programme evaluations, case studies	All empirical approaches considered to synthesize diverse evidence	Descriptive pieces lacking methodological detail	Insufficient evidence to support synthesis
Language	English	Feasible for the review team and majority of national/international publications	Non-English publications	Excluded (resource and translation constraints)
Population / Setting	Adult learners, youth and adult-oriented LL	Captures the full range of LL actors and sites	Studies focused exclusively on	Not relevant to lifelong

Criterion	Inclusion (Yes)	Details / Rationale	Exclusion (No)	Details / Rationale
	programmes, workplaces, community learning centres, urban/rural Tanzanian settings		pre-primary/primary schooling without LL linkage	learning framing
Quality threshold	Meets $\geq 3/5$ MMAT criteria (or equivalent quality appraisal)	Ensures methodological robustness of included evidence	Fails quality threshold	Excluded to preserve validity of synthesis
Grey literature credibility	Institutional affiliation (UN, World Bank, MoEST, UNESCO, recognised NGOs)	Allows inclusion of high-value policy evidence	Unattributed or poor-quality grey literature	Excluded due to unverifiable rigour

Table 2: Evidence Extraction Table (N = 60 studies)

No	Reference (Author, Year)	Study location	Document type	Study focus / topic (as in manuscript or source summary)	Key findings / relevance to societal needs (as in manuscript/source summary)
1	MoEST (2023). Education Sector Performance Report 2022/23.	Tanzania (national)	Government report	National education performance; teacher CPD (MEWAKA); digital platforms (TIE, Shule Direct)	Policy context; national initiatives for teacher CPD and digital platforms; anchors government commitment evidence.
2	URT (2022). NALMERS Annual Report.	Tanzania (national)	Government report / monitoring system	Adult literacy monitoring & evaluation	Evidence on adult literacy scale and monitoring capacity; relevant to ICBAE and COBET evaluation.
3	Mtega, W. P., & Malekani, A. W. (2023).	Rural Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Digital literacy and adult learning in rural Tanzania	Empirical insights on barriers/opportunities for digital LL in rural settings.
4	Ngussa, B. M., & Michael, G. (2022).	Tanzania (ICBAE sites)	Peer-reviewed article / sector journal	ICBAE facilitators' perspectives on adult education & livelihoods	Illustrates community-level programme practice and livelihood linkages.
5	World Bank (2022). Digital Tanzania Project report.	Tanzania (national)	Institutional report	National digital infrastructure and inclusion	Contextualises national broadband & ICT investments shaping digital LL opportunities.
6	URT (2023). Education & Training Policy (ETP) 2023.	Tanzania (national)	Policy document	Policy framework highlighting	Policy foundation; signals national LL

No	Reference (Author, Year)	Study location	Document type	Study focus / topic (as in manuscript or source summary)	Key findings / relevance to societal needs (as in manuscript/source summary)
				lifelong learning & flexible pathways	priorities and reforms.
7	Mnyanyi, C. (2023).	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	ICT in lifelong learning: opportunities for people with disabilities	Adds evidence on inclusive digital learning approaches for people with disabilities.
8	Ndyali, L. (2020).	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Community-based adult education for inclusive development	Provides historical and programmatic evidence for CLCs & community LL.
9	Mgaiwa, S. J. (2022).	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Higher education & employability; LL implications for TVET	Highlights workforce development drivers and LL linkages to TVET reform.
10	DVV International (2024). Reimagining TVET – Building pathways for youth.	Tanzania	NGO / programme report	TVET & pathways beyond formal education	Practical examples on TVET & micro-credentials informing LL pathways.
11	Mmasa, M., & Nyamsenda, I. (2023).	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Youth unemployment and role of technical education	Evidence on TVET & skills training addressing youth employment.
12	COBET programme documentation (MoEST & partners)	Tanzania (regions)	programme documentation / reports	Complementary Basic Education for out-of-school youth	COBET enrollment & second-chance education evidence.
13	ICBAE programme documentation (URT/DVV references)	Tanzania	programme documentation / reports	Integrated Community-Based Adult Education	Programme evidence on adult literacy & livelihood linkages.
14	UNESCO UIL (2022). Global ALE report.	Global (Africa content)	Institutional report	Adult learning & education status	International context for ALE, policy recommendations relevant to Tanzania.
15	World Bank / ILO / UNESCO (2023). Building Better Formal TVET Systems.	Multi-country	Institutional guidance report	TVET principles & practice in LMICs	Comparative best practice for TVET & LL interventions.
16	Mushi, P. (2020).	Tanzania	Monograph / book	Adult education: history & future directions	Historical grounding for LL policy evolution in Tanzania.
17	Mushi, P., & Chuo, D. (2022).	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Bridging skill gap via TVET & LL	Evidence of TVET contributions to skills development.
18	Mgaiwa, S. J., & Mkumbo, K. A. (2022).	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Gender inclusion & ICT in adult learning	Gendered dimensions of

No	Reference (Author, Year)	Study location	Document type	Study focus / topic (as in manuscript or source summary)	Key findings / relevance to societal needs (as in manuscript/source summary)
					digital inclusion in LL.
19	Magesa, A. B., Mlyuka, E., & Kalole, M. (2023).	Tanzania (rural)	Peer-reviewed article	Digital literacy for inclusive rural education	Empirical findings on rural digital literacy implications for LL inclusion.
20	Nkunya, H. R., & Mwila, P. M. (2024).	Dar es Salaam (case)	Peer-reviewed article	TVET outcomes & labour market alignment	Case evidence on training outcomes & employability.
21	Mwamanga, C. L., & Makundi, H. (2025).	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Volunteering & youth employment interplay	Examines volunteering's role in youth employability.
22	UN Women (2023). Gender Equality in Education: East Africa report.	East Africa (includes Tanzania)	Institutional report	Gender & education inclusion	Regional evidence on gender disparities & interventions relevant to LL.
23	URT (2021). Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) 2021/22–2025/26.	Tanzania	Policy document	National development & LL links	Links LL to national development priorities.
24	UNESCO (2020/2021). Futures of Education & LL reports.	Global (Tanzania included)	Institutional reports	Global LL policy guidance & SDG alignment	Frames global shifts and SDG links underpinning national LL reforms.
25	World Bank (2021). Tanzania Economic Update: Skills & Jobs.	Tanzania	Institutional report	Skills & jobs; LL implications	Links LL and skills policies to economic resilience.
26	ILO (2023). SYEEA Project report.	East Africa (includes Tanzania)	Project report	Youth skills training & employability	Project evidence on training programmes and outcomes.
27	Mtambalike, M., Mwasamwile, J., & Msigwa, R. (2023).	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Digital competencies among farmers	Shows digital skills gaps in rural livelihoods relevant to LL.
28	Kapinga, O. S. (2020).	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Digital learning in rural Tanzania: possibilities & challenges	Discusses digital learning constraints and opportunities in rural areas.
29	Kolawole / Case studies (Kigamboni & Temeke) (2023)	Tanzania (municipalities)	Peer-reviewed article / case	Adult education in municipal contexts	Local adult education case evidence for municipal LL delivery.
30	Ramadhani, R. I. (2025).	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	TVET graduates' employment experiences	Examines TVET graduate employment challenges and self-employment.
31	Institute of Adult Education (IAE) report on adult & lifelong learning (2025)	Tanzania	Institutional report	IAE initiatives & programmes	Institutional evidence of IAE's adult education

No	Reference (Author, Year)	Study location	Document type	Study focus / topic (as in manuscript or source summary)	Key findings / relevance to societal needs (as in manuscript/source summary)
32	Assessment of the Implementation of Adult Education in Tanzania (EAJES/article) (2025)	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Implementation status of adult education	programmes and graduates. Reviews challenges facing adult education implementation in Tanzania.
33	Digital Literacy-Responsive Adult Education in Tanzania (CRN C. Raphael thesis/article) (2025)	Tanzania	SLR / article	Integration of digital literacy into adult education (2015–2025)	Summarises 35 publications; finds curriculum integration, policy gaps, and recommendations.
34	DVV International assessment report: ICBAE (Assessment_Integrated_Programme.pdf) (c.2021)	Tanzania	NGO assessment report	Status of ICBAE implementation	Evaluates ICBAE implementation effectiveness and resource needs.
35	Implementing COBET study (Clemence, 2025)	Biharamulo District, Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Mainstreaming out-of-school children via COBET	Explores resources and strategies for mainstreaming; programmatic lessons.
36	Research on Complementary Basic Education (COBET) (researchgate 2025)	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	COBET implementation & mainstreaming	Provides practical lessons and challenges for COBET mainstreaming.
37	Kapinga, B. B. (2024). Career Preparation & Progression (IAE)	Tanzania	Institutional article	IAE programmes & graduates statistics	Reports on IAE bachelor programmes and graduate outcomes 2019–2023.
38	JPL Mzumbe article on e-government & digital literacy (2024)	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Digital literacy and e-government interaction	Notes low digital literacy limits e-government adoption; LL implications.
39	Masters theses repository (UDSM) – various dissertations on adult education (2015–2024)	Tanzania	Theses / dissertations	Various adult education topics (ICBAE, literacy, livelihoods)	Local academic studies contributing empirical evidence to LL themes.
40	Journal article: Realization of Time as a Resource in COBET (Onesmo Emmanuel) (2023)	Dar es Salaam	Peer-reviewed article	Time as resource in COBET practice	Examines time use and programme implementation constraints in COBET centres
41	Article: Assessing challenges faced by adult learners in Rukwa (AJESS 2025)	Rukwa, Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Challenges to adult learners' academic performance	Details barriers adult learners face in basic education contexts.

No	Reference (Author, Year)	Study location	Document type	Study focus / topic (as in manuscript or source summary)	Key findings / relevance to societal needs (as in manuscript/source summary)
42	Article: Role of Coordinators in Promoting Sustainable Adult Education (SciencePublishingGroup) (2025)	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Role of coordinators in adult education	Discusses coordinator roles and program management implications.
43	National Adult Literacy & Mass Education Rolling Strategy (NALMES 2020–2025)	Tanzania	Policy / strategy document	Strategy for adult literacy & mass education	Guidance for implementing adult literacy programmes and national targets.
44	World Bank: Developing Skills for Tanzanian Youth (2023)	Tanzania	Institutional report	Youth skills development & programmes	Policy & programmes guidance for youth skills and TVET.
45	Study: Graduates & Vocational Training – stakeholders’ perceptions (SSRN/MECA)	Tanzania (or region)	Peer-reviewed article / working paper	Stakeholder perceptions on TVET relevance	Demonstrates TVET value for community resilience and employability.
46	JRIIE article: Adult & Lifelong Learning Initiatives of IAE (2025)	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Institute-level LL initiatives	Documents IAE efforts to expand adult & lifelong learning access.
47	Study: Digital competencies among Tanzanian farmers (Sustainability 2023)	Rural Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Farmers’ digital competencies & implications	Highlights digital skills gaps affecting rural livelihoods and LL uptake.
48	Mtambalike <i>et al.</i> (2023). Digital competencies among farmers (Sustainability)	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Digital competencies & adoption	Evidence on rural digital skill barriers relevant to LL.
49	Siafu (2025). Micro-credential frameworks in LL (Journal of Adult Education in Tanzania)	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Micro-credentials & lifelong learning	Discusses micro-credentialing and lifelong learning pathways.
50	Nkunya & Mwila (2024). Bridging TVET skills & labour market (IJRISS)	Dar es Salaam	Peer-reviewed article	TVET outcomes & employability analysis	Empirical analysis of TVET outcomes and labour market relevance.
51	Ngussa & Michael (2022) — additional case examples (Babati, Lindi)	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	ICBAE & women’s groups income generation	Local case evidence linking adult learning to small enterprise & VICOBA.
52	Mkude (2022). National policies & LL in Tanzania (Journal of African Educational Studies)	Tanzania	Peer-reviewed article	Policy fragmentation & prospects for LL	Analyses policy incoherence and suggests institutional reforms.
53	URT (2022). Alternative Education Framework (guidelines for non-formal learning)	Tanzania	Policy document	Framework for non-formal & informal learning recognition	Establishes guidelines for managing & recognising non-formal learning pathways.

No	Reference (Author, Year)	Study location	Document type	Study focus / topic (as in manuscript or source summary)	Key findings / relevance to societal needs (as in manuscript/source summary)
54	TIE (2023). Annual Performance Report 2022/23 (Curriculum reforms & CBET)	Tanzania	Institutional report	Curriculum reforms emphasizing CBET & 21st-century skills	Documents CBET roll-out relevant to LL skills orientation.
55	World Bank (2024). IDA & Tanzania: People, cities & institutions.	Tanzania	Institutional report	Investments in people & digital infrastructure	Context for urban LL initiatives and infrastructure investment.
56	UNFPA & NPC (2025). Investing in Tanzania's youth report.	Tanzania	Institutional report	Youth investments, human capital & LL implications	Highlights youth human capital needs and LL programme implications.
57	IAE Annual report & programme statistics (2024/2025)	Tanzania	Institutional report	Adult & continuous education programme outputs	Institutional evidence of programme reach and participant numbers.
58	FAWE (2021). Gender-responsive education practice in Africa (includes Tanzania)	East Africa / Tanzania	NGO report	Gender-sensitive learning programmes & outcomes	Provides programme examples and policy recommendations for gender-inclusive LL.
59	OECD / UIL comparative note on LL policies in Africa (2022)	Africa (Tanzania included)	Institutional comparative report	LL policy mapping & strategy recommendations	Comparative insights to frame Tanzanian policy choices.
60	Media commentary / policy brief: Semberya (2025). National human settlement policy	Tanzania	Media / commentary	Urbanisation & implications for LL	Background commentary on urban policy that helps contextualise urban LL needs.

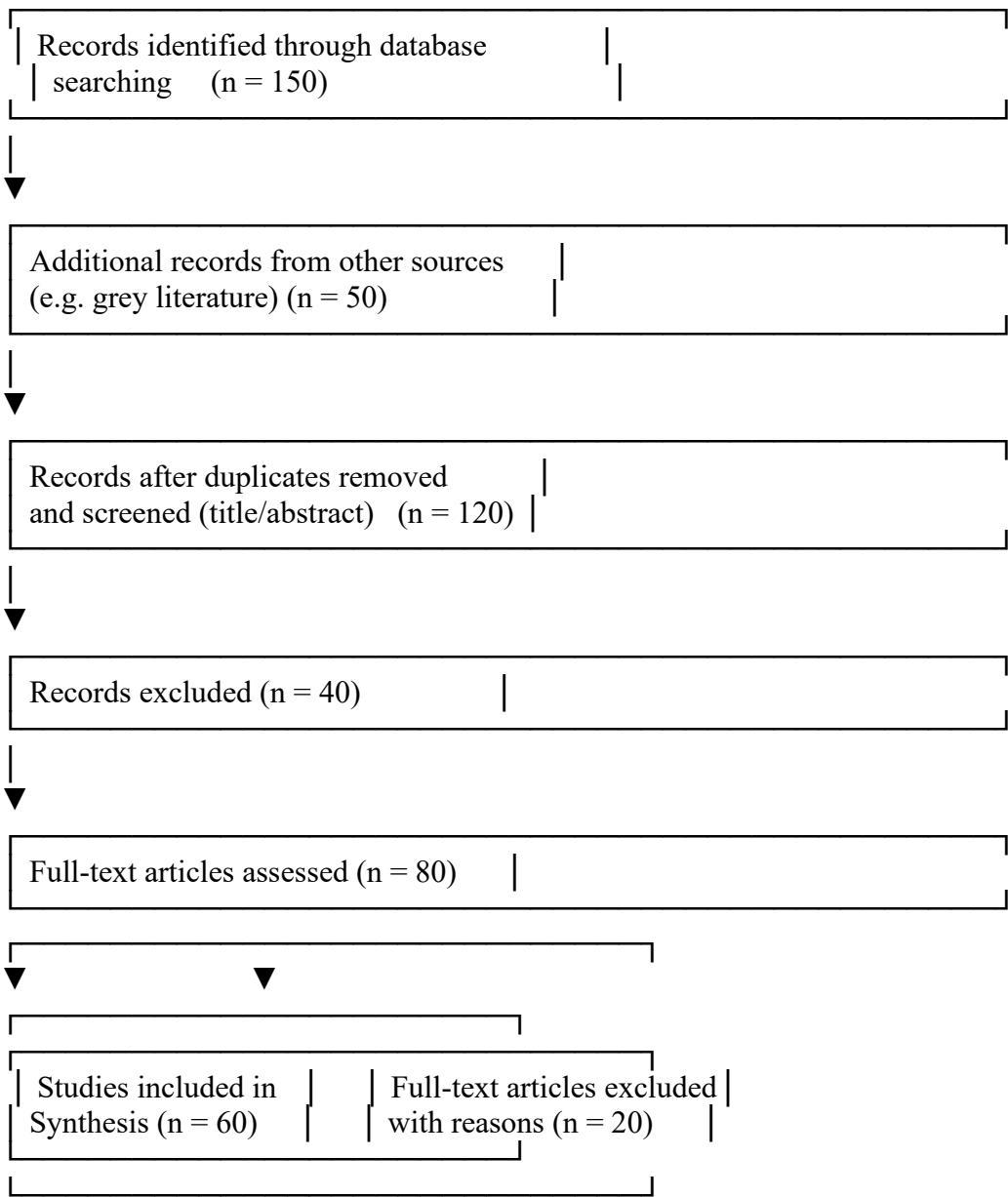
A data extraction matrix was developed in Excel to capture essential information from each literature. The information includes the author(s) and year, study location and target population, type of technology used, type of learning (formal, non-formal, informal), implementation strategies, key findings and outcomes, barriers and enabling factors. Two reviewers independently extracted and cross-validated the data to ensure consistency and reduce bias.

The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong *et al.*, 2018) was used to assess the methodological quality of selected literature. Each literature was rated on its clarity, relevance, data collection procedures, and validity of conclusions. Only literature that met at least three out of five MMAT criteria were included in the final synthesis.

A thematic synthesis approach was employed to analyse and organise findings. Thematic coding was conducted using NVivo software, categorizing evidence into thematic areas on societal needs which drive lifelong learning (LL) initiatives in Tanzania. Narrative synthesis was used to present recurring patterns, contextual insights, and policy implications.

PRISMA Flow Diagram (Textual Representation)

Identification



Results and Discussion

The findings from the review reveal five societal needs which drive LL initiatives in Tanzania. These societal needs include workforce development, promoting adult literacy and poverty reduction, promoting digital literacy and inclusion, supporting marginalised groups and gender equality, and government commitment and policy support as per specific objectives in section 1 (Introduction).

Workforce Development: Enhancing Employability and Vocational Skills

One of the strongest drivers for lifelong learning is the demand for a skilled workforce. A principal theme in the reviewed literature is the role of LL in equipping individuals mainly youth with relevant skills for an evolving job market (Nkunya & Mwila, 2024; Mwamanga & Makundi, 2025). Tanzania faces a significant skills mismatch; formal education often fails to provide practical skills aligned with labour market demands (Kibona & Mgaiwa, 2021; UNESCO, 2022).

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes and informal learning initiatives are increasingly promoted to bridge this gap (World Bank, ILO & UNESCO, 2023; DVV International, 2024; Siafu, 2025). Programmes like the Skills for Youth Employment in East Africa (SYEEA) and community-based vocational training have helped prepare youth and adults for entrepreneurship, ICT, agribusiness, and service sectors (ILO, 2023; Mushi & Chuo, 2022). However, challenges persist in rural outreach, curriculum flexibility, and sustainable funding (Mgaiwa, 2022).

Tanzania's current education reforms, including the updated ETP of 2014, Version 2023, place strong emphasis on developing human capital to meet the country's industrial and economic growth goals (MoEST, 2023). This aligns with broader national strategies like the Five-Year Development Plan III, which focuses on equipping young people and women with relevant skills to boost employment and productivity.

Promoting Adult Literacy and Poverty Reduction

Improving literacy among adults is seen as essential in the fight against poverty. LL initiatives also serve as critical tools for poverty reduction and socio-economic inclusion, particularly through adult literacy and income-generating skills training. According to URT (2023), about 20% of Tanzanian adults still lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, limiting their ability to engage in productive economic activities.

Adult education programmes such as the Integrated Community-Based Adult Education (ICBAE) have been successful in enhancing literacy, life skills, and livelihoods for rural communities, especially women (IAE, 2022; Mtana & Mwinuka, 2020). Studies have shown that increased literacy correlates with improved household income, food security, and civic participation (Mushi, 2020; UNESCO, 2023).

The initiatives like COBET (Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania), ICBAE (Integrated Community-Based Adult Education), and NALMERS (National Adult Literacy Management Information System) are helping provide alternative education opportunities for adults who missed out on formal schooling (DVV International, 2024). By building basic skills, these programmes aim to empower individuals economically and socially, especially in rural and underserved areas. Events like Adult Education Week also serve to promote the value of learning later in life.

Promoting Digital Literacy and Inclusion

As digital technologies continue to reshape the world, the need for digital literacy has become more urgent. The review identified digital transformation as a growing driver of LL, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Digital literacy is increasingly essential not only for employability but also for civic engagement and access to services (Mtega & Malekani, 2023).

However, the digital divide remains a critical barrier. While urban areas benefit from digital infrastructure and online learning platforms, rural populations often lack connectivity, devices, and digital competencies (Mtambalike *et al.*, 2023; URT, 2023). Several initiatives by the Ministry of Education, NGOs, and institutions like the Open University of Tanzania have tried to bridge this gap through mobile learning and digital literacy programmes (Mgaiwa & Mkumbo, 2022; IAE, 2022).

Government policy documents, including the national ICT and education strategies, now emphasise digital skills as a key part of lifelong learning (Semberya, 2025). Programmes such as “Binti Dijitali,” which trains girls in coding and digital skills, show how digital inclusion efforts are reaching youth especially girls in innovative ways, helping bridge both the digital and gender divide.

Supporting Marginalised Groups and Promoting Gender Equality

LL is also viewed as a tool for promoting inclusion and equality. LL initiatives in Tanzania are increasingly designed to be inclusive, addressing the needs of marginalised groups, such as women, people with disabilities, and pastoral

communities. Persistent cultural barriers, caregiving roles, and poverty have historically excluded these groups from formal education (UNESCO, 2023; FAWE, 2021).

Programmes targeting women such as literacy circles, micro-entrepreneurship training, and re-entry education for adolescent mothers have shown promising results (URT, 2022; Mgaiwa, 2022). Additionally, inclusive policies promoting the education of people with disabilities and marginalised ethnic groups are being embedded in national frameworks (IAE, 2022; Mkude, 2022). Nonetheless, disparities remain, particularly in implementation and resource allocation.

Tanzania's recent initiatives, such as its commitments under the Generation Equality campaign and the launch of the *Jasiri* Gender Bond, demonstrate how education and training opportunities are being extended to women, people with disabilities, and rural learners (Semberya, 2025). These efforts ensure that LL isn't just available, but also accessible and equitable for all.

Government Commitment and Policy Support

Finally, government commitment plays a major role in shaping the LL landscape. The success and expansion of LL in Tanzania are largely dependent on government commitment and enabling policy frameworks. The revised Education and Training Policy (ETP) 2023 explicitly promotes LL as a means for human capital development and poverty alleviation (URT, 2023). It emphasises flexible pathways, inclusive curricula, and support for non-formal and informal learning.

However, literature highlights challenges in policy implementation due to weak institutional coordination, insufficient funding, and limited data on LL outcomes (Mkude, 2022; World Bank, 2021). The review also identified a need for stronger inter-ministerial collaboration, integration of LL into national development plans, and better monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Komba & Kafanabo, 2020).

Through updated policies, public-private partnerships, and investment in community learning centres, the government is showing a clear intent to prioritise adult and non-formal education (DVV International, 2024). Collaboration with organisations like DVV International has further strengthened efforts to expand learning opportunities in all regions of the country.

The synthesis and implications of the above findings reveal that; Tanzania has made notable progress in promoting LL. The evolving societal needs including

unemployment, digital exclusion, and gender inequality require a rethinking of how LL is conceptualized and delivered across diverse social and economic contexts.

To address these gaps, multi-sectoral collaboration, policy coherence, and increased investment in digital and community-based learning infrastructure are essential. Furthermore, evidence-based policymaking and regular impact evaluations are needed to ensure the adaptability and relevance of LL systems in a rapidly changing Tanzanian society.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This review set out to explore the key societal factors that have shaped the direction of lifelong learning (LL) initiatives in Tanzania between 2015 and 2025. The findings make it clear that LL is not just a supplementary educational concept, but a powerful tool that supports Tanzania's broader development goals. As the country undergoes economic, technological, and social changes, lifelong learning has proven to be an essential pathway for empowering individuals, reducing inequality, and building a more resilient society.

Some important themes have emerged from the review. Workforce Development has been a driving force behind many LL programmes. With unemployment and changing job requirements affecting many young people and adults, there has been a strong focus on vocational skills training and professional development to prepare citizens for the evolving labour market.

Adult Literacy and Poverty Reduction remain fundamental needs, especially in rural and underserved communities. Programmes such as COBET and ICBAE have played a central role in helping adults and out-of-school youth gain literacy and life skills, supporting both personal growth and poverty alleviation.

Digital Literacy and Inclusion have become increasingly important as technology continues to transform how people live and work. Efforts to expand access to digital learning tools, mobile platforms, and internet connectivity have opened up new opportunities, although challenges in infrastructure still limit participation for many.

Support for Marginalised Groups and Gender Equality has been another critical area. Programmes designed for women, people with disabilities, and vulnerable youth have shown promising results, though more needs to be done to close persistent gaps in access and outcomes.

Finally, Government Commitment and Policy Support have created a more enabling environment for LL. Strategic documents like the Education and Training Policy

2023 and the Draft Lifelong Learning Policy (2022) reflect growing awareness and institutional support for learning across the life course.

In short, Tanzania has made meaningful progress in shaping a lifelong learning system that responds to the country's needs. Still, challenges remain such as limited funding, uneven implementation, and gaps in coordination which must be addressed to fully realise the potential of LL for all.

The following recommendations are advocated in order to build on the progress made and address existing challenges.

Expand Skills Training Opportunities

There is a need to invest more in technical and vocational education that prepares learners especially youth and adults for practical work. Updating facilities, training instructors, and linking programmes to the labour market will help ensure these efforts are relevant and impactful.

Revitalise and Diversify Adult Literacy Programmes

Adult learning should go beyond reading and writing. Programmes should also include life skills, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship training. Using local languages and mobile-friendly platforms can help reach learners in remote areas.

Close the Digital Divide

Ensuring access to affordable internet, devices, and basic digital skills is key. Partnerships with private companies and NGOs could help extend these services to rural areas and marginalised groups.

Promote Inclusion for all Learners

LL programmes must be intentionally inclusive, meeting the needs of women, people with disabilities, and disadvantaged groups. Gender-sensitive approaches, accessible content, and community-based models should be scaled up to promote equity.

Coordinate Efforts Across Sectors

Stronger collaboration between ministries such as education, labour, ICT, and community development is needed to harmonize lifelong learning efforts. A national strategy could help align goals and avoid duplication.

Improve Monitoring and Data Collection

Tracking who is learning, how they are learning, and what impact it has is essential. Systems like NALMERS and NAMIS should be fully implemented and integrated to support decision-making and programme improvement.

Secure Sustainable Funding

Lifelong learning needs consistent funding. This could come from national budgets, donors, and creative financing options. Empowering local governments with resources can also help them deliver programmes that reflect local needs.

Raise Awareness about Lifelong Learning

Public campaigns, community outreach, and school-based programmes should help build a culture where learning is valued at every stage of life not just during formal schooling. Lifelong learning should be viewed as a right and a normal part of personal and national development.

Finally, Tanzania stands at an important crossroads. As the country continues to grow and change, lifelong learning can serve as a bridge connecting individuals with opportunities, and communities with the tools they need to thrive. By addressing the societal needs identified in this review and implementing the recommended actions, Tanzania can build a learning society that is inclusive, adaptive, and prepared for the future.

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