



## **Administrative Learner Support Services and Retention in Alternative Secondary Education: Evidence from ASEP Centres in Dodoma Region**

Simon Michael Moses

Institute of Adult Education, Dodoma

Email: [simionmorem@gmail.com](mailto:simionmorem@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup>ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0003-4728>

---

*Received: 17/02/2026*

*Revised: 20/04/2026*

*Accepted: 17/06/2026*

*Published: 30/06/2026*

### **Abstract**

Learner retention remains a persistent challenge in Tanzania's Alternative Secondary Education Pathway (ASEP) despite its success in expanding access to secondary education for out-of-school youth and adults. This study examined the availability of administrative learner support services and their support for perceived learner retention in ASEP centres. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, guided by a convergent parallel design, to enable the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence. This study aimed to assess the availability of academic, psychosocial, and financial or material support services and determine their contribution to perceived learner retention. Data were collected from 120 participants across three ASEP centres in Dodoma Region, including learners, facilitators, and centre coordinators. Quantitative data from 60 questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings indicate that academic support services were relatively more available than psychosocial and financial or material support services, although the overall provision remained constrained by limited institutional resources. Financial or material support services emerged as the strongest predictors of perceived learner retention, followed by psychosocial and academic support services. The three support

dimensions jointly explained 61% of the variation in perceived learner retention ( $R^2 = .61$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The study concludes that effective perceived learner retention in ASEP centres requires integrated academic, psychosocial, and financial support systems, and recommends strengthening these services to enhance learner persistence and completion.

**Keywords:** Perceived learner retention, learner support services, ASEP, alternative education.

---

**How to cite:** Moses, S. M. (2026). Administrative learner support services and retention in alternative secondary education: Evidence from ASEP centres in Dodoma region. *Journal of Adult Education in Tanzania*, 28(1), 186–207. <https://doi.org/10.61408/jaet2026v28i01.10>

## Introduction

Education is widely recognised as a key driver of economic growth, social transformation, and poverty reduction (UNESCO, 2023). This is reflected in global frameworks such as the Education 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasise inclusive, equitable, quality education, and lifelong learning. Despite significant progress in expanding access, perceived learner retention remains a major challenge in achieving meaningful educational outcomes.

Globally, millions of children remain out of school or fail to complete their education, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (Carr-Hill, 2015). UNICEF (2023) estimates that over 244 million children and adolescents are out of school, with sub-Saharan Africa being the most affected. Even among those enrolled, dropout rates remain high, indicating that access alone is insufficient without sustained participation in the program. This has led to increased attention to alternative and non-formal education programmes aimed not only at expanding access but also at improving retention and completion rates (Riele et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2022).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016–2025) prioritises access, retention, and completion. However, persistent barriers, including poverty, gender inequality, early marriage, and limited infrastructure, continue to hinder sustained participation (World Bank, 2022). Inadequate administrative support services for learners, including academic, psychosocial, and financial or material support, further exacerbate dropout and poor

retention in alternative educational settings. (Nishimura & Yamano, 2021; UNESCO, 2023).

In Tanzania, efforts to expand educational opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults have evolved through a series of nonformal and alternative education initiatives. These include the Integrated Community-Based Adult Education (ICBAE) programme, Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania (COBET), and Open and Distance Learning pathways coordinated by the Institute of Adult Education (IAE). Building on these initiatives, the government introduced the Alternative Education Pathway (AEP) under the Secondary Education Quality Improvement Project (SEQUIP) in 2021. The Alternative Secondary Education Pathway (ASEP), one of the key components of the AEP, was established to provide a flexible route to secondary education for adolescents and young adults who had dropped out of school or had never enrolled. Through flexible delivery modes, localised learning centres, and accelerated learning opportunities, ASEP seeks to improve educational access, equity, and lifelong learning opportunities among disadvantaged populations (URT, 2021; World Bank, 2021).

Although the ASEP has expanded access to secondary education, evidence suggests that perceived learner retention and completion remain significant challenges in the region. Programme reports indicate that enrolment in ASEP centres has increased steadily since the programme's inception, with more than 13,000 out-of-school youth and adults enrolled by 2025, exceeding the programme's initial target of enrolling 12,000 out-of-school youth and adults. However, administrative records and program evaluations show that a considerable proportion of learners fail to complete the program, while irregular attendance and dropouts continue to affect learning outcomes (URT, 2024; World Bank, 2024). Studies on ASEP and adult education in Tanzania suggest that perceived learner retention is affected by financial constraints, work commitments, family responsibilities, and inadequate learner support services. These persistent patterns of learner dropout, low retention, and uneven completion rates suggest that increasing access alone does not guarantee successful participation and completion of the program. Consequently, perceived learner retention has emerged as a critical concern for policymakers and program implementers seeking to maximise the effectiveness of ASEP interventions.

Empirical studies in Tanzania have identified several factors influencing perceived learner retention, including low community awareness, socioeconomic challenges, and ineffective teaching approaches (Mkumbo, 2017; World Bank, 2021;

UNESCO, 2022). These factors reduce learners' engagement and increase the likelihood of dropout, reflecting the gaps between policy intentions and implementation. Additionally, broader socioeconomic pressures, peer influence, and low motivation have been consistently linked to dropouts and irregular attendance (Sumra & Rajani, 2006; United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2021; UNICEF, 2023).

The concept of perceived learner retention is supported by theoretical perspectives that emphasise the role of administrative learner support services in fostering student engagement and integration. Tinto's (1993) student integration model posits that learners are more likely to persist when they are academically and socially integrated into their learning environment. Similarly, Simpson (2012) highlighted the importance of continuous learner support, such as counselling, mentorship, and feedback, in promoting retention, particularly in adult and non-formal education contexts. These perspectives underscore the critical role of institutional support in sustaining learner participation in the program.

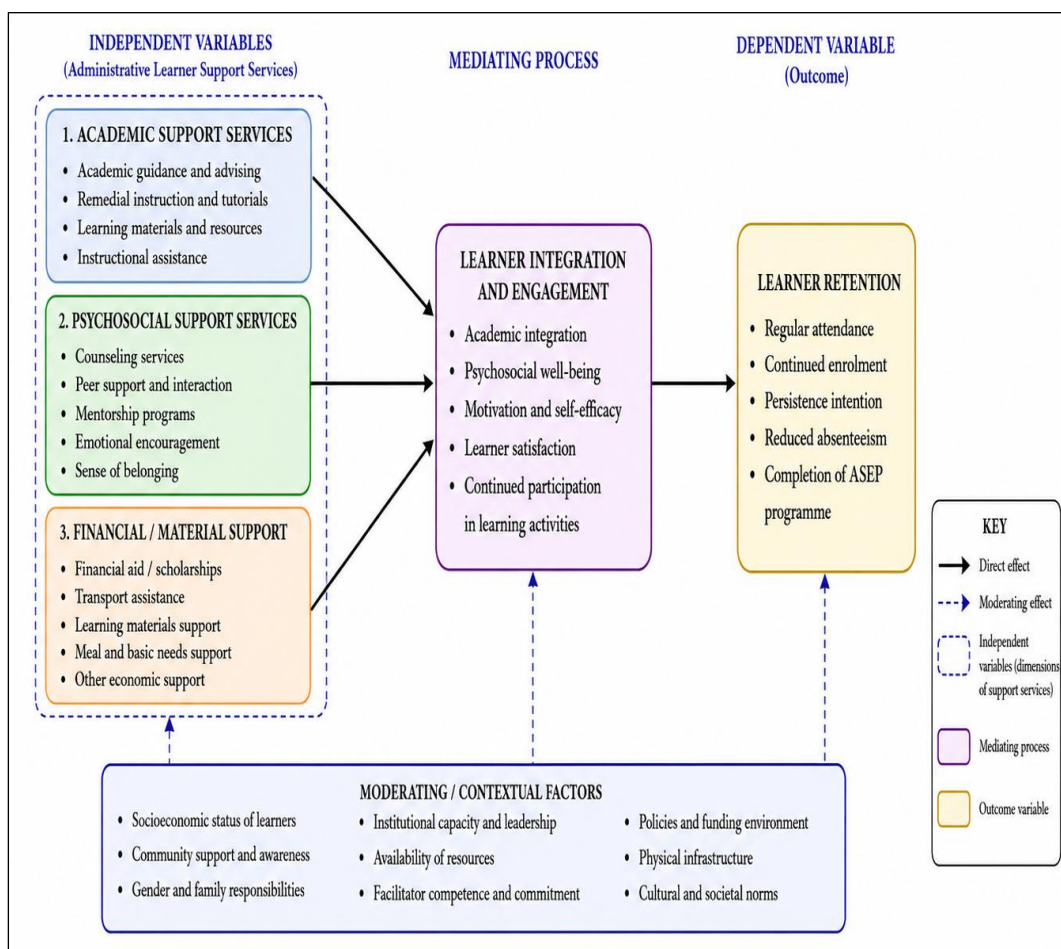
In this study, perceived learner retention refers to the continued enrolment, persistence, and successful completion of the ASEP program. Administrative learner support, on the other hand, encompasses services that provide academic, psychosocial, and financial or material assistance designed to support learners' continued participation and successful completion of educational programmes (Vincent Tinto, 1993; John P. Bean & Barbara S. Metzner, 1985).

Most studies on perceived learner retention have been conducted in formal schooling, higher education, and distance education contexts, limiting their applicability to adult education program (ASEP) learners. In higher education, retention is commonly explained through academic and social integration (Tinto, 1993). More recent studies have continued to support and refine Tinto's framework by emphasising student engagement, institutional support, and sense of belonging as key determinants of persistence (Samoila & Vrabie, 2023). Studies on non-traditional learners highlight environmental and institutional influences on attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985). In distance education, learner support systems and institutional interventions are central to explaining persistence (Simpson, 2013; UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2023). However, these findings may not fully apply to ASEP learners, who often experience overlapping challenges such as employment demands, family responsibilities, financial constraints, and disrupted educational pathways, and who require context-specific support mechanisms.

Although previous studies have shown that socioeconomic and institutional factors, such as poverty, family responsibilities, school resources, and learner support systems, influence retention (Hunt, 2008; UNESCO, 2022), there is limited empirical evidence on the perceived contribution of administrative learner support services, particularly academic, psychosocial, and financial or material support, in promoting retention in alternative secondary education settings. Existing research has largely focused on structural barriers, with less attention paid to how specific support services shape learner persistence (Sabates et al., 2010; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022). Moreover, most retention theories and empirical studies are grounded in formal schooling, higher education, and distance education contexts, limiting their applicability to ASEP learners, who often balance schooling with work, family responsibilities, and economic constraints (Tinto, 1993; Simpson, 2013). In Tanzania, studies on Alternative Education Pathways have mainly addressed access and implementation, with limited focus on learner support services and retention outcomes (Mwakalinga, 2024; Mwaifuge & Komba, 2024). This study addresses this gap by examining the effectiveness of administrative learner support services in enhancing retention in ASEP centres.

**Figure 1:**

*Conceptual Framework for the Effectiveness of Administrative Learner Support Services in Enhancing Perceived learner retention in ASEP Centres*



**Source:** Adapted by the researcher from Tinto's Student Integration Theory (1993), Bean and Metzner's Student Attrition Theory (1985), and relevant literature.

The conceptual framework for this study was developed from Tinto's Student Integration Theory (1993), Bean and Metzner's Student Attrition Theory (1985), and Simpson's Learner Support Framework (2012). The framework proposes that academic, psychosocial, and financial/material support influence perceived learner retention among ASEP learners. It further recognises that learner characteristics and contextual factors, such as age, employment responsibilities, family commitments, and socioeconomic conditions, may shape the relationship between support services and perceived learner retention.

The framework includes possible mediation and moderation pathways based on the theoretical and empirical literature. However, these pathways were not empirically tested in the present study. Rather, they are presented as conceptual propositions that may explain how and under what conditions learner support services influence the retention of students. This study focused solely on examining the direct relationships between learner support service dimensions and perceived learner retention using correlation and multiple regression analyses. Consequently, no conclusions were drawn regarding the mediation or moderation effects.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively understand the relationship between administrative learner support services and perceived learner retention in ASEP centres. Specifically, a convergent parallel research design was employed because the study sought to examine both the statistical relationship between administrative learner support services and perceived learner retention and the contextual experiences that explain how and why these services influence retention. Quantitative methods alone are limited in explaining the underlying reasons for learner dropout or persistence, while qualitative methods alone cannot establish the strength or direction of the relationships between variables. By integrating both approaches, this study generated more comprehensive and corroborated evidence of the effectiveness of administrative learner support services in distance learning.

The study was conducted in Dodoma Region, Tanzania, which was purposively selected because of its status as the national administrative capital and its active implementation of Alternative Secondary Education Pathway (ASEP) programmes under the Institute of Adult Education (IAE). The region provides a strategic and policy-relevant setting for the study because it hosts diverse urban, peri-urban, and rural populations, thereby reflecting the heterogeneous socioeconomic conditions under which ASEP operates in Tanzania. Dodoma continues to experience significant educational participation challenges, including a considerable number of out-of-school youth and adults, making it a suitable context for examining access, retention, and learner support in alternative education programs. From the multiple ASEP centres operating in the region, three centres—Kidoka, Razaq, and Dodoma ASEP Centres—were purposively selected based on their variation in geographic location, learner composition, and resource availability while sharing the same ASEP policy and administrative framework. This combination of

contextual diversity and policy uniformity makes the selected centres sufficiently representative of ASEP implementation in the Dodoma Region and provides a reliable basis for examining the effectiveness of administrative learner support services in enhancing perceived learner retention in this region.

The target population comprised all learners, facilitators, and centre coordinators in the selected ASEP centres, totalling 216. Learners formed the largest group and were the primary unit of analysis, while facilitators and centre coordinators were included because of their direct involvement in the implementation and management of learner support services at the centre. The exact population size was obtained from the ASEP centre records and served as the basis for sampling.

A total sample of 120 participants was drawn for the study, comprising 100 learners, 17 facilitators, and three centre coordinators. Simple random sampling was used to select 100 learner respondents from the total learner population in the three selected centres. The sample was drawn from updated enrolment registers, which served as the sampling frame. Learners were assigned identification numbers and selected using a lottery method to ensure equal probability of selection, with proportional allocation across centres to reflect differences in enrolment sizes. A sample size of 100 was considered adequate for statistical analysis and representation of the accessible learner population. Purposive sampling was used to include all 17 facilitators and centre coordinators from the selected centres, as they were directly involved in the implementation and administration of learner support services, and thus constituted the full accessible population of key informants for the study.

Although 120 participants were involved in the broader mixed-methods study, the quantitative analysis was based on 60 fully completed questionnaires. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with the three centre coordinators, all 17 facilitators, and a purposively selected group of learners drawn from the questionnaire participants. Learner interviews were conducted to provide deeper insights into their experiences of administrative learner support services and how these services support their persistence in the ASEP programme.



**Table 1:**

*Sample Distribution of Study Participants*

| Participant Category | Sample Size | Sampling Technique     |
|----------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| Learners             | 100         | Simple Random Sampling |
| Facilitators         | 17          | Purposive Sampling     |
| Centre Coordinators  | 3           | Purposive Sampling     |
| Total                | 120         |                        |

**Source: Field Data; February, 2026**

### **Participants' Characteristics**

Learner participants selected through simple random sampling reflected diverse demographic backgrounds, including out-of-school youth and adults enrolled in the ASEP. They varied in age and commonly combined schooling with employment, self-employment, or family responsibilities, factors that supported their attendance and retention in the programme.

Facilitators served as the main providers of learner support services, offering academic guidance, monitoring learner progress, and providing basic psychosocial assistance. Most held diploma or bachelor's degrees in education and had experience in adult and nonformal education. However, interviews revealed limited formal training in specialised support areas, particularly counselling, resulting in service delivery that was largely experience-based and varied across ASEP centres.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document reviews. A structured questionnaire was administered to the learners to generate quantitative data on their perceptions of learner support services and their retention. The questionnaire consisted of five sections covering demographic characteristics, academic support services, psychosocial support services, financial or material support, and perceived learner retention indicators. Most items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*).

Semi-structured interview guides were used to collect qualitative data from facilitators and centre coordinators regarding the implementation, adequacy, and challenges of the learner support services in the programme. This instrument enabled the respondents to provide detailed explanations and examples of learner support practices and institutional barriers.

A document review checklist was used to obtain supplementary data from attendance records, enrolment registers, dropout records, and institutional reports to corroborate reported retention trends and triangulate primary findings.

The quantitative instrument was reviewed by experts in adult education and research methodology to establish content validity. A pilot study was conducted to refine the questionnaire items, and internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which exceeded the recommended threshold of .70. To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, credibility was enhanced through triangulation of interview and documentary data, as well as member checking with the selected participants to verify the accuracy of the interpretations. Dependability was strengthened by maintaining an audit trail documenting coding decisions and analytical procedures, whereas confirmability was supported by the systematic documentation of the data analysis process.

The content validity of the instruments was ensured through expert review by specialists in adult education and educational research who assessed the instruments for relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study objectives. Their feedback informed the refinement of the questionnaire items and the interview questions. A pilot study was conducted at an ASEP centre outside the study sample to assess the clarity, feasibility, and reliability of the instruments. The reliability of the questionnaire scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with all constructs achieving coefficients above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

**Table 2:**  
*Reliability Statistics for Questionnaire Scales*

| Construct                     | Cronbach's Alpha |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Academic Support Services     | .81              |
| Psychosocial Support Services | .84              |
| Financial/Material Support    | .79              |
| Perceived learner retention   | .86              |

**Source: Researcher, February, 2026**

Following ethical approval and institutional permission, the researcher visited the selected ASEP centres to administer questionnaires to the sampled learners and conduct interviews with the facilitators and the coordinators. Quantitative and

qualitative data were collected concurrently using a convergent-parallel design. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness before coding and entry, while interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Quantitative data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 30. The data analysis was conducted in three stages. First, descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarise respondents' characteristics and assess the availability and perceived contribution of learner support services. Second, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between academic, psychosocial, and financial support services and perceived learner retention. Third, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relative contribution of each learner support service dimension in predicting perceived learner retention among ASEP learners. Statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

Prior to the regression analysis, the statistical assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of errors, and multicollinearity were assessed. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below 5, indicating no multicollinearity concerns.

Qualitative data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis framework: familiarisation, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition and reporting. Themes were developed in alignment with the study objectives.

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative strands were integrated during interpretation using a side-by-side comparison and triangulation to identify convergence, complementarity, and divergence across the data sources.

## **Results and Discussion**

The study involved 120 participants from three Alternative Secondary Education Pathway (ASEP) centres in Dodoma Region, Tanzania, including learners, facilitators, and Centre Coordinators. For the quantitative component, 100 learners were randomly selected to complete the questionnaires. Of these, 60 questionnaires were completed and included in the analysis, yielding a 60% usable response rate. The remaining 40 questionnaires were excluded because of incomplete responses.

Facilitators and centre coordinators participated in interviews to provide qualitative data for this study.

**Note.** Quantitative analysis was based on 60 completed questionnaires. Incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the study. Although the final sample was adequate for the planned statistical analyses, the exclusion of incomplete responses may have introduced a non-response bias.

### **Availability of Administrative Learner Support Services**

The first objective examined the availability of administrative learner support services at ASEP centres. Descriptive statistics indicated that academic support services were relatively more available than psycho-social and financial support services, although provision varied across support dimensions.

**Table 3:**

*Availability of Administrative Learner Support Services in ASEP Centres as reported by Learners*

| <b>Support Service</b>     | <b>Frequency (Available)</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Academic Guidance          | 40                           | 66.7%             |
| Learning Materials Support | 34                           | 56.7%             |
| Counseling Services        | 32                           | 53.3%             |
| Mentorship Programs        | 29                           | 48.3%             |
| Financial Support          | 21                           | 35.0%             |

**Source: Field Data; April, 2026**

**Note.** Percentages are based on responses from 60 ASEP learners regarding the availability of administrative learner support services in their centres. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) were derived from Likert-scale responses regarding perceived availability.

Table 3 presents learners' perceptions of the availability of administrative learner support services in ASEP centres. Academic guidance was the most available service (66.0%, M = 3.40, SD = 0.85), followed by learning material support (56.0%, M = 3.18, SD = 0.90) and counselling services (54.0%, M = 3.10, SD = 0.97). Mentorship programs were available to less than half of the learners (48.0%, M = 2.95, SD = 1.03). Financial support was the least available service, with only 36.0% of learners reporting its availability (M = 2.60, SD = 1.12). Overall, the

findings indicate that academic support services were more widely available than mentorship and financial support services in the ASEP centres.

The qualitative findings supported this pattern. Facilitators reported that although academic guidance services such as mentoring, progress monitoring, and assistance with learning difficulties are routinely provided, limited staffing and inadequate learning resources constrain the depth and individualisation of these services. One facilitator explained this as follows:

We try to support learners academically by clarifying difficult concepts, reviewing assignments, and providing remedial assistance to slow learners; however, large class sizes and limited instructional resources constrain our ability to offer individualised and continuous academic support. (Facilitator 1 February 2026).

The findings were corroborated by the centre coordinators, who similarly reported:

Although academic support services were routinely provided, a shortage of facilitators and instructional resources limited the timely provision of individualised support for students with disabilities. Consequently, the quality and consistency of academic support varied across ASEP centres, potentially reducing its contribution to perceived learner retention.

These interview data indicate that the availability of academic support services alone does not guarantee their effectiveness in promoting perceived learner retention. Rather, the quality and consistency of support depend on the institutional capacity to provide timely and individualised assistance. The findings suggest that resource constraints reduce the potential of academic support services to foster sustained learner engagement and persistence in ASEP centres in South Africa. These findings are consistent with Tinto's (1993) argument that sustained academic support promotes learner integration and persistence. However, the findings also suggest that the effectiveness of such support depends on the availability of adequate institutional resources. This concurs with Bean and Metzner's (1985) view that organisational and environmental factors support learner persistence. The limited availability of mentorship and financial support further indicates that comprehensive learner support is essential for enhancing retention in alternative education programmes.

### **Perceived Contribution of Psycho-social Support Services on Perceived learner retention**

The second objective was to assess the perceived contribution of psycho-social support services to perceived learner retention. This study assumed that learners

who receive adequate psycho-social support—including counselling, mentorship, emotional encouragement, and a sense of belonging—are more likely to remain engaged and persist in their programmes. According to Tinto (1993), social integration enhances learners' commitment to their educational goals, while Bean and Metzner (1985) argue that support mechanisms help non-traditional learners cope with personal and environmental challenges that may otherwise lead to attrition. Therefore, psycho-social support was expected to contribute positively to perceived learner retention in ASEP centres. The field data are listed in Table 4.

**Table 4:**

*Perceived Contribution of Psycho-social Support on Perceived learner retention as Reported by Learners (n = 60)*

| Variable                     | M    | SD   | Interpretation |
|------------------------------|------|------|----------------|
| Access to Counseling         | 3.25 | 0.92 | Moderate       |
| Peer Support                 | 3.38 | 0.89 | Moderate       |
| Emotional Well-Being         | 3.20 | 0.95 | Moderate       |
| Motivation to Continue Study | 3.50 | 0.82 | High           |

**Source:** Field Data; February, 2026

**Note.** The findings are based on responses from 60 ASEP learners who rated the perceived contribution of psycho-social support services to their retention using a 5-point Likert scale. Mean scores were interpreted using the following intervals: 1.00–1.80 = Very Low; 1.81–2.60 = low; 2.61–3.40 = moderate; 3.41–4.20 = high; and 4.21–5.00 = Very High.

As presented in Table 4, psycho-social support was positively perceived to contribute to perceived learner retention, particularly by enhancing motivation to continue studying (M = 3.50, SD = 0.82) and strengthening peer support networks (M = 3.38, SD = 0.89). On the other hand, interview findings revealed that psycho-social support remains largely informal and dependent on individual facilitator initiatives rather than institutionalised systems. One centre coordinator stated:

The centre lacks a formal counselling structure. Learners rely on informal interactions with facilitators, often approaching them after lessons for guidance on academic or personal issues. However, the absence of an organised system means that support is inconsistent and largely dependent on individual teachers' availability. Coordinator 1; February 2026).

The interview evidence shows that psycho-social support in ASEP centres is largely informal, with learners relying on ad hoc interactions with facilitators in the absence of a formal counselling system. Although such support contributes to learner persistence, its delivery is inconsistent and depends on individual teachers' availability, indicating weak institutionalisation of counselling services.

These findings suggest that psycho-social support contributes to perceived learner retention by enhancing learners' motivation, emotional well-being, and sense of belonging. However, the absence of formal counselling structures limits the effectiveness and consistency of these services across ASEP centres. This finding supports Tinto's (1993) proposition that social integration promotes learner persistence and is consistent with Bean and Metzner's (1985) view that institutional support is particularly important for non-traditional learners facing personal and environmental challenges. Therefore, strengthening institutionalised psycho-social support services could enhance perceived learner retention in ASEP centre.

### Financial and Material Constraints Affecting Learners' Retention

The third objective examined how financial and material factors affect perceived learner retention at ASEP centres. Specifically, this study sought to determine the extent to which financial difficulties, inadequate learning materials, and competing work responsibilities support learners' ability to attend classes regularly and persist in their studies despite these challenges. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements related to these factors. The results are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5:**  
*Perceived Contribution of Financial and Material Constraints on Perceived learner retention (n = 60)*

| Factor                                   | Agree (%) | Disagree (%) | M    | SD   |
|------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|------|------|
| Financial Difficulties Affect Attendance | 73.3      | 26.7         | 3.75 | 0.78 |
| Lack of Learning Materials               | 63.3      | 36.7         | 3.48 | 0.91 |
| Need to Work Affects Schooling           | 71.7      | 28.3         | 3.65 | 0.83 |

**Source: Field Data; February, 2026**

Table 5 shows that financial and material challenges significantly affect perceived learner retention in ASEP centres. The majority of respondents (73.3%) agreed that financial difficulties negatively influenced their attendance (M = 3.75, SD = 0.78),

indicating that economic hardships limit consistent participation in learning activities. Similarly, 71.7% reported that the need to work interfered with their schooling ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ), suggesting that competing economic responsibilities reduce learners' ability to remain engaged in the programme.

In addition, 63.3% of the respondents agreed that a lack of learning materials affected their learning and retention ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ). Although this factor recorded the lowest mean score, it still represented a notable barrier to persistence. Overall, the findings suggest that financial and material constraints are major factors influencing perceived learner retention, underscoring the importance of strengthening financial support mechanisms and improving access to learning resources in ASEP centres.

Learners repeatedly linked absenteeism to economic pressures:

Sometimes, I miss classes because I must work to earn money for food and transportation. Balancing school and income-generating activities is difficult, especially when family responsibilities increase. As a result, I occasionally miss lessons and struggle to maintain regular attendance. (Learner 2 February 2026)

Another learner explained:

I want to continue my studies, but financial challenges often make it difficult. There are times when I have to choose between attending classes and working to support myself and my family. When work opportunities arise, I miss some lessons because earning an income becomes an immediate priority. (Learner 7 February 2026).

These findings underscore the central role of economic vulnerability in shaping educational persistence among ASEP participants in the study. The interview participants explained that the costs of transportation, learning materials, and other educational necessities often compete with their daily livelihoods and family responsibilities. Consequently, most learners are forced to prioritise income-generating activities over class attendance, leading to irregular participation and, in some cases, dropouts. These experiences highlight how financial hardship can undermine perceived learner retention and reinforce the need for stronger financial and material support in ASEP centres. The findings also support Tinto's (1975, 1993) Student Integration Model, which argues that persistence in education is influenced by learners' ability to overcome external commitments alongside their academic engagement. Financial hardship and employment obligations reduce learners' capacity to participate consistently in educational activities, thereby weakening their commitment to the programme and increasing the risk of attrition.



## Correlations Between Learner Support Services and Perceived learner retention

Pearson product–moment correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between the support service dimensions and perceived learner retention.

**Table 6:**

*Pearson Correlations Between Learner Support Services and Perceived learner retention (n = 60)*

| Variable             | r   | Approximate t-value | p-value |
|----------------------|-----|---------------------|---------|
| Academic Support     | .60 | 5.88                | < .001  |
| Psychosocial Support | .66 | 6.69                | < .001  |
| Financial Support    | .70 | 7.52                | < .001  |

**Source: Field Data; February, 2026**

All support service dimensions demonstrated statistically significant positive relationships with perceived learner retention. Financial support showed the strongest correlation with retention ( $r = .70$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by psycho-social ( $r = .66$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and academic support ( $r = .60$ ,  $p < .001$ ) support. These findings suggest that improvements in learner support services are associated with increased persistence among ASEP learners.

## Predictors of Perceived Learner Retention

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to assess the relative predictive contribution of the support service dimensions to the perceived learner retention.

### *Regression Assumption Testing*

Prior to conducting the multiple regression analysis, key assumptions were tested. Multicollinearity diagnostics showed acceptable levels, with VIF values ranging from 1.42 to 2.18, indicating no multicollinearity concerns. The examination of the normal P–P plot and histogram of the standardised residuals suggested that the residuals were approximately normally distributed. Homoscedasticity was confirmed using a scatterplot of the standardised residuals, which showed a random

distribution around zero without a clear pattern. The Durbin–Watson statistic of 1.89 indicates the independence of errors. These results confirmed that the data met the assumptions required for multiple regression analysis.

**Table 7:**

*Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Perceived learner retention (n = 60)*

| Predictor Variable   | B   | SE   | t    | p      |
|----------------------|-----|------|------|--------|
| Academic Support     | .30 | 0.09 | 3.45 | .001   |
| Psychosocial Support | .34 | 0.08 | 4.10 | < .001 |
| Financial Support    | .38 | 0.07 | 4.85 | < .001 |

**Source: Field Data; February, 2026**

### Model Summary

| R <sup>2</sup> | F     | p      |
|----------------|-------|--------|
| .61            | 31.50 | < .001 |

The regression model explained 61% of the variance in perceived learner retention ( $R^2 = .61$ ,  $F = 31.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating substantial explanatory power. Financial support emerged as the strongest predictor of perceived learner retention ( $\beta = .38$ ), followed by psycho-social ( $\beta = .34$ ) and academic ( $\beta = .30$ ) support.

## Summary of Document Review Findings Related to Perceived learner retention

### *Reviewed Documents and Key Findings*

| Document Source             | Key Finding                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Attendance Registers</b> | Frequent absenteeism was observed among some learners.                                                                                                         |
| <b>Enrolment Registers</b>  | A decline was observed between initial enrolment and programme completion.                                                                                     |
| <b>Dropout Records</b>      | Dropout records indicated that financial hardship, employment demands, and family responsibilities were frequently recorded as reasons for learner withdrawal. |
| <b>Centre Reports</b>       | Limited counselling services, learning materials, and financial assistance were reported by ASEP centre coordinators.                                          |

The document review findings corroborated the survey and interview results of this study. Attendance and dropout records indicated that financial challenges contributed to absenteeism and programme withdrawal, while centre reports highlighted limited psycho-social and material support services in the community. These findings strengthen the conclusion that learner support services aid retention, although financial constraints remain a major barrier to continued participation in ASEP centres in Tanzania. This finding supports Tinto's (1993) proposition that sustained institutional support enhances learner persistence and is consistent with Bean and Metzner's (1985) view that environmental factors, particularly financial constraints, significantly influence the retention of non-traditional learners. It also underscores the need for comprehensive learner support services that address both academic and socioeconomic barriers to improve perceived learner retention in ASEP centres.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study examined the effectiveness of administrative learner support services in enhancing perceived learner retention in ASEP centres in Dodoma region, Tanzania. The findings indicate that perceived learner retention is influenced by the combined availability and effectiveness of academic, psycho-social, and financial support services. While academic support was the most readily available form of

assistance, psycho-social and financial support services were less consistently provided, reflecting important gaps in the learner support system.

The study further established that psycho-social support contributes positively to perceived learner retention by promoting motivation, emotional well-being, and a sense of belonging. However, the largely informal nature of counselling and mentoring services limits their consistency and effectiveness. Financial and material challenges were found to be the most significant barriers to learner persistence, with many learners facing difficulties related to transport costs, learning materials, and competing economic responsibilities. These challenges often result in absenteeism and an increased risk of program withdrawal.

The findings also demonstrate that academic, psycho-social, and financial support services are significantly associated with perceived learner's retention. However, financial support emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that socioeconomic conditions play a particularly important role in shaping educational participation in ASEP centres. This finding highlights the need to view perceived learner retention as a multidimensional issue that extends beyond academic engagement to include students' emotional wellbeing and economic stability.

Overall, the study concludes that the effectiveness of ASEP as a second-chance education pathway depends not only on providing access to learning opportunities but also on strengthening integrated learner support systems. Therefore, enhancing retention requires a balanced approach that combines academic guidance, structured psycho-social support and targeted financial assistance. Addressing these interconnected dimensions would improve learners' ability to remain engaged in their studies and increase the likelihood of successful program completion.

Based on the findings, this study recommends that ASEP centre administrators and facilitators strengthen academic support systems through remedial instruction, tutoring programmes, continuous feedback, and learner-centred teaching approaches to enhance learners' academic integration and retention. The Institute of Adult Education and relevant teacher-training institutions should support these efforts through targeted capacity-building initiatives.

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, in collaboration with the Institute of Adult Education and ASEP Centre management, should institutionalise psychosocial support services by establishing counselling programmes, peer mentorship initiatives, and regular learner guidance sessions, while equipping facilitators with basic counselling and psycho-social support skills.

To address financial barriers to participation, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, local government authorities, development partners, non-governmental organisations, and community-based organisations should expand financial and material support through scholarships, transport assistance, learning materials, and emergency support mechanisms for vulnerable students.

The government, through the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology and implementing agencies, should increase financial allocations to ASEP centres to improve infrastructure, staffing, instructional resources and learner support services. In addition, the Institute of Adult Education should provide continuous professional development for facilitators, coordinators, and administrators in learner support, counselling, inclusive education and retention management.

Community leaders, parents, local government authorities, and the Institute of Adult Education should strengthen community engagement and awareness programmes to support participation in ASEP, reduce the stigma associated with alternative education, and encourage sustained family and community support for the learners. Finally, policymakers within the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology should review and strengthen alternative education policies and guidelines by establishing clear standards for academic, psycho-social, and financial support services across ASEP centres.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this study. This study was conducted without any financial, personal, or professional relationships that could have influenced the study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or reporting.

### **Funding Statement**

This research did not receive any specific grants from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. This study was conducted using the author's own resources, and no external financial support was received.

## References

- Andrade, M. S. (2023). Student persistence in higher education: What is the role of learning? *College Teaching*, 73(1), 66–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2023.2228443>
- Bean, J. P., & Metzner, B. S. (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Review of Educational Research*, 55(4), 485–540. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543055004485>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Carr-Hill, R. (2015). The education of out-of-school children and adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40, 13–24. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.11.002>
- Hunt, F. (2008). *Dropping out from school: A cross-country review of literature* (CREATE Pathways to Access Research Monograph No. 16). University of Sussex.
- Hovdhaugen, E., Sweetman, R., & Thomas, L. (2023). Institutional scope to shape persistence and departure among nursing students: Re-framing Tinto for professional degrees. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 29(2), 107–121. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-022-09111-w>
- Mkumbo, K. A. (2017). The effectiveness of the new education and training policy in addressing the learning crisis in Tanzania. *International Journal of Management in Education*, 11(3), 347–366. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJMIE.2017.084948>
- Mwaifuge, R., & Komba, W. (2024). Implementation challenges of alternative education programmes in Tanzania. *Tanzania Journal of Education*, 4(1), 22–37.
- Mwakalinga, F. (2024). Alternative education pathways and access in Tanzania: Emerging trends and challenges. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 15(2), 45–58.
- Nishimura, M., & Yamano, T. (2021). *Education access and learning support in low-income contexts* (Policy Research Working Paper). World Bank.
- Sabates, R., Akyeampong, K., Westbrook, J., & Hunt, F. (2010). *School dropout: Patterns, causes and policy responses*. UNESCO.
- Samoila, M. E., & Vrabie, T. (2023). First-year seminars through the lens of Vincent Tinto's theories of student departure: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Education*, 8, Article 1205667. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1205667>
- Simpson, O. (2013). *Supporting students for success in online and distance education* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

- Sumra, S., & Rajani, R. (2006). *Secondary education in Tanzania: Key policy challenges* (Working Paper No. 06.4). HakiElimu.
- Sweetman, R., Hovdhaugen, E., & Thomas, L. (2023). The (dis)integration of nursing students: Multiple transitions, fragmented integration and implications for retention. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 29(2), 79–92. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-022-09106-7>
- te Riele, K., McGregor, G., Mills, M., Baroutsis, A., & Hayes, D. (2020). Learning from alternative schools to enhance school completion. In G. W. Noblit (Ed.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.513>
- Thomas, L. (2012). *Building student engagement and belonging in higher education at a time of change*. Paul Hamlyn Foundation.
- Thomas, L., Hovdhaugen, E., & Sweetman, R. (2023). Professional or student identity and commitment? Comparing the experiences of nursing students with literature on student success. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 29(2), 93–106. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-023-09115-0>
- Tight, M. (2020). Higher education: Discipline or field of study? *Tertiary Education and Management*, 26(4), 415–428. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-020-09060-2>
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89–125. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543045001089>
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- UNESCO. (2022). *Global education monitoring report 2022: Youth and skills*. UNESCO Publishing.
- UNESCO. (2023). *Global education monitoring report 2023: Technology in education*. UNESCO Publishing.
- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. (2022). *Adult learning and education: Global report*. UIL.
- UNICEF. (2023). *Out-of-school children and youth in sub-Saharan Africa: Global estimates*. UNICEF.
- United Republic of Tanzania. (2021). *Secondary Education Quality Improvement Project (SEQUIP): Implementation report*. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

- United Republic of Tanzania. (2024). *Alternative Secondary Education Pathway (ASEP) monitoring and evaluation report*. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.
- World Bank. (2021). *Tanzania education sector analysis report*. World Bank Group.
- World Bank. (2022). *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Equity and inclusion challenges*. World Bank Group.
- World Bank. (2023). *Improving learning and retention in secondary education systems*. World Bank Group.
- Yorke, M., & Longden, B. (2004). *Retention and student success in higher education*. Open University Press.