



FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE OF ADULTS IN ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION IN NKULUMANE-EMGANWINI AREA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the correlation of the factors affecting academic performance with the performance levels of adults in adult and continuing education in Nkulumane-Emganwini area. These factors were arbitrarily selected from the literature review. The research design selected was the empirical approach. A sample of 40 students was randomly selected from a population of 420 in Nkulumane –Emganwini in the four schools. Questionnaires were used as the research instrument. Other instruments used were adult learning style inventory, attendance registers and mid-year mark sheet record. The research findings indicate that attendance and academic self-concept have a strong positive correlation with performance. Learning styles and Age were also found to affect performance while marital status and income did not significantly affect performance. It is recommended that school administrators should adequately monitor lesson attendance. The Ministry of Education Sport and Culture should carry out refresher courses in teaching styles as part of the continuing professional development teachers.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the research was to determine how well the factors affecting adult education correlate with academic performance in adult and continuing education. Six factors were arbitrarily selected from literature review.

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1.1. Background of the Study

Zimbabwe has an adult literacy rate of approximately 89% which is among the highest in Africa (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2007). However, this has been declining considering it was once 92% in the early 90's. This makes Zimbabweans insightful when it comes to issues concerning education. The recent years has many adults pursuing further education to improve different productive skills and credentials that are needed in the shrinking job market. In an attempt to acquire these skills many adults attend evening classes. Some want to acquire basic education, for example, General Certificate Education Ordinary level. The General Certificate Education Ordinary Level has the grading A, B, C, D, E, with C being the lowest pass and A being the highest pass. The Zimbabwean requirements for a full certificate is five 'O' Levels, which include English Language. The recent years have seen a pass in Mathematics also made compulsory. This has led to many adults who do not have a full certificate going back to school.

In order to cater for these needs the Ministry of Education Sports and Culture in Zimbabwe has set a programme in public schools where 'O' Level is being taught after normal working hours. These students are called private candidates. It has been observed that the pass rate of private candidates is low compared to those attending conventional school. Their results show that some candidates register but do not write the examination.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Adults are faced with varying difficulties in their learning. This research intends to determine how different factors correlate with academic performance of adult learners in adult and continuing education.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine how well the six arbitrarily selected factors correlates with performance in adult and continuing education. The focus was in the Nkulumane – Emganwini area.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The study will assist the teachers of adult learners to identify and encourage factors with positive correlation with academic performance and discourage those factors with negative correlation with academic performance.

1.5. Research Questions

To arrive at the required data the following questions needed to be answered.

- Does demographic profile affect adult academic performance?
- Does access to instructional material contribute towards academic performance of adult learners?
- Do learning styles of adult learners affect academic performance?
- Does self-concept influence academic performance?
- To what extent does lesson attendance affect academic performance?

1.6. Limitations of the Study

Time to distribute questionnaire was one of the problems faced in the study as the learners were only available after 5pm when their lessons start.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A body of literature on the adult learners and performance was reviewed with the aim of establishing factors that affect adult learners in adult continuing education.

2.1 Effects of Demographic Profile on Performance

Much of the early work in adult learning focused on intelligence, examining whether intelligence declined with age (Merriam *et al.*, 1993). Studies were conducted in artificial settings, and timed educational tests were used to compare younger learners with older learners. Findings of these studies were that intelligence is not reduced through the aging process. According to Hassett (1983) one intelligence test, the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, takes this into account by testing two very different sorts of abilities, the verbal and performance abilities, where verbal portion measures competence with words and store of information, older people show little decline. On the other hand, which measures speed of reaction, adults have low scores. The researchers concluded that overall decline in abilities is not great.

Hallam (1996) noted that the ability to comprehend new information and to think flexibly improves with age. One researcher studied over seven hundred individuals who were engaged in scholarship, science or the arts. Although the patterns varied from profession to profession, most of these subjects reached their peaks of creativity and productivity in their forties. Alhassan (2012) found that significant findings in the brain research of the 1990s indicated that the more the brain is used, the less likely cognitive function will be lost.

In the same light Rawlins *et al.* (1993) say that cognitive functioning remains high during early adult hood. They also points out that during this stage there is decreased egocentrism which results in a more balanced idealism. Emotionally, the ability to function in a stressful environment is critical for young adults to achieve success in work or school. However, stress can serve a useful purpose in motivating the adult to strive for greater achievements (Rawlins *et al.*, 1993).

With regards to marital status, Jarvis (1987) found that family commitments could indicate stability that may enhance academic focus. In studying an intermediate university accounting course at two universities in the USA, marital status was used as an indicator of maturity, and it was found that it contributes significantly to success in academic performance. One of the most frequently cited reason for returning to school is divorce (Glass and Rose, 1994). They noted that in 1992 in America more than 30% of the families were headed by single parents. 86% of which were females who had enrolled at a college or university. However these females experienced both institutional and personal factors that made their ability to learn and complete their education more difficult.

2.2. Effect of Self-Concept on Academic Performance

Lemmer and Dekker (1993) clearly state that no factor is more important for positive school outcomes than the children's perception of the teacher's attitude toward them and expectations. They claim that when students believe that their teachers care about them, see them as competent, respect their views and desire their success, they tend to work toward fulfilling those high expectations. Teachers' expectations of pupils' performance and abilities can operate as a self-fulfilling prophecy within a classroom (Lemmer and Dekker, 1993). There are tendencies for the performance of the pupils to conform to the expectations declared by the teacher.

According to Shalveson and Marsh (1986), students' attitude towards their ability to influence their academic outcome does affect their performance. Schneider *et al.* (2012) argues that students' feelings, attitudes, and perceptions they hold about their academic ability that is, academic self-concept, does affect their performance. When students have low academic self-concept they shift to self-handicapping. This method shifts blame away from the individual, and allows them to have excuses for failure. Students are more likely to achieve high marks when they believe in their own capacities and do not feel anxious about the learning process, (Schneider *et al.*, 2012).

Shalveson and Marsh (1986) also states that Self-efficacy in mathematics affects students' willingness to take on challenging tasks and the amount of effort and persistence. Bandura (1994) cites that students were asked to what extent they believe in their own ability to handle learning situations in mathematics effectively, overcoming difficulties tackling them. Results showed that self-efficacy and self-concept did affect performance and was also a key impact on motivation.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

An empirical research design was used as it was convenient. It uses direct or indirect observation or experience to gain knowledge. Empirical evidence (the record of one's direct observations or experiences) can be analysed quantitatively or qualitatively. That is why this research design was suitable for this study.

3.2. Population

The population for the study comprised of male and female black adults aged 21 years and above. These were mainly from the Ndebele and Shona cultures who reside in the western part of the city of Bulawayo, called Nkulumane – Emganwini area. The targeted population were those adults doing adult and continuing education in four secondary schools in Emganwini - Nkulumane area, namely Nketa High school, Nkulumane, Mandwandwe and Emganwini High school. Most of them have written O level and failed it at one point in time. There were 420 adult learners in these 4 secondary schools. According to Isaac and Michael (1984) the recommended sample size for a population of 420 should be 201. However, due to constraints a sample of 40 students was selected. This is in line with Bless *et al.* (2006) who said that the size of the sample depends on the kind of data analysis the researcher plans to use.

The random sampling procedure was followed by making 100 identical blank pieces of and paper 10 pieces written "yes" put in a hat. Students were asked to pick one paper and those who

picked “yes” qualified for the sample. The process was repeated in each school that is 10 students from each school which makes a total of 40 students.

3.3. Research Instruments

Questionnaires were used to elicit the factors affecting adult learners in adult and continuing education. According to Bless *et al.* (2006) questionnaires reduce bias by the interviewer and encourage honesty by respondents as they require anonymity. The first questionnaire had two sections, section A and section B. Section A was on demographic data and section B on self-concept and access to learning material. The second questionnaire was on adult learning styles (Honey and Mumford, 2006). It was used to determine the preferred learning style of learners. Honey and Mumford identified four distinct learning styles, the Activist, Theorist, Pragmatist and Reflector. The activists are people who learn by doing, have an open-minded approach to learning and involve themselves fully and without bias in new experiences. The theorists are learners who like to understand the theory behind the actions. They need models, concepts, and facts in order to engage in the learning process. The pragmatists are those learners who need to see how to put the learning into practice in the real world. They are experimenters, they try-out new ideas, theories and techniques to see how they work. The reflectors are learners who learn by observing and thinking about what happened. They may avoid leaping in and prefer to watch from the side lines.

To check attendance by learners, daily attendance registers were collected from class teachers and the total attendances for the term for each learner was compiled. Mid-year marks for English and Maths were provided by the subject teachers for Maths and English. Their averages were calculated and used to determine the performance of learners. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and were collected soon after they had had been filled in.

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data collected was presented in tables and bar graphs. The response rate to the questionnaire was an impressive 100%. All the respondents were cooperative.

4.1. Demographic Profile of the Subjects Who Participated

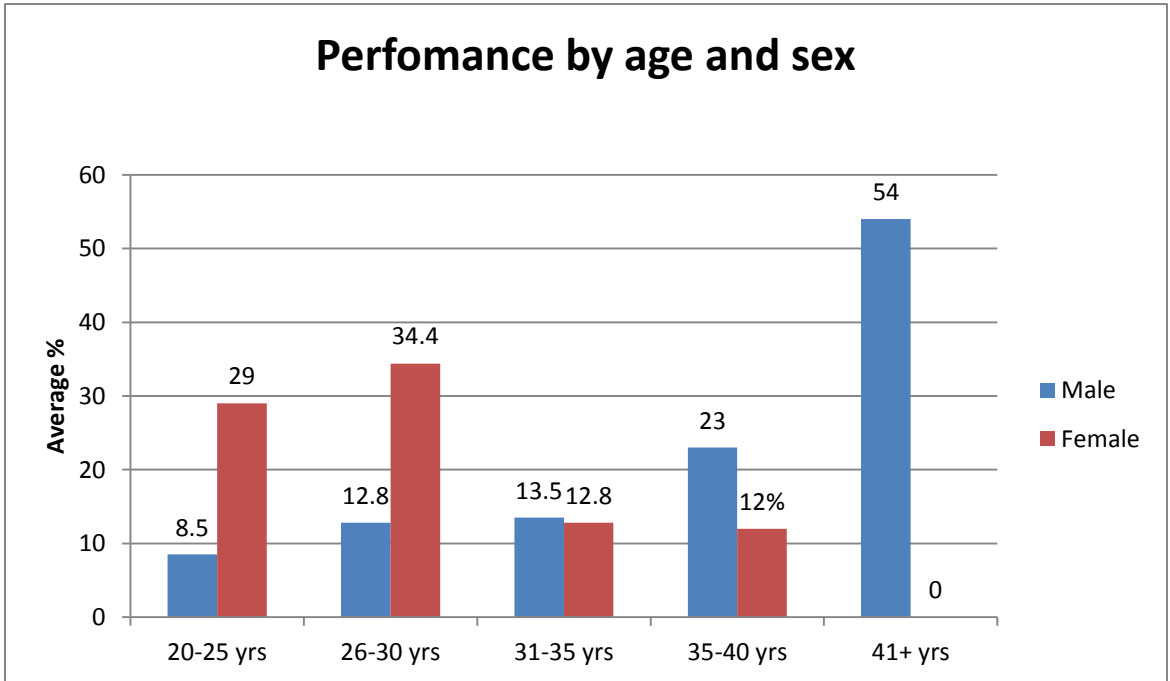
The first table in this chapter reflects the age group and gender of the subjects who participated in this research. The purpose of this is to identify the gender and age groups which are most affected by negative and positive factors in their academic performance.

Table-4.1. Showing demographic profile of subjects who participated

Age	Males	Females	Total	Percentages
20 -25	2	8	10	25
26 -30	8	8	16	40
31 -35	3	5	8	20
36 -40	1	3	4	10
41+	2	0	2	5
Total	16	24	40	100

The table shows that there were more female respondents than males in all age groups except the 40+ years. The majority of the adult learners are in the age group 20 – 36 year. They constitute 65% of the population. The results also show that after the age of 30, the number of participants diminishes as age increases. To show how these age groups are affected in their learning, their mid year average marks were plotted against their performance. The bar graph below shows performance by age of participants.

Figure-4.1. showing performance by age and sex



From the above graph males aged 41+ have an average performance of 54% which is better than those aged below 41 years. It can also be seen that females within the age group 31 – 35 and those aged 36 – 40 have a similar performance. Their average performance is 12.8% and 12% respectively.

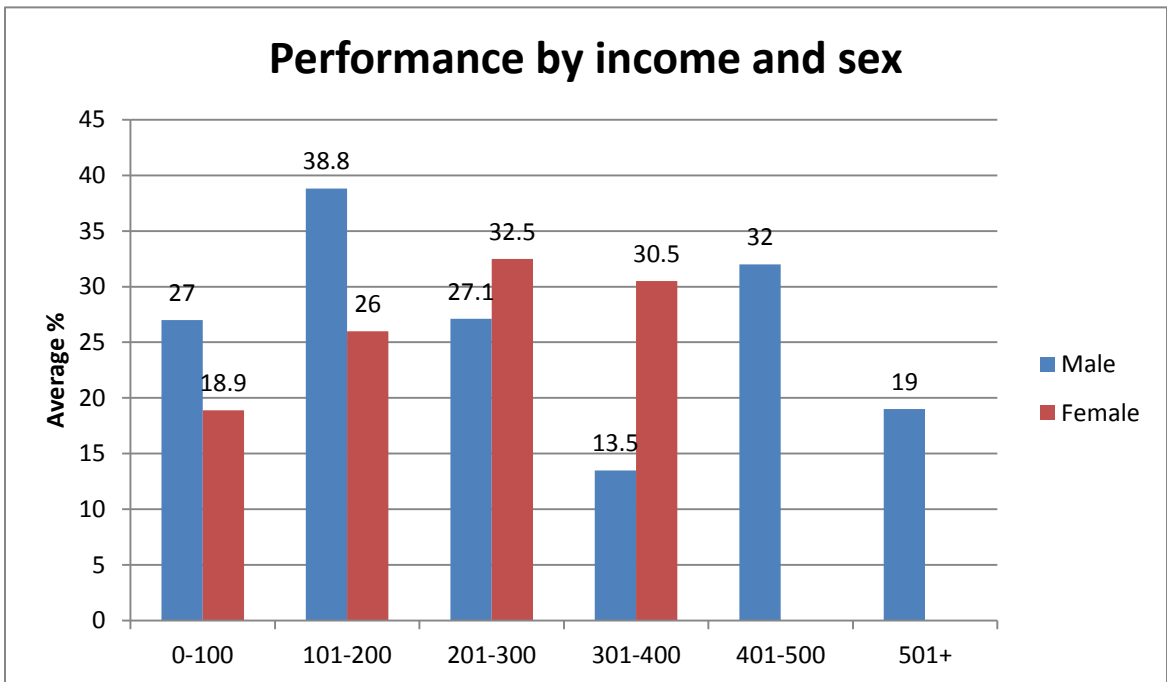
4.2. Financial Status of Participants

Literature claims that financial instability has been seen to be contributing significantly to problems faced by adults. The Consumer Price Index (C.P.I) in Zimbabwe 2013 is at 100.94. C.P.I shows changes in the cost to the average consumer of acquiring a basket of goods and services that maybe fixed or changed at specific intervals. Respondents were asked about their financial status so as to determine if academic performance of adult learners is affected by the income group they fall under. Results of the financial status of respondents are shown in table 4.2. The table below 58.33% females earn an income which is below the C.P.I. and none of the females earn an income more than \$500 per month. 56% of the males earn more than \$200 as compared to 29% of the females. To show income earnings affect performance, mid year average marks were plotted against income the data in table 4. 2.

Table- 4.2. showing financial status of respondents

Income earned per month (\$)	Males	Females	Total
0 – 100	3	14	17
101 – 200	4	3	7
201 – 300	5	2	7
301 – 400	2	4	6
401 – 500	1	1	2
501 +	1	0	1
Total	16	24	40

Figure- 4.2. showing student performances by income and sex.



From the above graph females in the income bracket of \$301 - \$400 have an average performance of 13.5%, which is the lowest. It is followed by males in the income bracket of \$0- \$100 of 18.9%. The best performance is of females in the income bracket of \$101 - \$200 who have an average of 38.8%.

4.3. Family Size and Marital Status of Respondents

Table 4.3 shows the respondents’ marital status and the family size they have. The purpose was to determine whether the factors such as marital status and family size affect the learners’ performance.

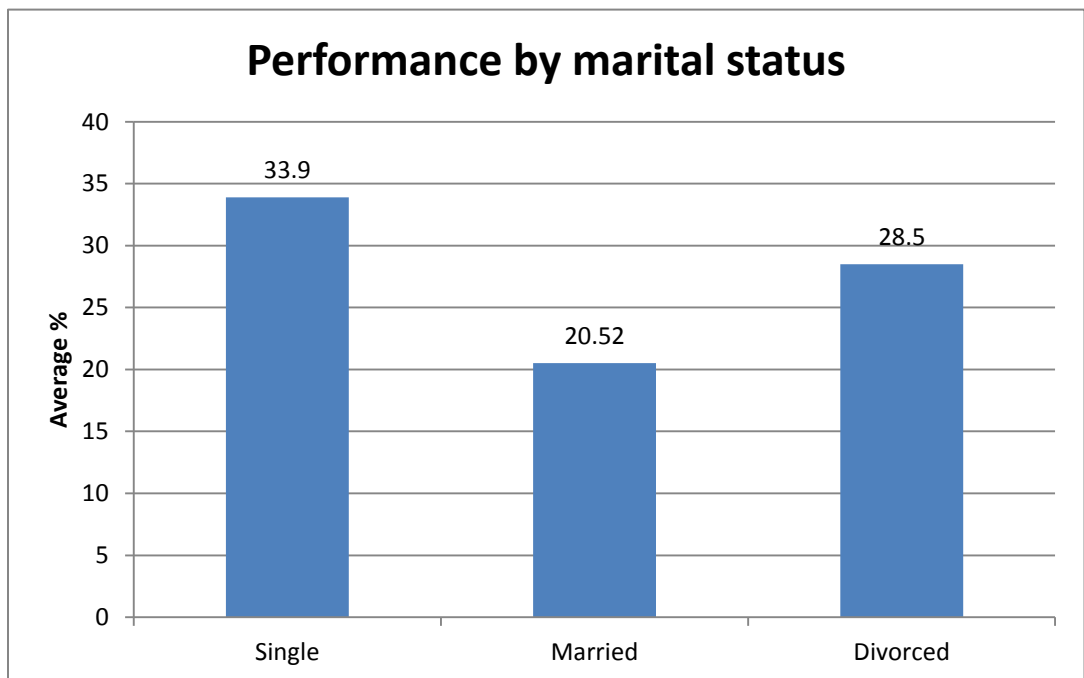
Table- 4.3. Showing marital statuses and number of children of respondents

No. of children	Marital status			Total
	Single	Married	Divorced	
0	11	3	0	14
1 – 3	6	10	2	18
4 – 6	0	4	1	5
7+	0	3	0	3
Total	17	20	3	40

The table shows that 50% of the respondents were married, 42.5% were single and only 7.5% were divorced. 45% had 1 – 3 children, followed by those who had no children at all who were 35%. Those with 4- 6 children were 12.5% and only 7.5 % had 7+ children. It can also be seen that none of the learners who are single had more than 4 children.

The respondents’ average marks were plotted against their marital status and the results are shown in figure4. 3

Figure-4.3. showing performance by marital status



Learners who are married had the least performance, followed by those that are divorced. The learners who are single had the highest performance of 33.9%

4.4. Access to Instructional Material

To determine if access to instructional material contributed to performance of adult learners, respondents were asked if they had access to the library and the internet in the last three weeks.

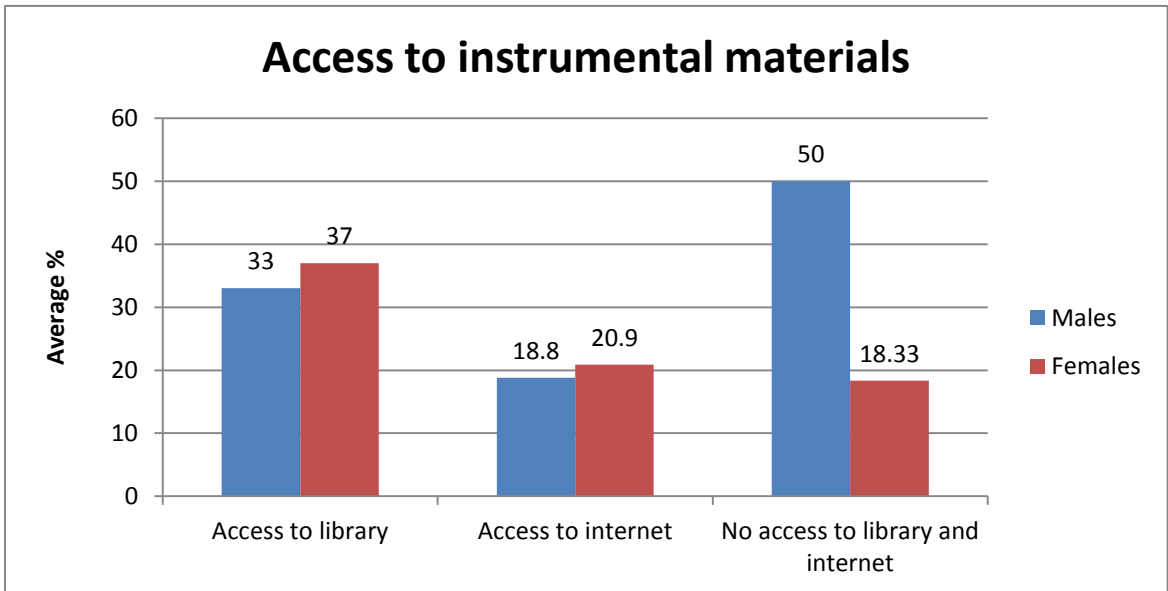
Students were given a question with three options where they had to tick the statement they agree with. The results are tabulated in table 4.4

Table-4.4. showing access to library and internet

	Males	Females	Total
Do you have to the access library	7	8	15
Do you have access to the Internet	8	10	18
No access to library and internet	1	6	7
Total	16	24	40

From table 4.4 six females had no access to either the library or the internet as compared to one male. 15 Respondents had access to the library and 18 respondents had access to the internet. Respondents were asked to comment about their responses and they stated that there were only two libraries within the Nkulumane- Emganwini area. 55% of the respondents indicated that libraries were too far from where they stay. 90% of those who had access to the library stated that the library had out dated textbooks. 32.5% stated that the library operates during normal working hours but they are able to access it after normal working hours due to other commitments. 30% of the respondents could not access the internet because they lacked the skills to do so. 40% of the respondents had no funds to access the internet and only 30% respondents had the access to the internet.

Figure-4.4. showing academic self-concept and performance



Both males and females who had access to the internet had the least performances. Those who had access to the library had a total average of 35% and those who had no access to neither the

library nor internet had an average of 34%. It is interesting to note that males who had no access to either the library nor the internet had an average of 50%.

4.5. Learners' Preferred Learning Style

In the learning process, the learners' preferences have become very important in determining the learning outcomes. As individuals, learners apply the learning styles they prefer. The learning styles determine how much information can be retained, which will in turn determine the final performance. To find out the preferred learning styles students were asked to complete the Honey and Munford questionnaire on adult learning styles. They had to tick the statement they agreed with and place an "x" on the statement they disagree with. The results were then scored according to the scoring formula provided by the instrument. The results are shown in table 4.5

Table-4.5. showing respondents preferred learning styles by age

Age	Activist	Theorist	Reflector	Pragmatists	Total
20 – 25	1	1	2	6	10
26 – 30	2	3	2	9	16
31 – 35	5	1	1	1	8
36 – 40	0	1	3	0	4
40+	0	2	0	0	2
Total	8	8	8	16	40

From table 4.5 forty percent of the students prefer the pragmatist learning style, with the majority of them being in the ages 20 – 25 and between 26- 30. Those in the 31–35 age group prefer the theorist learning style and those between 36 – 40 prefer the reflector. Finally those above 40 years prefer the theorist learning style.

4.6. Academic Self-Concept of Respondents

To determine if academic self concept affects academic performance. Respondents were asked about their academic self-concept, whether they believed that they were academically good. Respondents had 4 options to choose from, namely strongly disagreed, disagreed, agreed or strongly agreed. Their responses are tabulated below.

Table-4.6. showing personal factors of respondents

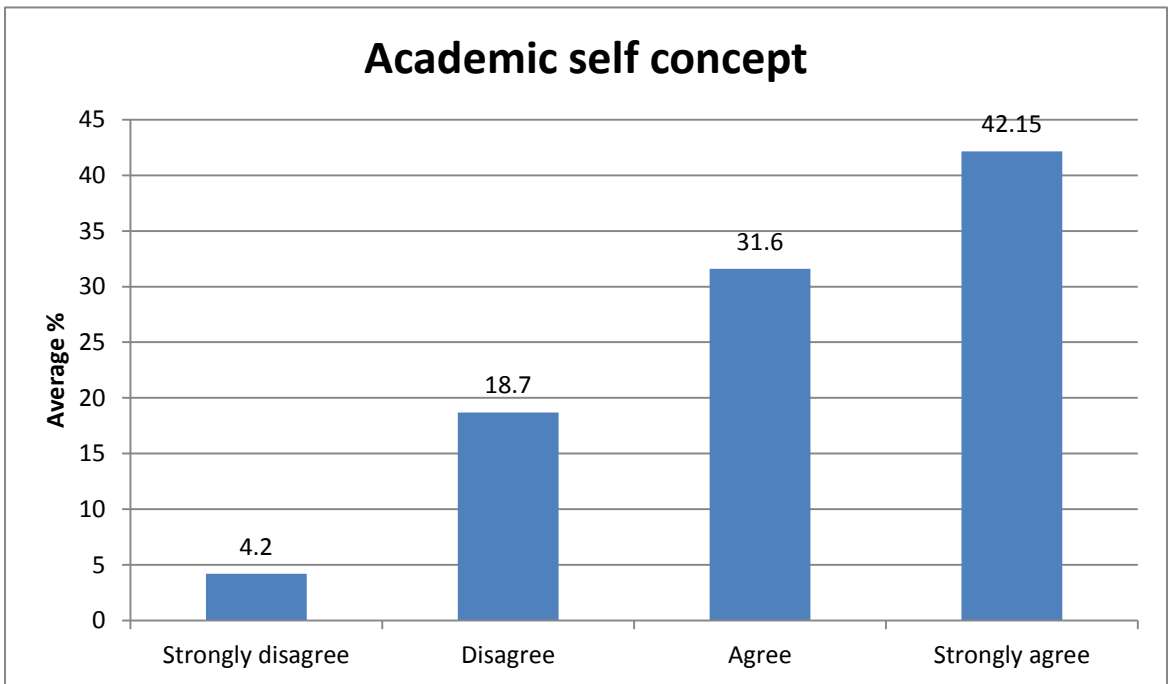
Rating	Academic self-concept		
	Male	Female	Total
Strongly disagree	1	4	5
Disagree	3	12	15
Agree	5	5	10
Strongly agree	7	3	10
Total	16	24	40

The above table shows that only 1 male student and 4 female students strongly disagreed with the statement that they were academically good. 12 females and 3 males disagreed with the statement that they are good academically. 7 males believed that they are very good academically but only 3 female believe they are academically good.

The students' self-concept was then measured against their performance to check if self-concept had an effect on performance. The results are shown in figure 4.6

In figure 4.6 the average performance of students who strongly disagreed that they were academically good was 4.2% and for those who agreed that they were academically good was 31.6. It is of great interest to note that those with high self-concept also had a high average mark.

Figure-6. showing academic self-concept and performance



4.7. Lesson Attendance

To determine whether lesson attendance had an effect on performance of adults in learning, the attendance registers were collected. The attendances of students were presented in the table below. Those who scored Very good – attended all lessons, good – absent less than 5 days in a term, average – absent less than 20 days in a term. Low – absent more than 20 days in a term

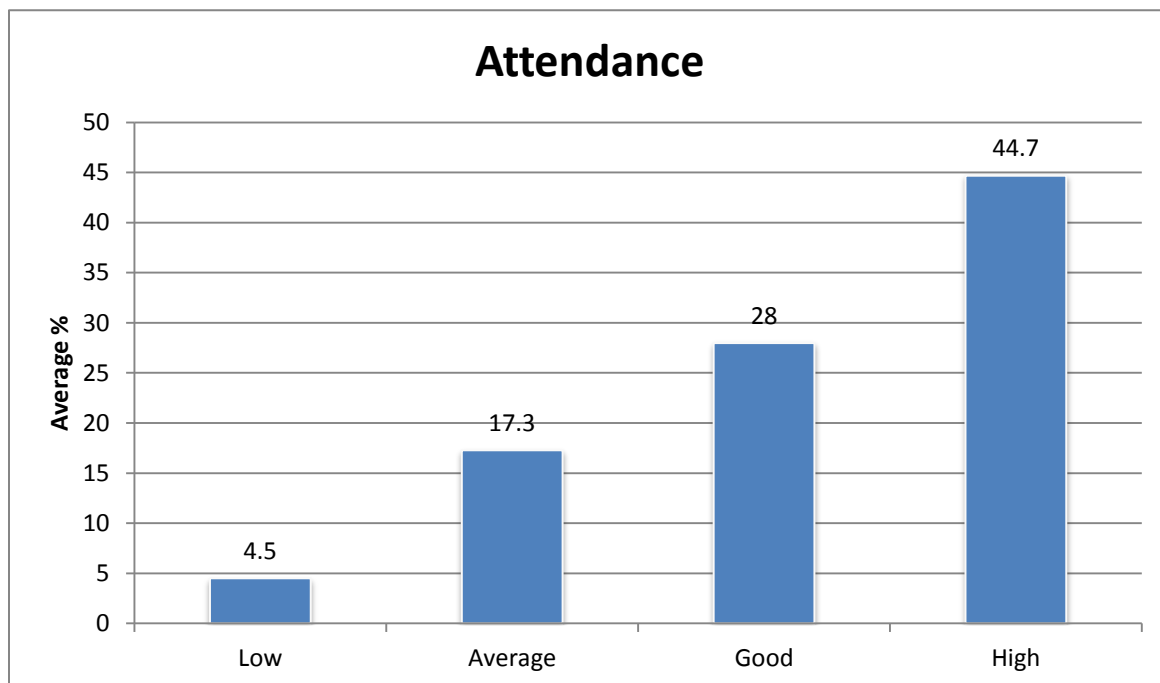
Table- 4.7. showing attendance of learners.

Rating	Attendance		
	Male	Female	Total
Low attendance	2	2	4
Average	1	13	14
Good	8	5	13
Very good	5	4	9
Total	16	24	40

On attendance, 50% of the males have a good attendance and only 20.8% of the females have a good attendance. 54.2% of the females were absent more than 20 days. 54% of the females had an average attendance 6.25% of the males had an average attendance.

The students' attendance was then plotted against the performance to see if attendance had an effect on performance. Midyear average marks were used for performance. The results were presented in figure 7.

Figure-7. showing attendance by performance



From the figure 7 students with low attendance also performed the least and those with high attendance performed well. Those with high attendance had an average performance of 44.7%, followed by those with a good attendance with 28%. The least was those with low attendance, they had an average performance of 4.5%.

5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to determine the correlation of the factors that affect performance with performance of adults in adult and continuing education. The focus was in the Nkulumane – Emganwini area. A sample of 40 students in a population of 420 was used. This study was prompted by the low pass rate of adult learners in the Nkulumane – Emganwini area.

The findings from this study indicate that age does affect learning performance. Older students did perform better than the younger ones. From the mid-year averages those aged 40+ had the best performance as compared to the age groups less than 40 years. This confirms the findings by Merriam *et al.* (1993) that intelligence is not reduced through the aging process. This is also supported by Hassett (1983) who found that competence with words and store of information is not reduced as age increases. The results used were from the Mathematics and English examinations. Maybe the results would have been different if they had been taken from the practical subjects like wood work because Hassett (1983) cited that speed of reaction is reduced as age increases.

The second question in the questionnaire looked at sex of the respondents. The findings from this study were that there were more female students than male students. They constituted 65% of

the population used in this study. The possible explanation is that in Zimbabwe females are 52% of the population. From this study it was noted that females perform better between the age groups 20 – 30 years then there is a gradual decline in performance as they approach the age of forty. The researcher suspects that it may be caused by the increase in responsibilities for women as they grow older. The overall average for females was lower than that of males.

In this study the results show that those students who are married do not perform better than those either single or divorced, which is inconsistent with [Jarvis \(1987\)](#) who found that family commitments indicate stability, maturity and contribute significantly to academic success. Figure 3 shows that the best performance was from those who are single, followed by those who are divorced and the least was those who were married. This could have been caused by the fact that those who are single have more time to themselves as compared to those who are married who have to attend to their spouses and children. Furthermore those who are divorced performed better than those who are married. This confirms findings by [Rawlins et al. \(1993\)](#) who suggested that stress may serve as motivation to adults to strive for greater achievements. Those students who are divorced may have been stressed by the breaking of their marriages hence seek to improve their academic status or want to seek employment which needs better educational qualifications.

The research findings on income indicate that one's financial status does not affect one's academic performance. Males who had an income of \$ 500+ per month had a performance less than those with an income of less than \$500 per month. This is in contrast with [Duke \(2000\)](#) findings that students' achievements have a positive correlation with their socio economic status. This may have been caused by the fact that students used by Duke were younger students and the students used in this study are adults. However there is quite a significant difference in achievements between those with an average income of 0 – 100 and those with an income of 100 – 200. The researcher is of the opinion that those with an income more than \$100 are better off financially and can afford to buy a few learning materials than those with an income less than \$100. On instructional material, those with an internet access did not perform well as compared to those who had access to the library. The researcher suspects that since most students use an internet for social networking than educational research some of the time meant for research was used by learners for socialising. The findings of this research may have been affected by the fact that marks used were from subjects where less research is needed. For example in mathematics, more practise is needed than research. However the overall performance of those who used the library was generally higher than those who do not use the library. So access to instructional materials has an effect on performance. The third research question was on the effect of attendance on academic performance. The findings of this research indicate that attendance had a positive correlation on performance was lesson attendance. Those with a low attendance scored less marks as compared to those with high attendance. More males had a high attendance than females. The researcher suspects that since females have other duties at home, like child caring that is why their attendance is lower than their male counterparts. Results in this study indicate that self-concept does affect performance. Those students with low self-image scored low marks. This matches findings by [\(Shalveson and Marsh, 1986\)](#), who found that self-concept in mathematics affects students' willingness to take on challenging tasks and the amount of effort and persistence.

Results in table 4.7 indicate that only half of the students in the sample had the same preferred style that is pragmatist. Within the same sample 20% preferred theorist, another 20% preferred reflector and the last 20% preferred activist. This is in line with findings by Candy (1990) that each learner has his own preferred learning style. The overall performance average was 26.7 which is too low. This could be an indication that not all learning styles were used.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the outcome of this research, the researcher can safely say that there are many factors that affect adult learners in adult and continuing education

It can be concluded that

- Age does affect academic performance
- Students marital status does affect the time they allocate to their studies
- Financial status does not affect their academic achievements
- Attendance and self-concept have a positive correlation with academic achievement
- Learning styles have a significant effect on academic performance

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above conclusions it is recommended that:

- School administrators should supervise adequately and monitor the daily attendance of students.
- Libraries consider opening for longer hours after 5pm because most of the adult learners would be occupied during the day
- The ministry of Education should facilitate the training of teachers on learning and teaching styles and other assessment instruments as part of the continuing professional development.
- Further research studies should be done on factors outside the school environment that affect student's performance.

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