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ADULT LEARNERS' READINESS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING FOR WORKPLACE PERFORMANCE IN THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OYE-EKITI SANDWICH PROGRAMME, EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

A critical aspect of workforce development and adult education, particularly in higher education and the workplace, is the upskilling and reskilling of employees, as it leverages technology-driven learning strategies to enhance learning and job outcomes, readiness, adaptability, and evolving workforce demands. This study investigates adult learners' perceptions at the Federal University of Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria, on the impact of upskilling and reskilling on workplace performance amidst gender disparities. Underpinned by the Human Capital and Continuous Learning Theories, this study utilised the survey research design. The study population comprised all adult learners at the Sandwich Programme of the Federal University of Oye-Ekiti, with a sample of 184. Five research questions were raised to explore the study's objectives. Data for the study were collected using an adapted survey tool tagged "Upskilling, Reskilling, and Workforce Job Performance Questionnaire (URWJPQ)"(α=0.85) and were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics at a 5% level of significance. Findings indicate negative attitudes of adult learners toward upskilling and reskilling ($\bar{x}$=1.46), and adult learners' readiness for upskilling and reskilling was low ($\bar{x}$=1.58). Adult learners' readiness for upskilling and reskilling significantly impacts their perceived workplace performance ($F_{(2, 106)} = 82.692$, $p < .001$), and no significant gender difference exists in adult learners' attitudes (t_{107}=-.106, p>0.01;95% CI for Cohen's d [-.545, .490]) and readiness for upskilling and reskilling (t_{107}=0.140, p>0.01;95% CI for Cohen's d [-.481, .554]). The study concludes that adult learners' readiness for upskilling and reskilling significantly contributes to their performance in the workplace. It is recommended that continued funding and organisation of upskilling and reskilling professional development and training programmes be provided for adult learners at their various workstations.

Keywords: Adult learners; Upskilling; Reskilling; Professional development; Work performance.

Introduction

The need for continuous learning and skill development has become increasingly important in today's rapidly changing work environment, and the concept of lifelong learning has gained significant attention, with many organizations recognizing the importance of upskilling and reskilling to remain relevant and competitive (Chakma & Chaijinda, 2020; Chivige & Magidi, 2026; Rikala et al., 2024). However, as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) disrupts traditional workplaces, job responsibilities are expected to shift, necessitating that workers acquire new skills and enhance their existing competencies (Gouda, 2022;

Odeibat, 2021). The concepts of upskilling and reskilling have emerged as strategic responses to this demand, aiming not only to address the evolving needs of the current era but also to impact the overall job satisfaction of employees (Gouda, 2022).

Similarly, Sasmita and Kumar (2018), Chivige and Magidi (2026), and Rikala et al. (2024) restate that jobs that were previously seen as stable and unchanging now demand flexibility and an ongoing dedication to learning in order to improve an organization's productivity. In this study, upskilling (gaining new skills to improve current abilities) and reskilling (learning completely new skills to adapt to evolving job requirements), have become essential elements of workforce development (Vinayan et al., 2020). Individuals, particularly adult learners, must constantly acquire new skills or update their existing ones in response to changing labour market demands (Muchiri, 2022). Skills gaps have formed, and reskilling and upskilling programs can help bridge them. Individuals who have upgraded or acquired new talents can match the skills that employers are searching for when hiring personnel. As Sawant et al. (2022) elaborated, an individual may have a degree to be educated, but holding or developing the necessary skills makes him employable.

Guar (2020) established that different work environments are increasingly acknowledging the importance of investing in upskilling and reskilling for proper worker development, which in several cases has given rise to adult learners' further education. Little is known regarding the readiness and attitudes of adult learners, particularly in under-resourced settings and educational programmes (Kosasih, 2025); such as the Sandwich programme of universities. Furthermore, the extent to which these constructs contribute to the job performance of adult learners in these programmes amidst gender dynamics is sparse (Damalie et al., 2023; Fadiya et al., 2025; Park & SU, 2026). This study, therefore, examined the readiness and attitudes of adult learners toward upskilling and reskilling for workplace performance in the Federal University Oye-Ekiti Sandwich programme.

Problem Statement

The rapidly changing work environment has created a skills gap, leaving many employees without the skills needed to perform their jobs effectively (Chivige & Magidi, 2026; Rikala et al., 2024). This skills gap is particularly pronounced in Nigeria, where the education system has been criticized for failing to provide students with the skills the workforce needs (Adams & Mengistie, 2026; Attah et al., 2026; Kolajo et al., 2026). As a result, many adult learners are seeking opportunities to upskill and reskill to enhance their career prospects and improve their workplace performance (Mampuru et al., 2024). However, although the significance of upskilling and reskilling seems available in the literature, there is a lack of insight into how adult learners perceive these programmes (with respect to their readiness and attitudes), especially in Nigeria.

Most existing studies have concentrated on the advantages of upskilling and reskilling, neglecting the experiences and viewpoints of adult learners. This gap necessitates the need for context-specific research that takes into account the perceived readiness and attitudes of adult learners in the Nigerian setting. Thus, this study aims to address this

gap by investigating the levels of and association among adult learners' attitudes and readiness toward upskilling and reskilling for workplace performance at a Sandwich programme in the Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of adult learners toward upskilling and reskilling?
2. To what extent are adult learners ready for upskilling and reskilling?
3. To what extent do adult learners' attitudes and readiness for upskilling and reskilling influence their work performance?

Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant gender difference in adult learners' attitudes towards upskilling and reskilling.
H02: There is no significant gender difference in adult learners' readiness for upskilling and reskilling.

Literature Review

Attitudes towards upskilling and reskilling are how individuals view, feel about, and approach the process of gaining new skills and knowledge to boost their career opportunities, enhance job performance, and adjust to evolving work environments (Brinegar & Masino, 2021). Studies show that individuals usually have positive attitudes toward upskilling and reskilling initiatives (Brinegar & Masino, 2021; Menna et al., 2019). Yet, Adekoya (2020) and Beach (2021) contend that despite the increase in awareness of the significance of upskilling and reskilling, some workers still have negative views about it. Other studies have highlighted the significance of individuals' attitudes toward upskilling and reskilling and their relative contribution to productivity and performance (Lane and Robison, 2021).

As noted by Beach (2021) and Egungwu (2020), to promote positive attitudes toward upskilling and reskilling, organizations and educational institutions can implement strategies such as providing flexible learning opportunities, offering financial support, and recognizing and rewarding learning achievements. Additionally, educators and trainers can create a supportive learning environment, provide guidance and mentorship, and foster a growth mindset (Beach, 2021). Gokhool et al.'s (2025) quantitative study in Mauritius was aimed at analysing participants' learning experiences and reported satisfaction with an upskilling and reskilling course. The data were collected via an online structured questionnaire. The data show that reskilling and upskilling were effective, and students were really pleased with the course. They also had a positive assessment of the course, and some of them were able to improve existing talents while others learned new ones.

Andrews and Higson (2020) posit that readiness for upskilling and reskilling refers to the willingness and preparedness of workers or students to acquire new skills and knowledge to enhance their career prospects, improve job performance, and adapt to changing work environments. In today's rapidly changing world, upskilling and reskilling are essential for individuals to remain relevant and competitive in the job market (Mason et al., 2021). In furtherance, Chakma and Chaijinda (2020) believe that assessing an individual's readiness for upskilling and reskilling is crucial to ensure that they are prepared to learn and develop new skills, and this, in most cases, is done through self-assessment

tools, such as surveys and quizzes, or through assessments conducted by educators or trainers. Research indicates that employees need regular upskilling and reskilling if they organization where they work wants enhanced productivity (Caballero & Walker, 2021; Makki & Salleh, 2022).

The relationship between attitudes towards upskilling and readiness and job performance is a significant one, as research suggests that workers who are open to upskilling perform better in their jobs (Li, 2022; Sackett & DeVore, 2020). Positive attitudes toward upskilling have been linked to increased loyalty, productivity, and retention, ultimately benefiting the organization's overall performance (Battaglia et al., 2019; Cappelli, 2015; McKinsey, 2021; Nourbakhsh & Wang, 2020; Odeibat, 2021). In contrast, Negative attitudes toward upskilling and readiness can hinder job performance, leading to decreased productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness (Clark, 2013).

Muchiri (2022) argues that the relationship between readiness and employee productivity is reciprocal and mutually reinforcing. Workers who are ready for upskilling are more likely to be ready for job performance because they continuously enhance their skill sets and adapt to new requirements (Bilodeau, 2022). Conversely, workers who perform their jobs well are often more motivated and better positioned to take on additional training and development opportunities (Muleya et al., 2022). This dynamic creates a positive feedback loop where job performance and readiness for upskilling improve together, leading to overall organizational effectiveness (Nourbakhsh & Wang, 2020).

Shatila (2026) investigated how digital reskilling programs affect employee work performance by finding the factors that link training investments to performance results. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design is used in this study, which draws on human capital theory and training transfer perspectives. A systematic online questionnaire was distributed to personnel working in organisations that are undergoing digital transformation. The findings suggest that digital reskilling programs have a strong direct impact on employee work performance. Specifically, reskilling projects improve employees' adaptive learning abilities and raise perceptions of the actual application of skills, both of which improve performance outcomes.

With respect to gender, studies have shown that men and women have varying perspectives on the importance and benefits of acquiring new skills, which can be influenced by a range of factors including societal expectations, cultural norms, and individual experiences (Hu & Cheung, 2021; Møgelvang et al., 2024). According to Bergin et al. (2019), men are more likely to view upskilling and reskilling as essential for career advancement and economic stability, while women, on the other hand, may see them as secondary to their primary responsibilities. Similarly, men may be more resistant to change in industries with traditional job roles and less emphasis on skill development (Katz, 2021).

However, this difference in perception is attributed to traditional gender roles that often prioritize men's career progression over women's; as a result, women may feel less motivated to invest time and effort in upskilling and reskilling opportunities (Jain, 2020). Corrigall and

Konrad (2010) contend that women are often restricted to upskilling and reskilling initiatives, while men typically have more chances for professional growth and may receive more encouragement from their workplaces to develop new skills (Eagly & Steffen, 2020). Hsu et al. (2021) believe that addressing gender differences in attitudes toward upskilling and reskilling requires a multifaceted approach, with organisations bridging the gap in attitudes and ensuring that both men and women have equal opportunities to develop their skills and advance their careers (Kjeldstad & Nymoen, 2012).

Research suggests that gender influences attitudes towards learning new skills and adapting to changing job requirements (Li, 2026; Schwartz et al., 2024). For instance, Landy and Kremer (2021) in their study found that women have a higher level of readiness for upskilling and reskilling compared to men because of women's greater openness to change and their ability to adapt to new technologies and methodologies. On the other hand, Eccles (2021) maintained that men exhibit a lower level of readiness for upskilling and reskilling, which is influenced by traditional gender roles that emphasize stability and consistency in job performance. Additionally, societal norms and expectations also lead men to focus more on immediate job outcomes rather than long-term skill development (Brody, 2002). The relationship between gender and readiness for upskilling and reskilling can also be influenced by the specific industry or field in which an individual works. For example, women may be more inclined to embrace upskilling opportunities in fields such as healthcare or education, where the need for continuous learning is high (Shimizu et al., 2024). Additionally, Machado and Costa (2018) noted that men are more resistant to change in industries with traditional job roles and less emphasis on skill development.

A study by Machado and Costa (2018) found that women have a more positive attitude towards upskilling and reskilling compared to men and women, on the other hand, have greater openness to change and greater ability to adapt to new technologies and methodologies. Moreover, Noe (2020) stated that men exhibit a lower level of readiness for upskilling and reskilling as a result of being influenced by traditional gender roles, societal norms, and expectations that emphasize stability and consistency in job performance and call for more immediate job outcomes rather than long-term skill development. The relationship between gender and attitudes toward upskilling and reskilling is also influenced by the specific industry or field in which an individual works.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the Adult Learning and Human Capital theories. The adult learning theory was developed by Malcolm Knowles in 1968. It emphasizes the unique nature of how adults learn. It aims to show how adult learning is distinct and identify the learning styles that suit them best. At its core, it contains five key assumptions about adult learners, which include self-concept, adult learner experience, readiness to learn, orientation of learning, and motivation to learn. In the context of this study, this theory can be used to explain upskilling and reskilling for workplace performance among adult learners, as it suggests that adult learners are self-directed, motivated, and bring a wealth of experience to the learning process

(Kalabuki & Uzorka, 2026; Li, 2022). In furtherance, by adopting a learner-centered approach and providing relevant and valuable learning experiences, flexible and accessible learning options, and opportunities for immediate application, upskilling and reskilling programmes can be designed to meet the unique needs and preferences of adult learners, and this can lead to improved workplace performance and increased productivity. Thus, the Adult Learning Theory (andragogy) is relevant to this study because it frames adult learners in the Sandwich programme as self-directed, experienced, and problem-centred individuals whose readiness and attitudes towards upskilling and reskilling are shaped by the perceived relevance of such learning to their occupational, personal, and social needs.

The Human Capital theory was propounded by Gary Becker in 1964. It focuses on the idea that experiences can be translated into knowledge and skills, although the length of experience is not always a reliable predictor of expertise. The theory posits that investments in education and training can lead to increased productivity and economic returns. Human Capital Theory is relevant because it conceptualises education, training, and skill acquisition as investments that enhance individuals' productivity, employability, and economic returns (Dalmon, 2026). Thus, adult learners' readiness for upskilling and reskilling in the Sandwich programme can be understood as their willingness to invest time, effort, and resources in upgrading qualifications and competencies for improved career and income outcomes. Their attitudes towards the programme may also reflect their perceptions of its value in expanding human capital, particularly since the Sandwich programme enables working adults to obtain university qualifications without leaving employment.

Methodology

Research Design

The survey research design was utilised for this study. This is because, according to Check and Schutt (2012), survey research design is used in the collection and analysis of data from a sample of participants to understand their attitudes, behaviours, or opinions. This research design also involves administering a questionnaire or survey instrument to a representative sample of individuals, either in-person, by phone, online, or through mail.

Population, Sampling Technique, and Sample

The population of this study comprised all adult learners at the Sandwich Programme of the Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria, who were workers at private or public organisations or institutions. The study sample was selected using the multistage sampling procedure. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the Federal University Oye-Ekiti Sandwich Programmes in the State, given that it runs a Sandwich programme, in line with the study's focus. A simple random sampling technique was used to select five departments (out of the seven departments) at the Sandwich Center. The judgemental sampling technique was used to select only adult learners who were already employees of an organisation or institution (private or public). In all, the study sample was 129.

Instruments

The research instrument used for data collection for this study was titled: Upskilling, Reskilling, and Workforce Job

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Performance Questionnaire (URWJPQ). The URWJPQ was divided into four. Section A measured the respondents' biodata. Section B has 11 items that measured respondents' attitudes toward upskilling and reskilling and were placed on a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD), scored as 4 and 1, respectively. Section C has 11 items measuring respondents' level of readiness and was placed on a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD), scored as 4 and 1, respectively. Section D consists of the job performance questionnaire, which was adapted from the validated Job Performance Scale of Koopmans et al. (2014), which measures individual work performance at the workplace, with 18 items placed on a 5-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1).

The original scale was reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.88. However, for the adapted version as used in this study, the reliability Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .817, .886, and 0.833 respectively, higher than the accepted level of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In the case of the performance scale, there were two reverse-coded items ('complains a lot at work' and 'gossips with colleagues') that had low correlations (.142 and .172, respectively) with the total sum; however, deleting them would slightly increase alpha to .853. Since reliability still appeared satisfactory (α = .833), all items were kept.

Method of Data Collection

Data for the study were collected via face-to-face administration of the research instrument to the respondents. Adequate time was given to them to respond, after which the instruments were retrieved from them. The data collection period lasted from July to September 2025.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected for this research were analysed using both descriptive (frequency counts and percentages, mean and standard deviation) and inferential (multiple regression) statistics at a 0.05% level of significance.

Results

Respondents' Socio-Demographic Attributes

Table 1 denotes the respondents' distribution by gender, year of work experience, cadre at work, and their organisation or institution. Of the 129 respondents who participated in the study, 37 (26.68%) were males, while 93 (71.32%) were females. See the Table for further information.

Table 1. *Respondents Distribution by Gender, Year of Work Experience, Cadre at Work, and Type of Organization or Institution*

		Freq.	%
Respondents' Gender	Male	37	28.68
	Female	92	71.32
	Total	129	100.0
Year of Work Experience	1 - 10 Years	44	34.11
	11 - 20 Years	69	53.49
	Above 20 Years	16	12.40
	Total	129	100.0
Cadre at Work	Junior	42	32.56
	Senior	87	67.44
	Total	129	100.0

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Type of Organization or Institution	Private	48	37.21
	Public	81	62.79
	Total	129	100.0

RQ 1: What is the attitude of adult learners toward upskilling and reskilling for workplace performance?

Table 2 denotes the attitudes of adult learners toward upskilling and reskilling for workplace performance. As indicated in the Table, the sampled adult learners have negative attitudes toward upskilling and reskilling for workplace performance, since the mean values of most of the items are less than the criterion (2.50).

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics for Attitude (ATT) Items*

S/N	Item	Mean	SD
1	Eager to acquire new skills/knowledge	1.23	.464
2	Love to acquire new knowledge	1.23	.422
3	Open to change/new technologies	1.31	.485
4	Look out for training opportunities.	1.39	.525
5	Give constructive feedback.	1.53	.602
6	Happy when learning new skills	1.27	.464
7	Wants further learning opportunities	1.34	.548
8	Reskilling leads to higher job satisfaction.	1.49	.647
9	Upskilling leads to higher job engagement.	1.49	.765
10	Without upskilling, could lose job	2.28	1.044
11	Recognizes the need for upskilling/reskilling	1.50	.571
	Pooled Mean	**1.46**	

***Criterion Mean = 2.50**

RQ 2: What is the readiness level of adult learners regarding upskilling and reskilling for workplace performance?

Table 3 shows the level of readiness of the sampled adult learners with respect to upskilling and reskilling for workplace performance. Given the low levels of agreement (mean values < 2.50) regarding the respondents' readiness toward upskilling and reskilling for workplace performance, it can be implied that these adult learners are not ready for upskilling and reskilling opportunities.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics for Readiness (RED) Items*

S/N	Item	Mean	SD
1	Learns new concepts/skills quickly	1.60	.654
2	Ready for change/new technologies	1.42	.566
3	Can analyze problems, creative solutions	1.81	.645
4	Willing to develop abilities through effort	1.39	.508
5	Motivated to learn/develop skills	1.50	.675
6	Confident learning/applying new skills	1.42	.532
7	Bounces back from setbacks	1.66	.784
8	Initiates training/development seeking	1.75	.735
9	Takes ownership of one's own learning	1.92	.851
10	Ready to share knowledge with others	1.33	.492
11	Seeks feedback/criticism to improve	1.59	.612
	Pooled Mean	**1.58**	

***Criterion Mean = 2.50**

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RQ 3: To what extent do adult learners' attitudes and readiness for upskilling and reskilling predict their workplace performance?

The multiple regression analysis was done on the combination of Attitude and Readiness as predictors of Performance (Table 16). There is significance in the model as a whole, R = .781, R^2 = .609, Adj. R^2 = .602, F(2, 106) = 82.692, p < .001. There is significance of Readiness as a predictor of Performance (β = .746, p < .001), but not for Attitude as a predictor (β = .042, p = .678). In terms of multicollinearity, VIF < 10 for both predictors (VIF = 2.831), and there is no autocorrelation as per the Durbin-Watson statistic (2.279).

Table 4. *Multiple Regression of Attitude and Readiness on Performance*

Predictor	B	SE	B	T	Sig.	VIF
(Constant)	.690	.111		6.232	< .001	
Attitude (ATT)	.051	.123	.042	.416	.678	2.831
Readiness (RED)	.741	.101	.746	7.305	< .001	2.831

R = .781, R^2 = .609, Adjusted R^2 = .602, F (2, 106) = 82.692, p < .001; Durbin-Watson = 2.279.

Hypotheses Testing

To compare gender groups on the variables of Attitude (H01) and Readiness (H02), independent-samples t-tests were carried out; see Tables 5 and 6, respectively. The results from Levene's test showed that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was not violated in the case of both ATT (F = .045, p = .833) and RED (F = .736, p = .393).

Table 5. *Gender Differences in Attitude (H01)*

Group	N	Mean	SD	t(107)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Cohen's d
Male	37	1.4492	.35424	-.106	.916	-.028
Female	92	1.4595	.37139			

95% CI for Cohen's d [-.545, .490]. No significant gender difference in Attitude was found; H01 is retained.

Table 6. *Gender Differences in Readiness (H02)*

Group	N	Mean	SD	t(107)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Cohen's d
Male	37	1.5936	.43256	.140	.889	.037
Female	92	1.5771	.44870			

95% CI for Cohen's d [-.481, .554]. No significant gender difference in Readiness was found; H02 is retained.

Discussion

This current research has examined the attitudes and readiness of adult learners towards upskilling and reskilling and how these associate with their workplace performance. The study findings indicate that the sampled adult learners have negative attitudes toward upskilling and reskilling for workplace performance. Adult learners in the sampled sandwich program may have unfavourable attitudes toward upskilling and reskilling because

they believe these activities require a lot of effort and money, yet are uncertain about their employment relevance, recognition, and personal value. Low self-efficacy, competing job and family commitments, financial constraints, inadequate program support, and restricted employer incentives are all possible factors shaping the attitude.

The finding that adult learners in Ekiti State sandwich programs exhibit negative attitudes toward upskilling and reskilling could be attributed to a mix of dispositional, situational, and institutional barriers. Financial hardship, work-family commitments, inadequate digital resources, and inflexible program frameworks may all diminish willingness to engage (Boeren, 2017; Kobani et al., 2026). However, this conclusion does not imply that adult learners are fundamentally averse to learning. Clair (2024) contends that adults are driven when learning is meaningful, practical, autonomy-enhancing, and linked to better job outcomes. Rather than a fundamental resistance to job upskilling, the negative attitude may reflect bad program design, low perceived benefit, or poor employer recognition.

Findings also depict a low level of readiness for upskilling and reskilling opportunities among the adult learners. This can be attributed to the combined effects of structural, financial, digital, psychological, and informational barriers. In this context, "readiness" should be viewed not just as a desire to learn, but also as learners' perceived capacity, confidence, resources, and opportunity to participate effectively in additional training or skill development. International evidence similarly reveals that adults frequently fail to upskill due to a lack of awareness and motivation, as well as practical obstacles such as work and family responsibilities and training costs (Cedefop, 2020; OECD, 2025a). The findings should be interpreted as evidence of conditional readiness: adult learners in the FUOYE Sandwich program may have educational goals and prior academic preparation, but their ability to upskill and reskill is limited by time, finances, digital access, awareness, confidence, and institutional support.

Findings indicate that adult learners' readiness for upskilling and reskilling significantly predicts their work performance. Adult learners' preparedness for upskilling and reskilling has a substantial impact on work performance because it indicates the motivation, confidence, learning capacity, and practical willingness required to acquire, transmit, and apply new knowledge to changing job needs (Shatila, 2026). Learners who are prepared to upskill are more likely to identify skill gaps, engage in continuous learning, adapt to new technologies, and apply newly acquired competencies to solve work problems, ultimately improving task performance, productivity, adaptability, and career effectiveness (Blume et al., 2010). Adults who are prepared to upskill and reskill are more likely to learn, develop learning agility, gain relevant abilities, use those talents to work tasks, and adjust to changing demands (Lee et al., 2024).

Findings show no significant gender difference in adult learners' readiness and attitudes towards upskilling and reskilling. Both male and female learners may share similar educational aspirations, perceive comparable career benefits from skill upgrading, and face broadly similar academic and professional demands. In other words, gender alone may be less influential than factors within the study context (Kalenda et al., 2024). The non-

significant gender finding should be interpreted cautiously. It may mean that male and female adult learners in the FUOYE Sandwich programme have equally positive readiness and attitudes towards upskilling and reskilling. However, it does not necessarily mean that they have equal access to learning opportunities or face identical barriers (OECD, 2025b).

Adult Learning Theory and Human Capital Theory jointly support the study's findings by explaining that adult learners' engagement in upskilling and reskilling depends on both their perceived relevance of learning and the value they expect to gain from it. Adult Learning Theory, particularly Knowles' andragogy, holds that adults learn best when learning is self-directed, experience-based, problem-centred, and immediately applicable to their personal and occupational needs; therefore, the negative attitudes and low readiness observed among the Sandwich learners suggest that available upskilling and reskilling opportunities may not have been perceived as sufficiently relevant, flexible, practical, or aligned with their work and life responsibilities.

At the same time, Human Capital Theory explains that individuals invest in education and training when they expect economic and professional returns, such as improved productivity, employability, income, promotion, and job performance; thus, the significant prediction of work performance by readiness confirms that learners who feel prepared and willing to acquire new skills are better positioned to apply those skills effectively at work. The absence of significant gender differences in attitudes and readiness is also consistent with both theories, because adult learning capacity and human-capital investment are shaped more by motivation, experience, perceived usefulness, opportunity, and access to resources than by gender itself. Consequently, the findings imply that improving readiness requires making upskilling and reskilling opportunities meaningful, accessible, flexible, and clearly connected to workplace performance rather than assuming that gender alone will determine adults' willingness to learn.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that adult learners in the Sandwich programme held generally negative attitudes towards upskilling and reskilling for workplace performance and demonstrated a low level of readiness to participate in such opportunities. This suggests that, although the learners may recognise the importance of education, they may not currently perceive upskilling and reskilling as accessible, relevant, affordable, or immediately beneficial to their work roles. However, the finding that learners' readiness significantly predicted their work performance is important. It indicates that readiness is not merely a background characteristic; it is a meaningful predictor of how effectively adult learners perform workplace tasks, adapt to change, apply new knowledge, and respond to evolving job demands. Thus, improving learners' readiness could strengthen both their learning engagement and workplace effectiveness.

The absence of significant gender differences in both attitudes and readiness indicates that male and female adult learners were similarly disposed towards upskilling and reskilling opportunities. This suggests that gender alone does not determine learners' willingness or preparedness to acquire new skills. Rather, shared programme experiences, career

aspirations, educational backgrounds, and similar exposure to workplace demands may have produced comparable attitudes and readiness levels across gender groups. Overall, the study establishes that readiness is a critical lever for improving adult learners' workplace performance, while negative attitudes and low readiness represent barriers that require deliberate institutional, financial, digital, and career-support interventions.

Thus, based on the findings and conclusion, the study recommends the following:

i. University managers, Sandwich programme coordinators, and adult-education providers should design structured upskilling and reskilling initiatives that are explicitly linked to learners' current jobs and future career goals.
ii. The programme should adopt flexible and blended learning modes, including evening, weekend, online, mobile-friendly, and short-course options.
iii. The University should provide financial, technological, and informational support.
iv. Career counselling, mentoring, and employability services should be integrated into the Sandwich programme.
v. Employers, professional bodies, and community organisations should be engaged as partners. Workplace-based projects, internships, industry mentorship, and recognition of completed micro-credentials would make upskilling more relevant and increase learners' motivation to participate.
vi. Gender-sensitive but not gender-exclusive interventions should be adopted. Since no significant gender differences were found, support should be provided equitably to all learners.

Limitations

The study was limited by its reliance on self-reported data. Adult learners' attitudes, readiness, and work performance were measured through their own perceptions, which may be affected by social-desirability bias, recall problems, or limited self-awareness. The use of a cross-sectional design means that causal relationships cannot be firmly established. Although readiness significantly predicted work performance, it is not possible to conclude definitively that higher readiness causes better performance; reverse effects or unmeasured variables may also explain the relationship.

The sample was drawn from adult learners in the Sandwich programme of a single university, FUOYE, in Ekiti State. Therefore, the findings may not be generalisable to adult learners in other universities, states, occupational groups, or non-Sandwich adult-education programmes in Nigeria. The study focused mainly on gender as a demographic variable. It did not fully examine other potentially important factors, such as age, marital status, income, employment type, years of work experience, digital access, prior training, field of study, family responsibilities, and organisational support. In addition, work performance may have been measured from learners' self-ratings rather than objective supervisor ratings,

productivity records, or employer evaluations. This may limit the accuracy and objectivity of the performance measure.

Future research directions

Future studies should adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to determine whether improving adult learners' readiness for upskilling and reskilling leads to measurable improvements in work performance over time. Such designs would provide stronger evidence of causality than cross-sectional surveys. Researchers should examine additional predictors of readiness and attitudes, including self-efficacy, motivation, digital literacy, financial capacity, work-family conflict, perceived employability, organisational support, career identity, and prior participation in training. Comparative studies across universities, states, disciplines, and occupational sectors are needed to test whether the findings from FUOYE's Sandwich programme apply more broadly to Nigerian adult learners. Studies involving employers' ratings of performance would also strengthen the validity of performance outcomes.

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