

Barriers and Challenges in Learning Basic English Competencies Among TESDA Adult Learners: A Phenomenological Study

Jeremiah Rex P. Maga

Masbate Institute of Fisheries and Technology, Cayabon, Milagros, Masbate, Philippines

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Email of Corresponding Author: mrjeremiahrexx@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examined the barriers and challenges encountered by TESDA adult learners in acquiring basic English competencies at the Masbate Institute of Fisheries and Technology (MIFT). Guided by the principles of adult learning and a phenomenological perspective, the study aimed to identify the barriers experienced by learners, describe their learning experiences, and determine the coping strategies they employed to overcome difficulties in learning English. A qualitative descriptive research design using a phenomenological approach was employed. Fifteen TESDA adult learners enrolled in Food and Beverage Services NC II, Trainers Methodology Level I, Housekeeping NC II, Events Management Services NC III, and the 3-Year Diploma Program in Hotel and Restaurant Operation and Management were purposively selected. Data were gathered through a validated semi-structured interview guide and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed seven major barriers: limited vocabulary and difficulty understanding English, lack of confidence, difficulty in pronunciation, limited exposure and practice, difficulty understanding spoken English, anxiety and pressure during assessments, and environmental distractions. Learners' experiences reflected both positive and negative dimensions of language learning, including skill development, learning through failures, emotional challenges, motivation to improve, appreciation of instructional support, and limitations in learning resources. To address these challenges, learners employed six coping strategies: self-practice and repetition, use of technology and online learning tools, observation and peer interaction, exposure to English media, self-motivation and confidence-building, and support from teachers, peers, and family. The study concluded that TESDA adult learners demonstrate resilience and adaptability despite linguistic, emotional, and environmental barriers. It recommended the implementation of an English Communication Enhancement Action Plan to strengthen learners' confidence, vocabulary development, communication skills, and access to learning resources. The study aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by supporting inclusive language learning and workforce readiness. Its sustainability impact lies in strengthening educational, institutional, and socio-economic development through improved communication competencies among adult technical-vocational learners.

Keywords: Adult Learners, Basic English Competencies, Coping Strategies, English Language Learning, Phenomenological Study, TESDA, Technical-Vocational Education and Training, Thematic Analysis, TVET, Vocabulary Development.

1. Introduction

English plays a vital role in global communication, higher education, scientific research, business transactions, and technological innovation (Kurniawan, 2024; Dilnoza, 2024; Abdulkarim Kizi et al., 2025). The rapid advancement of technology and globalization has further increased the importance of English proficiency in enabling individuals to participate in knowledge exchange and workforce development (Awangku Ismail & Seong Pek, 2023; Ismail & Pek, 2023). Studies consistently show that English proficiency contributes significantly to employability, career advancement, and workplace performance, particularly in technical and vocational sectors (Mariano & Tantoco, 2023; Mohamad et al., 2024). Employers frequently identify English communication skills as essential competencies for hiring, collaboration, and professional growth (Bautista and Santos, 2022; Khalid et al., 2021; Garcia and de la Cruz, 2023). In the Philippines, TESDA is mandated to develop a globally competitive workforce through technical and vocational education (PhilippineGo, 2024; TESDA, 2024a). To support this goal, TESDA integrates English communication into competency standards and training programs, including CEFR-aligned language courses and workplace communication modules (TESDA, n.d.-a; TESDA, n.d.-b; TESDA, 2024b; Mohamad et al., 2025). These efforts emphasize the importance of listening, speaking, reading, and writing competencies for successful training and employment outcomes (Ergün, 2022). However, adult learners often face barriers that affect language acquisition, including time constraints, work and family responsibilities, educational background differences, language anxiety, limited resources, and low self-confidence (Laroza-Velasco, 2024; Natividad and Magno, 2021; Flores and Javier, 2020; Cabardo, Avenido, & Barabat, 2024; Khodadady and Fakhrebadi, 2022; Torres and Austria, 2023). These challenges may hinder successful participation in TESDA programs and competency assessments.

The literature highlights several recurring themes regarding adult English language learning. First, adult learners commonly encounter linguistic barriers such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, grammatical weaknesses, and inadequate exposure to English (Allen-Abulhassan, 2021; Mokhtar et al., 2009; Musallam and Taqi, 2019). Such difficulties affect learners' ability to communicate effectively and participate confidently in learning activities. Second, psychological and affective factors significantly influence language acquisition. Language anxiety, fear of making mistakes, low self-efficacy, embarrassment, and reduced willingness to communicate often discourage adult learners from engaging actively in English learning (Aporbo, 2024; Nguyen and Vu, 2024; Attia & Algazo, 2025; Romero et al., 2023). Third, situational and institutional factors shape learning outcomes. Adult learners frequently balance employment, family obligations, and educational demands, leading to limited study time and inconsistent participation (Kamisli, 2023; Nguyen and Nguyen, 2024; Laroza-Velasco, 2024). Resource limitations, insufficient instructional support, and delivery challenges also affect learning experiences (Musallam and Taqi, 2019; Pallado et al., 2022; Rhey et al., 2022). Finally, the literature emphasizes learner agency and coping strategies. Adult learners often rely on self-directed learning, practice, digital tools, peer collaboration, family support, and authentic language exposure to overcome learning difficulties (Mokhtar et al., 2009; Neville, 2023; Singleton, 2002; Macmillan English, n.d.; EFLCafe, n.d.; ProLiteracy, 2024).

Globally, English proficiency is increasingly associated with economic participation, employability, and competitiveness in international labor markets (Arayata, 2024; Ismail & Pek, 2023). Technical and vocational graduates are expected to possess not only technical expertise but also effective communication skills in English (Mohamad et al., 2024). Nationally, TESDA promotes communication competence through competency-based education and CEFR-aligned language standards (TESDA, 2024b; TESDA, 2023a; TESDA, 2023b). These policies support the integration of English language learning within TVET programs to meet workforce requirements and international standards (TESDA, n.d.-a; TESDA, n.d.-b). Locally, the Masbate Institute of Fisheries and Technology (MIFT), formerly the Masbate School of Fisheries, serves as a major provider of technical-vocational education in Masbate Province under Republic Act No. 10824. Guided by its Institutional Development Plan (2024–2028), MIFT (2024) aims to produce globally competitive graduates equipped with technical and communication competencies. However, institutional data indicate that some learners continue to experience difficulties in English-based instruction and competency assessments, affecting certification outcomes and demonstrating the need for stronger language support mechanisms.

This study is primarily anchored in Knowles's (1984) theory of andragogy, which posits that adult learners are self-directed individuals whose learning is influenced by prior experiences, readiness to learn, and practical life needs. Effective adult education requires learner-centered approaches that recognize adults' responsibilities and motivations (Knowles, 1984; Merriam and Bierema, 2014). The study also reflects principles of communicative competence embedded in TESDA's CEFR-aligned competency standards, emphasizing meaningful language use in workplace and real-life contexts (TESDA, 2024b; TESDA, n.d.-b). Conceptually, the study adopts a systems framework consisting of input, process, and output. The inputs include barriers, lived experiences, and coping strategies of TESDA adult learners. The process involves qualitative data collection and thematic analysis. The outputs consist of identified barriers, documented experiences, coping mechanisms, and a proposed action plan for improving English learning outcomes among adult learners.

Although extensive research has explored English language learning among school-age learners, university students, and general adult populations, limited studies have focused specifically on TESDA adult learners within technical-vocational environments. Existing literature frequently emphasizes program effectiveness, institutional implementation, or quantitative performance indicators rather than learners lived experiences (Pallado et al., 2022; Rhey et al., 2022). Moreover, a gap exists between policy intentions and the realities experienced by adult learners. While TESDA promotes competency-based and CEFR-aligned language training, many learners continue to face linguistic, emotional, and situational barriers that are not fully captured in institutional reports or assessment outcomes. Additionally, previous studies often rely on quantitative measures and may overlook the complex interplay of confidence, anxiety, motivation, resilience, and coping strategies that influence adult learners' language development. By employing a phenomenological approach, this study addresses these gaps by examining how TESDA adult learners personally experience and navigate the challenges of acquiring basic English competencies. Such understanding may contribute to more responsive instructional practices, learner support systems, and policy improvements.

This study aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): SDG 4: Quality Education. The study contributes to inclusive and equitable quality education by examining barriers to English language acquisition and identifying strategies to improve learning outcomes among adult learners. SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. English proficiency is closely linked to employability, workplace communication, and career advancement in technical-vocational sectors (Mariano & Tantoco, 2023; Mohamad et al., 2024). Enhancing language skills supports workforce readiness and economic participation. SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. The integration of English communication, digital literacy, and technology-supported learning strengthens human capital needed for innovation and industry development (Hauge et al., 2024; Awangku Ismail & Seong Pek, 2023). SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities. By addressing barriers experienced by

adult learners, particularly those facing socioeconomic and educational disadvantages, the study supports more equitable access to learning opportunities.

The study contributes to multiple dimensions of sustainability based on its findings and context. Educational Sustainability. By identifying barriers and effective coping mechanisms, the study supports continuous improvement of adult education and lifelong learning programs. Socio-Economic Sustainability. Improved English proficiency can enhance employability, income opportunities, and workforce mobility, strengthening economic well-being among learners and communities. Technological and Digital Sustainability. The literature highlights the growing role of digital tools, online learning platforms, and technology-assisted language learning in supporting adult learners (Hauge et al., 2024; Ortogero et al., 2025). Understanding how learners use these resources can inform sustainable digital learning initiatives. Community and Institutional Sustainability. The findings may help TESDA, MIFT, and related institutions develop more responsive support systems, learner-centered instructional practices, and evidence-based policies that sustain educational quality and learner success. Human Development Sustainability. By addressing language barriers, confidence issues, and learning challenges, the study promotes personal growth, lifelong learning, and meaningful participation in education and employment, contributing to long-term individual and societal development.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative descriptive research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to explore and describe the barriers and challenges experienced by TESDA adult learners in acquiring basic English competencies. Qualitative descriptive research is appropriate for obtaining comprehensive descriptions of human experiences and events while remaining close to participants' actual accounts (Sandelowski, 2000). It is particularly useful for understanding experiences from the participants' perspective and for generating rich descriptions of everyday realities (Neergaard et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2017). Through this approach, the study gathered detailed narratives regarding the difficulties encountered by learners enrolled in Food and Beverage Services NC II, Trainers Methodology Level I, Housekeeping NC II, Events Management Services NC III, and the 3-Year Diploma Program in Hotel and Restaurant Operation and Management at the Masbate Institute of Fisheries and Technology during Fiscal Year 2024.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at the Masbate Institute of Fisheries and Technology (MIFT) in the municipality of Milagros, Masbate. Milagros is a coastal municipality located along the Asid Gulf and is one of the largest municipalities in the province. Many residents depend on fishing, aquaculture, and marine-related industries for their livelihood (PhilAtlas, 2024). MIFT (2024), formerly the Masbate School of Fisheries, operates under TESDA and serves as a major provider of technical-vocational education, fisheries training, and community-based development programs. Guided by its Institutional Development Plan 2024–2028, the institution aims to produce globally competitive graduates equipped with technical competencies and adaptive skills. Programs offered by MIFT require the use of English in instruction, technical documentation, workplace simulations, and competency assessments. This environment made the institution an appropriate setting for examining the lived experiences of adult learners as they acquire and use English in technical-vocational education.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents consisted of fifteen (15) TESDA adult learners enrolled in five registered programs at the Masbate Institute of Fisheries and Technology during Fiscal Year 2024. These programs included Food and Beverage Services NC II, Trainers Methodology Level I, Housekeeping NC II, Events Management Services NC III, and the 3-Year Diploma Program in Hotel and Restaurant Operation and Management. To protect participant anonymity and confidentiality, identification codes rather than real names were used throughout the study (Dane, 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The respondents served as key informants in describing their barriers, experiences, and coping strategies related to learning English.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research to select information-rich participants who can provide relevant insights into a research problem (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposive sampling was appropriate because it enabled the selection of learners who had direct experiences with difficulties in acquiring English competencies. The sample size of fifteen participants was consistent with qualitative research standards emphasizing depth rather than generalizability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As noted by Aguinis (2024), purposive sampling relies on the researcher's judgment in selecting suitable participants, while Bryman (2015) emphasized that selected cases must align with the research objectives. Participants were chosen based on two criteria: they had to be enrolled in one of the identified TESDA programs at MIFT and must have obtained a failing grade in the institutional mock

assessment, indicating challenges in English competency acquisition (Palinkas et al., 2015; Andrade, 2021; Saunders et al., 2023; Etikan et al., 2016; Bougie & Sekaran, 2020; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021; Lim, 2024).

2.5 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide. This instrument allowed participants to respond freely while maintaining consistency across interviews (May, 1997). Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for exploring complex and sensitive topics because they provide opportunities for clarification and deeper probing during data collection (Kumar, 2005). The interview guide focused on barriers encountered in learning English, learners' experiences and challenges, coping strategies used to address those challenges, and recommendations for improving English learning experiences and outcomes. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by two experts in English language education and qualitative research. It was also pilot tested with three TESDA adult learners who were not included in the actual study, allowing refinement of question wording and sequencing.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection began after the research proposal had been approved by the thesis adviser and panel members. A formal request was submitted to the TESDA Provincial Director of Masbate for permission to conduct the study. Upon approval, participants were informed about the study's purpose, nature, and ethical considerations, including their right to voluntarily participate and withdraw at any time (Kumar, 2005). Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through Facebook Messenger, depending on participant availability and circumstances. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent to ensure accurate transcription. The recordings were securely stored, properly labeled, and handled confidentially. The researcher also maintained a reflective journal to document observations, nonverbal cues, and potential biases throughout the data collection process.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is widely used to identify, examine, and interpret patterns within qualitative data (Boyatzis, 1998; Elliott, 2018; Thomas, 2006). To minimize researcher bias, the analysis followed a systematic process and remained grounded in participant responses (Morse & Mitcham, 2002; Patton, 2015). The study adopted the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved transcription of interviews, familiarization with the data, selection of significant quotations, identification of keywords, coding, theme development, interpretation of themes, and conceptualization of findings. The researcher repeatedly reviewed transcripts and audio recordings to ensure accurate coding and interpretation. Emergent themes were organized and verified through repeated examination of the data, enabling the development of meaningful descriptions of learners' barriers, experiences, and coping strategies.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the ethical guidelines prescribed by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED, 2019) and Republic Act No. 10173, otherwise known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Participants were fully informed about the objectives, scope, and procedures of the study before providing consent. Consistent with Kumar (2005), participation was based on informed and voluntary agreement. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using participant codes rather than names and by safeguarding all collected information (Dane, 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty or consequence.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Barriers Encountered in Acquiring Basic English Competencies

3.1.1 Limited Vocabulary and Difficulty Understanding English

Participants consistently reported difficulty understanding unfamiliar words, technical terms, and complex English expressions. Limited vocabulary reduced their ability to comprehend lessons, follow discussions, and participate confidently in learning activities. These findings indicate that vocabulary deficiency remains a major obstacle to language acquisition among adult learners. The result supports the work of Allen-Abulhassan (2021), who identified limited vocabulary as a primary barrier to English learning. It also aligns with Mokhtar et al. (2009), who found that adult learners often struggle with vocabulary development, and Del Rosario (2025), who reported that vocabulary limitations hinder effective communication. Bacang (2024) further emphasized that targeted vocabulary instruction improves comprehension and learner confidence.

3.1.2 Lack of Confidence and Fear of Making Mistakes

Many learners expressed low confidence when using English, particularly in speaking situations. Fear of errors, negative experiences, and concern about being judged discouraged active participation and communication. The findings suggest that emotional barriers significantly affect language development. Similar results were reported by Nguyen and Vu (2024), who found that low self-confidence reduces willingness to communicate. Attia and Algazo (2025) and Romero et al. (2023)

likewise noted that fear of mistakes and previous negative learning experiences contribute to language anxiety. Zeligman (2022) further explained that adult learners may feel embarrassment and frustration when learning a language later in life.

3.1.3 Difficulty in Pronunciation and Speaking Fluency

Participants commonly described challenges in pronunciation, speech delivery, and expressing ideas fluently in English. Several learners experienced mental blocks and difficulty articulating responses during assessments and classroom activities. This finding is consistent with Allen-Abulhassan (2021), who identified pronunciation as a common obstacle among adult English learners. Nguyen and Vu (2024) also found that pronunciation difficulties reduce learners' confidence and willingness to speak. The result further reflects the observations of Barcibal et al. (2023), whose study showed that first-language influences create phonological challenges that affect spoken English performance.

3.1.4 Limited Exposure and Practice in English

Learners reported that English was rarely used in their homes and communities, limiting opportunities for regular practice. Most participants indicated that they primarily used English within school or training settings. The result highlights the importance of continuous language exposure in developing proficiency. Moreno (2022) emphasized that meaningful communication opportunities facilitate language development, while ProLiteracy (2024) stressed the importance of sustained practice. Similarly, Santos et al. (2022) noted that many Filipino learners have limited opportunities to use English in everyday contexts despite its role in education.

3.1.5 Difficulty Understanding Spoken English

Participants frequently experienced challenges understanding verbal instructions, lectures, conversations, and assessment questions delivered in English, particularly when speech was rapid or contained unfamiliar vocabulary. This finding supports the observations of Mokhtar et al. (2009), who found that adult beginners often struggle with listening comprehension due to limited vocabulary and exposure. Del Rosario (2025) similarly reported difficulties in listening comprehension among adult learners, especially when processing unfamiliar or fast-paced speech.

3.1.6 Anxiety, Pressure, and Overthinking During Assessments

Participants reported feeling anxious, pressured, and prone to overthinking during English-related assessments. These emotions frequently caused memory lapses, reduced concentration, and lowered performance. The findings reflect the concept of foreign language anxiety discussed by Attia and Algazo (2025), who highlighted the negative impact of anxiety on language performance. Aporbo (2024) likewise found that fear of evaluation and language anxiety adversely affect adult learners' confidence and academic achievement.

3.1.7 Environmental Distractions and External Factors

Learners identified noise, family concerns, stress, and distracting surroundings as factors that interfered with concentration and study effectiveness. These external conditions often compounded existing learning difficulties. The findings support Kamisli's (2023) concept of adult learners' "loads," referring to responsibilities and environmental factors that influence educational participation. Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) also found that work, family obligations, and personal responsibilities create significant challenges for adult learners. Similar concerns were reported by Albert et al. (2024) in community-based literacy programs.

3.2 Experiences and Challenges in Learning Basic English Competencies

3.2.1 Positive Learning Experiences and Skill Development

Despite their difficulties, participants reported meaningful progress in vocabulary, grammar, communication skills, and confidence. Many viewed English learning as enjoyable and beneficial to their personal and professional growth. These positive experiences reflect the practical value adult learners attach to learning. Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) observed that adult learners remain engaged when they perceive tangible benefits from language learning. Similarly, Mardani et al. (2022) found that second-language learning contributes to personal fulfillment and cognitive development. Bacang (2024) also reported that literacy interventions improved learners' confidence and competence.

3.2.2 Learning Through Challenges and Failures

Participants viewed failures and setbacks, particularly unsuccessful assessments, as opportunities for improvement rather than permanent obstacles. Many reported becoming more determined after experiencing difficulties. This finding demonstrates resilience among adult learners. Mardani et al. (2022) emphasized that adult learners often develop adaptive coping mechanisms to overcome challenges, while Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) found that they remain committed to learning despite competing responsibilities. Balasa and Narita (2025) similarly reported increased perseverance and self-confidence among adult learners facing educational barriers.

3.2.3 Emotional Challenges and Negative Experiences

Participants described experiences of embarrassment, discouragement, criticism, and self-doubt while learning English. Negative interactions and previous failures sometimes reduced their confidence and willingness to participate. The result aligns with Aporbo (2024), who found that language anxiety influences learners' confidence and participation. Attia and Algazo (2025) also linked fear of criticism with reduced classroom engagement. Romero et al. (2023) similarly identified emotional stress and anxiety as major influences on English learning experiences.

3.2.4 Motivation to Improve and Continue Learning

Despite obstacles, learners demonstrated strong motivation to continue improving their English skills. Personal growth, career aspirations, and encouragement from instructors helped sustain their efforts. This finding is consistent with Mardani et al. (2022), who identified professional advancement and self-improvement as major motivational factors among adult learners. Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) also reported that workplace and communication needs serve as strong incentives for learning English. Neville (2023) further emphasized adults' tendency toward self-directed learning and personal initiative.

3.2.5 Positive Perception of TESDA Instruction and Teaching Support

Participants generally viewed TESDA instructors positively, highlighting clear explanations, structured teaching approaches, and supportive guidance as important contributors to their learning. The result supports Moreno (2022), who emphasized that encouragement and supportive classroom environments promote willingness to communicate among adult learners. It also reflects TESDA's learner-centered and competency-based educational framework, which prioritizes practical and guided learning experiences (TESDA, n.d.-a; TESDA, 2024b).

3.2.6 Limitations in Learning Materials and Resources

Participants reported shortages of learning materials and instructional resources. In response, many sought alternative resources and adapted their learning strategies. This finding mirrors the observations of Pallado et al. (2022), who identified resource limitations in TESDA learning environments. Albert et al. (2024) similarly reported inadequate educational resources in adult literacy programs. Despite these limitations, participants demonstrated adaptability and persistence in pursuing their learning goals.

3.3 Coping Strategies Used to Overcome English Learning Difficulties

3.3.1 Self-Practice and Repetition

Participants commonly relied on repeated practice, memorization, speaking exercises, script rehearsal, reading, and independent study to strengthen their English skills. This finding supports Mokhtar et al. (2009), who reported that adult learners frequently use repetition and memorization strategies to improve language proficiency. Neville (2023) likewise emphasized the role of self-directed learning among adults. The result also reflects adult learner autonomy as described by Singleton (2002).

3.3.2 Use of Technology and Online Learning Tools

Participants utilized digital resources such as online dictionaries, Google Translate, mobile applications, ChatGPT, and internet searches to support vocabulary acquisition and language practice. The finding demonstrates the growing importance of technology in language learning. Hauge et al. (2024) found that digital tools enhance both technological and language competencies among adult learners. Ortogero et al. (2025) also reported that multimedia-based learning supports vocabulary development and learner engagement.

3.3.3 Learning Through Observation and Peer Interaction

Participants learned by observing classmates, asking questions, and engaging in peer discussions. These interactions provided opportunities to model language use and gain practical feedback. This finding supports Moreno (2022), who emphasized the value of communication and collaboration in adult learning. Singleton (2002) likewise noted that social interaction and shared experiences contribute significantly to language development among adult learners.

3.3.4 Exposure to English Media and Informal Learning

Many participants improved their English skills through movies, songs, online videos, tutorials, and other forms of informal language exposure outside the classroom. The finding aligns with recommendations from Macmillan English (n.d.) and EFLCafe (n.d.), which emphasize authentic language materials as effective tools for vocabulary growth, listening comprehension, and pronunciation improvement. Neville (2023) also highlighted the importance of multimedia resources in self-directed language learning.

3.3.5 Self-Motivation and Confidence Building

Participants actively encouraged themselves to persevere through challenges by developing confidence, maintaining positive attitudes, and focusing on personal goals. This finding is consistent with Mardani et al. (2022), who found that

personal aspirations and self-improvement motivate adult learners. Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) similarly reported that career and communication goals strengthen persistence in language learning.

3.3.6 Support from Teachers, Peers, and Family

Participants emphasized the importance of encouragement, feedback, corrections, and assistance from instructors, classmates, and family members. These support systems strengthened motivation and facilitated learning. The finding supports Singleton (2002), who emphasized the role of peer, family, and instructor support in adult language learning. Francisco and Buri (2024) likewise found that encouragement and instructional guidance help adult learners overcome literacy challenges and sustain engagement.

3.4 Integration of Findings

The findings reveal that TESDA adult learners experience interconnected linguistic, psychological, situational, and environmental barriers in acquiring English competencies. Limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, low confidence, anxiety, inadequate exposure, and external responsibilities collectively influence their learning experiences. At the same time, learners demonstrate resilience through self-directed practice, technology use, peer collaboration, informal learning, personal motivation, and support systems. The interaction between barriers, experiences, and coping strategies reflects the complexity of adult language learning. Consistent with Knowles (1984), adult learners actively draw upon their experiences, resources, and motivations to overcome challenges. The findings further suggest that learner-centered instruction, supportive environments, adequate resources, and authentic communication opportunities are essential for strengthening English proficiency among TESDA adult learners.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that TESDA adult learners encounter multiple interconnected barriers in acquiring basic English competencies, including limited vocabulary, pronunciation and speaking difficulties, low confidence, limited exposure to English, difficulty understanding spoken English, anxiety during assessments, and environmental distractions. Their experiences reveal both growth and persistent challenges, as learners develop vocabulary, confidence, and skills while also dealing with emotional barriers, previous negative experiences, and resource limitations. Despite these difficulties, learners demonstrate resilience through self-practice, use of technology, peer interaction, exposure to English media, self-motivation, and support from teachers, classmates, and family. These findings indicate that successful English learning among TESDA adult learners depends on addressing linguistic, emotional, and environmental challenges while strengthening the support systems and learner-driven strategies that contribute to their continued development.

Based on the findings, the study recommends the adoption and implementation of the English Communication Enhancement Action Plan for TESDA Adult Learners to strengthen confidence, vocabulary development, and communication skills through collaborative learning, technology integration, authentic learning materials, and continuous learner support. TESDA trainers and administrators should provide regular speaking activities, role-plays, workplace simulations, repetition-based drills, pronunciation practice, peer-learning opportunities, and guided use of digital learning tools. The integration of English movies, songs, podcasts, and online resources, together with mentoring, feedback, emotional support, and improved access to instructional materials, should also be sustained. Furthermore, future studies may be conducted to identify additional interventions and best practices that can enhance teacher readiness and improve English learning outcomes among adult learners in technical-vocational education settings.

Compliance with ethical standards

The author declares no conflict of interest. This study complied with recognized ethical standards for human-participant research by ensuring voluntary participation with informed consent, the right to withdraw without penalty, and strict confidentiality through anonymous, secure, and aggregated data handling. Given the focus on psychological well-being, procedures were non-invasive, and safeguards were observed to minimize discomfort, with guidance to appropriate support services when needed, and required institutional permissions were secured for instrument use and access to academic records.

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