Identification of Factors and Components Affecting the Adult Literacy Curriculum with a Focus on Improving Social and Economic Skills in Tehran Province

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to design and validate a comprehensive model for the adult literacy curriculum with a specific focus on enhancing learners' social and economic skills in Tehran Province. The research employed a qualitative approach using the grounded theory method. The statistical population consisted of experts in education, literacy instructors, and university specialists from Tehran Province. Through purposive snowball sampling, 20 experts with at least 29 years of experience and doctoral qualifications were selected for semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding to extract concepts, categories, and relationships among variables. The coding process led to the identification of causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, as well as strategies and outcomes. To ensure validity and reliability, data triangulation and expert validation were applied. The results revealed that the causal conditions of the adult literacy curriculum included infrastructures for work attachment, individuals' internal orientation toward growth, and continuous skill development. The core category comprised intra-organizational characteristics, decision-making centered on the curriculum, conflict resolution around curriculum goals, institutional participation and support, organizational culture, structure, and staff skills. Contextual conditions were defined by adherence to values and behavioral principles, while intervening conditions encompassed environmental, legal, cultural, social, political, and economic factors. Strategic factors such as the formulation of a curriculum charter, implementation of essential managerial processes, and curriculum control led to positive outcomes including meritocracy, organizational justice, reduced corruption, improved leadership behavior, protection of labor rights, and stronger social relationships. Adult literacy education is most effective when it integrates moral, social, and economic dimensions through value-driven, participatory, and institutionally supported curriculum frameworks.

Keywords: Curriculum, Adult Literacy, Social Skills, Economic Skills.

Introduction

Adult literacy and curriculum design represent crucial pillars in contemporary educational reform and lifelong learning. The ability to read, write, and think critically is no longer a static competency but an evolving set of cognitive, emotional, and social

capacities that shape an individual's capacity to participate in economic and social development. In the 21st century, educational systems are being reconceptualized not only to promote literacy in its traditional sense but also to empower individuals with the social, digital, and entrepreneurial skills necessary for active citizenship and employability (1). Within this transformative paradigm, curriculum planning assumes a strategic role in shaping learners' competencies, fostering creativity, and integrating life skills with academic knowledge (2).

The evolution of curriculum studies has shown that educational programs must move beyond content transmission and focus on learner engagement, contextual relevance, and interdisciplinary adaptability (3). According to global educational trends, effective literacy curricula are not only informed by pedagogical frameworks but are also designed to align with societal needs and economic structures (4). In this context, the adult literacy curriculum—especially for disadvantaged or low-literate adults—plays an essential role in fostering social inclusion, occupational readiness, and lifelong adaptability (5). The significance of adult literacy education becomes even more evident when considered within a broader socio-economic landscape, where literacy contributes to both personal empowerment and national development (6).

Scholars have increasingly emphasized that literacy is a multidimensional concept encompassing cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions (7). Traditional literacy programs focusing solely on reading and writing fail to address the complex realities of modern society, where digital, financial, and social literacies are equally vital (8). Research suggests that adult learners benefit from curricula that incorporate practical, contextual, and culturally relevant experiences designed to strengthen social ties and enhance economic resilience (9). In this regard, the curriculum functions as a dynamic framework that connects individual empowerment with broader social change (1).

The relationship between literacy and socioeconomic status has been well documented. Studies indicate that individuals with higher literacy levels are more likely to achieve better employment outcomes, health literacy, and social mobility (10, 11). Conversely, individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face barriers to educational access and quality, which in turn perpetuate cycles of poverty and marginalization (12, 13). Effective adult literacy programs must, therefore, be designed to break this cycle by embedding social and economic skill-building components into the curriculum. This approach ensures that literacy learning goes beyond functional reading and writing to encompass financial awareness, communication competence, and civic engagement (14).

In recent decades, educational theorists have emphasized the need to view curriculum design as an instrument of transformation, not merely transmission (2, 15). Adult education, in particular, requires a curriculum that considers learners' lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and economic realities. The integration of contextualized learning within adult literacy programs increases both participation and retention rates, thereby enhancing overall program effectiveness (16). Similarly, entrepreneurship-oriented curricula have been found to cultivate self-efficacy, initiative, and innovation among adult learners (17, 18). These findings underscore the interdependence between educational design and social advancement.

The central challenge in developing a curriculum for adult literacy lies in harmonizing the learners' immediate needs with long-term developmental goals. Scholars such as Purzer and Nataraga (19) argue that curriculum design should be flexible enough to incorporate formative assessment, experiential learning, and reflective practice. In contexts where adults must balance education with work and family responsibilities, modular and competency-based curricula are more effective (4). Moreover, the growing emphasis on skill-based and project-oriented learning has prompted a rethinking of how adult literacy programs are evaluated, particularly in relation to employability and socio-economic integration (20).

From a pedagogical perspective, literacy learning is deeply rooted in social interaction and communication. Collaborative learning models, including shared reading, peer instruction, and discussion-based approaches, have been shown to enhance both cognitive and affective engagement among learners (7, 21). For instance, collaborative story reading significantly

improves early literacy skills and language comprehension, particularly among at-risk learners (21). Although these findings primarily concern early education, they hold substantial implications for adult learning, where collaboration fosters confidence, social belonging, and reflective understanding (13).

Socioeconomic variables also influence the success of literacy interventions. Research has found that economic hardship and low social capital can reduce motivation and persistence in adult learners (8). Therefore, curriculum design must take into account not only educational content but also psychosocial support mechanisms such as mentoring, community participation, and workplace integration (9). In this sense, adult literacy education becomes an instrument for both personal empowerment and social cohesion (6).

The incorporation of digital literacy within adult education has become increasingly relevant in the post-pandemic era. Digital literacy enhances access to information, facilitates remote learning, and enables adults to engage with new economic opportunities (8). The intersection between digital competence and literacy education contributes to reducing inequalities among social groups, particularly for individuals in marginalized or rural communities (9). Therefore, effective curriculum planning for adult literacy must integrate digital literacy as a fundamental component of lifelong learning (1).

Entrepreneurship education further enriches adult literacy by linking learning outcomes with real-world applications. Entrepreneurship-based literacy curricula cultivate self-efficacy, critical thinking, and innovation (17). Studies in various contexts—including Iran, Indonesia, and Western countries—demonstrate that entrepreneurial learning enhances motivation, creativity, and the ability to identify and exploit socio-economic opportunities (18, 22). This alignment of literacy with entrepreneurship promotes economic independence and community development, especially in low-income regions (16).

Beyond skills acquisition, adult literacy programs play a vital role in strengthening cultural and moral values. The integration of ethical principles and social norms into literacy education enhances civic responsibility and social harmony (6). Such values-based curricula help learners internalize positive behavioral standards and develop a sense of shared purpose. This perspective aligns with Wilder's argument that literacy education should promote nonviolent, cooperative, and globally aware relationships among learners (7).

Another emerging dimension of adult literacy is its role in supporting psychological well-being and self-concept development. Research suggests that learning experiences fostering autonomy, self-control, and intrinsic motivation contribute to personal growth and resilience (23, 24). This holistic perspective emphasizes that literacy education should not only enhance technical competencies but also nurture emotional intelligence and self-efficacy (25). Such psychosocial empowerment contributes to the sustainability of learning outcomes and their transferability to everyday life and work contexts.

Moreover, in the context of sustainable development and energy transition, scholars have recognized the importance of curriculum planning that incorporates ethical, environmental, and technological literacy (3). Such integration helps learners understand the interrelation between technological progress, environmental stewardship, and social justice. Accordingly, a literacy curriculum that embeds sustainability education prepares learners to become responsible citizens in a rapidly transforming world (15).

The role of institutions in implementing adult literacy curricula is equally critical. Institutional support, resource allocation, and policy alignment directly affect the effectiveness of educational programs (1). Furthermore, intersectoral collaboration—among educational institutions, NGOs, and governmental bodies—enhances program scalability and long-term impact (4). Institutional capacity building, therefore, remains a cornerstone in the successful design and implementation of literacy education for adults (2).

Despite the global recognition of literacy as a human right, many adult learners continue to face systemic barriers such as limited access, outdated pedagogical models, and inadequate evaluation frameworks (18, 19). To overcome these challenges,

contemporary research advocates for competency-based assessment, reflective teaching, and learner-centered approaches (25). Such innovations enable adult learners to experience autonomy, empowerment, and self-directed growth—key drivers of lifelong learning success (1).

In light of these theoretical and empirical foundations, adult literacy education must be reconceptualized as a transformative process that integrates cognitive, social, and economic dimensions. The effectiveness of such programs depends on their ability to connect individual development with collective progress, promoting equity, inclusion, and sustainability (7).

Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify and analyze the factors and components influencing the adult literacy curriculum with a focus on improving social and economic skills among learners in Tehran Province.

Methods and Materials

The present study is a *qualitative research* project, and the strategy employed in its qualitative section is the *Grounded Theory Method* (GTM). Grounded theory consists of three main components: *concepts, categories,* and *propositions.* Concepts are the fundamental units of analysis because theory development is not merely the product of collected data; rather, attaining theory is the result of *conceptualizing* the data. According to Corbin and Strauss, it is impossible to construct theory solely based on real events or activities—that is, on raw data. Events, incidents, and occurrences are regarded as potential indicators of phenomena that are then analyzed, after which the researcher assigns conceptual labels to them. The theorist can only provide the main building blocks of a theory by comparing events and labeling similar phenomena with the same terms.

The second element of grounded theory is *categories.* According to Corbin and Strauss, categories represent a higher and more abstract level compared to the concepts they describe. Identifying categories, similar to identifying lower-level concepts, occurs through an analytical process of comparison that reveals similarities and differences. Categories form the foundation of theorizing and provide tools through which the theory can be integrated. In fact, categories are the result of grouping related concepts.

The third element of grounded theory is *propositions.* Propositions demonstrate the generalized relationships between a category and its concepts, as well as relationships between distinct categories. Glaser and Strauss viewed propositions as a kind of hypothesis; however, the term "proposition" has become more commonly used. Propositions encompass conceptual relationships, whereas hypotheses require measurable relationships. It should be remembered that the process of constructing and formulating concepts, categories, and propositions in grounded theory is cyclical. In other words, during the research process, the researcher continuously returns to earlier stages to refine, modify, and develop a suitable theory that provides an explanation for the observed relationships (Zakaei, 2002, pp. 55–57).

In grounded theory methodology, data must be organized chronologically (based on the timing of interviews or the sequence of events). However, it is also possible to order them according to other variables. In any case, data organization should allow for the observation of event sequences and even the logical connections among them. In analyzing data collected through the grounded theory approach, a *coding process* is employed. Data analysis in this process is not separate from data collection and sampling; at every stage, the analysis of previous data helps determine which data should be collected next and what samples should be sought. During the coding process, data are decomposed, conceptualized, and finally reorganized into a new structure (Flick, 2008, p. 329).

Strauss and Corbin divided the coding process into three stages: *open (free) coding, axial coding,* and *selective (theoretical) coding.* These three stages are not necessarily distinct and support each other throughout the research process. However, generally speaking, the analytical process begins with open coding and, ideally, concludes with selective coding. Achieving

selective coding and theory development is not necessary or even possible for all studies using this approach; some research may conclude at the stage of presenting and analyzing concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 2006, p. 117).

Sampling in grounded theory research is *non-random, purposive, and theoretical* in nature, aiming to optimize concepts and categories. Sampling continues until *theoretical saturation*—that is, until the addition of new data no longer alters the final model.

The qualitative statistical population, designed to identify the influential factors in the *design and validation of the adult literacy curriculum model focused on improving social and economic skills* based on the grounded theory method, consisted of a group of experts: academic specialists, officials from literacy education departments with relevant experience, literacy instructors responsible for implementing literacy education, as well as university scholars and distinguished organizational consultants from Tehran Province. Participants were selected purposively, and the number of experts in the qualitative section was *20 individuals.*

These expert participants possessed at least *29 years of work experience,* held *doctoral degrees or higher,* and served in *managerial positions.* Considering the nature of qualitative data collection—specifically, when the aim of the interview is to explore and describe participants' beliefs and attitudes—and given time and resource constraints, a sample size of *20 interviews* was deemed sufficient.

The data for this study were gathered through *semi-structured interviews* conducted with 20 experts from the academic community, university specialists, and literacy instructors residing in Tehran Province. In conducting the interviews, the researcher first presented an introduction explaining the purpose of the interview and a general definition of the *adult literacy curriculum focusing on improving social and economic skills.* Subsequently, the research questions, designed according to the predetermined structure, were asked of each interviewee.

Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the qualitative participants indicated that out of a total of 20 experts, 14 individuals (70%) were male and 6 individuals (30%) were female. Regarding age distribution, 1 participant (5%) was between 25 and 30 years old, 9 participants (45%) were between 30 and 40 years old, 6 participants (30%) were between 40 and 50 years old, and 4 participants (20%) were above 50 years old. In terms of educational level, all participants (100%) held doctoral degrees or higher, while none held a master's degree, reflecting the high level of academic and professional expertise among the study's participants.

The data analysis method in the qualitative phase was based on the *Grounded Theory Approach.* In this method, three fundamental components are considered: *concepts, categories,* and *propositions.* Concepts refer to assigning titles or labels based on the semantic content of events, incidents, and occurrences. Categories, compared to concepts, are more abstract and represent a higher level of analysis. In other words, by combining several related concepts, a category or class is formed. Propositions, in fact, emerge from a comparative process that establishes relationships between a category and its concepts, as well as among specific categories.

The grounded theory method includes three types of coding: *open coding, axial coding,* and *selective coding.* The coding process (i.e., identifying concepts within the data) is conducted in three stages:

1. Open coding,
2. Axial coding, and
3. Selective (theoretical) coding.

The systematic version of grounded theory consists of six components that integrate the core (central) phenomenon with axial and selective categories. These six components of the *paradigm model* are as follows:

1. **Central phenomenon:** Also referred to as the *core or central category* or the *focal variable,* it represents the central element of the theory that emerges from the data analysis. It is the core concept discovered within the research context.

2. **Causal conditions:** These are the circumstances and factors that lead to the formation and development of the central phenomenon. They encompass a set of related causes and attributes that give rise to the main phenomenon.

3. **Contextual conditions:** These refer to the contexts in which the causal conditions influence the main phenomenon. Contextual conditions shape the strategies (actions and interactions) and determine the environment in which the phenomenon operates. In some cases, distinguishing causal conditions from contextual conditions can be challenging.

4. **Intervening conditions:** These include the structural factors and conditions that either intensify or weaken the effects of causal and contextual conditions. In other words, they serve as facilitators or inhibitors of the influence exerted by causal and contextual factors.

5. **Strategies:** This component represents the set of micro and macro actions undertaken as a result of causal conditions to enhance and strengthen the central phenomenon. These strategies include behavioral approaches, actions, and tactics that occur according to contextual and intervening conditions.

6. **Consequences:** These are the outcomes and results derived from the interaction of conditions, strategies, and other elements of the model.

In summary, the process systematically connects the *core category* to other categories and presents these relationships within a coherent narrative framework, refining and enhancing the categories that require further development.

Table 1. Extracted Concepts and Categories

Theoretical Code (Condition)	Selective Code (Category)	Initial Codes (Basic Themes)
Contextual Conditions	Observance of Values	Principles of the Adult Literacy Curriculum
		Curriculum Values
		Individual Values
		Promotion of the Adult Literacy Curriculum
		Deviant and Improper Behaviors in the Curriculum
		Socialization of Individuals
	Development of Behavioral Principles	Behavioral Principles
		Good and Virtuous Traits
		Behavioral Patterns and the Curriculum Charter
		Manners and Conduct
		Development of Behavioral Patterns
Causal Conditions	Establishing Infrastructure for Work Attachment	Sense of Satisfaction
		Strengthening Work Commitment and Interest
		Creating Suitable Conditions for Human Factors
		Personal Relationships
		Decision-Making
		Irresponsibility
	Internal Dimension of Individuals Toward Growth	Justice and Fairness
		Individual Level
		Employee Capabilities
		Motivation Among Employees
		Justice and Fairness
		Positive Attitude
		Delegation of Authority
		Reward and Punishment
		Service Orientation
		Integrity

		Responsibility
		Work Discipline
		Kindness
		Patience
		Fair Judgment
		Attitude
		Intention
		Self-Efficacy
		Internal Locus of Control
		Personal Values
		Beliefs
		Perseverance and Seriousness
		Weak Conscience
		Lack of Self-Esteem
		Interest in Job
		Virtues of the Curriculum
		Characteristics of the Curriculum
		Trust
		Sense of Equality and Fairness
		Weak Religious Conviction
		Commitment to Learning
		Adherence to Curriculum Values
		Freedom-Seeking Human
		Human Dimension
		Spirit of Collectivism
		Intelligence in the Curriculum
		Accountability
		Lack of Determination
		Employing Committed Staff
	Improving Skill Levels through Continuous Training	Learning
		Skill and Knowledge
		Structure and Framework of Competency
		Use of Actual and Potential Abilities
		Knowledge Level of Individuals
		Lack of Experience and Skills in the Administrative System
		Staff Competence in Skills and Knowledge
		Provision of Continuous Training
Organizational Strategy	Developing a Charter for the Adult Literacy Curriculum to Ensure Compliance with Curriculum Principles	Perfecting the Curriculum
		Value System
		Commitment to Islamic and Organizational Values
		Curriculum Codes
		Implementation of Curriculum Practices
		Valuing Compliance with Curriculum Principles
		Correct Understanding of the Curriculum Concept
		Emphasis on Observing Curriculum Principles at the Community and Family Levels
		Performance Values
		Curriculum Norms and Values
		Decline and Breakdown of Curriculum Boundaries
		Organizational Value-Creation Principles
		Alignment of Behaviors and Performance
		Curriculum Development Level
		Developing a Curriculum Charter
		Applying Curriculum Values
		Practical Commitment of Human Resources to Curriculum Principles and Legality
	Implementation and Execution of Essential Managerial Processes	Organizational Communication and Functional Processes
		Systematic Approach and Establishment of Managerial Processes

Core Category (Phenomenon)	Control of the Adult Literacy Curriculum	Design of Structured Organizational Mechanisms
		Systems Thinking and Holistic View in the Organization
		Organizational Requirements
		Compliance with Curriculum Principles in Interactions with Internal and External Stakeholders
		Legitimacy of Organizational Actions
		Respect and Protection of Citizens' Rights
		Identifying Weaknesses and Planning for Improvement
	Intra-Organizational Characteristics (Core Phenomenon)	Providing Services to Clients and the Public
		Organizational Level
		Field Dependency
		Demographics
		Parental Influence
		Social Capital
		Job Characteristics
		Organizational Culture
		Quality of Work Life
		Employee Motivation
		Managerial Bias and Personal Preferences
		Organizational Climate
		Performance Evaluation
		Organizational System
		Discourse Formation
		Knowledge Management Implementation
		Public Interest
		Conflict of Interest
		Expectations in the Organization
		Client Dissatisfaction
		Planning
		Motivation
		Avoiding Managerial Misuse of Authority
		Ethical Organizational Governance
		Dynamic and Learning Organization
		Organizational Aspects
		Identifying Organizational Vulnerabilities
		Individual Behavior and Beliefs
		Self-Control and Internal Commitment to Curriculum Values
		Corporate Reputation for Commitment
		Quick Response to Curriculum Noncompliance
		Influence for Personal Gain
		Creativity and Innovation
		Job Position
		Job Security
		Creative Management Program
		Organizational Reputation
		Transparency
	Decision-Making Around the Adult Literacy Curriculum	Alignment of Programs and Decisions
		Decision-Making Process
		Proper Planning and Use of Medium-Term Vision
		Unpredictability of Decisions
		Failure to Achieve Goals
	Conflict Resolution Ability Around Curriculum Goals	Low Managerial Power
		Reduced Legitimacy and Acceptance of Management
		Public Awareness Consideration
		Conflict Between Organizational and Individual Goals
		Conflict of Interest
		Employee Negligence

	Institutional Participation and Support	Formation of Experienced Employee Groups
		Employee Retention and Support
		Establishment of Healthy and Humane Relations
		Collective Spirit and Collaboration Growth
		Institutional Participation and Convergence
		Participation of All Employees
	Institutionalization of Organizational Culture	Culture of Self-Control
		Organizational Values and Culture
		Reforming the Administrative System Toward Islamic Organizational Culture
		Institutionalization of Curriculum Culture
		Culture of Participation
		Learning Organizational Culture
		Social Culture
	Organizational Structure	Organizational Structure
		Reforming Administrative Structures
		System Improvement and Renewal
		Establishing Unified Organizational Thinking
		Agile Organization
		Enhancing Administrative Structures and Relationships
		Focusing on Health-Oriented Businesses
		Organizational Health and Integrity
	Employee Skills and Knowledge	Targeted Training Through Mass Media
		Organizational Literacy Training
		Employee Ignorance
		Training Programs
		Employee Training Planning
		On-the-Job Training
		Staff Training and Development Aligned with Organizational Goals
		Educational and Socialization Processes
		Establishing Experienced Employee Networks
		Development of Communication and Psychological Sciences
		Training in Organizational Culture
		Continuous Learning Programs
Outcomes	Progressivism and Meritocracy	Human Resource Recruitment
		Behavioral Competence
		Merit-Based Promotion
		Job Processes
		Administrative Integrity and Competence
		Merit-Oriented Recruitment Systems
	Organizational Justice and Equality	Equal and Fair Distribution of Tasks
		Equal Workload Balance
		Justice Orientation
		Establishing Equilibrium in Dimensions
		Organizational Justice
	Reduction of Organizational Corruption	Governance-Level Corruption
		Financial Corruption
		Transparency in Information
		Clarification of Work Procedures
		Misconduct in Service Delivery
		Defined Job Roles and Authority Boundaries
		Absence of Administrative Violations
		Lack of Curriculum and Transparency
		Executive Transparency
		Nepotism Over Merit
		Neglect of Administrative Issues
		Reducing Curriculum-Related Corruption
		Improving Service Systems
		Identification of Organizational Bottlenecks

	Performance Evaluation System	Administrative Corruption
		Employee Silence
		Transparency in Instructions and Processes
		Social Justice Policies
		Elimination of Bureaucratic Procedures
		Achieving Organizational Objectives
		Quality Service Delivery
		Effective Actions and Activities
		Result-Oriented Evaluation System Design
		Serious Cooperation
		Accurate Supervision
		Implementation of Performance Monitoring Systems
		Benchmarking from Other Institutions
		Citizen Satisfaction Improvement
		Clear Regulations and Guidelines
		Long-Term Interest Assurance
		Lack of Proper Governance
		Absence of a Comprehensive Curriculum System in Society
		Lack of Customer Satisfaction Feedback
		Establishing a Performance Evaluation System
		Lack of Customer Feedback
		Providing Solutions for Improvement
		Competitor Behavior
		Integrated and Efficient Planning
		Effective Monitoring and Control
	Improving Leadership Behavior in the Curriculum System	Leadership Behavior Patterns
		Organizational Leaders and Managers
		Leadership Behavior
		Curriculum Leadership Existence
		Managerial Attitudes
	Observance of Labor Rights	Financial and Job Incentives
		Adherence to Public Interest
		Wage and Salary Adjustment Plans
		Motivational Systems Design
		Employee Rights and Welfare
	Social Interaction and Relationships with Others	Relations with Colleagues
		Mechanisms for Client Communication
		Manager–Employee Relationship
		Organizational–Job Relationship
		Organizational Conflicts and Individual Relations
		Commitment to Client Rights
		Regulation of Human Relations
Intervening Conditions	Environmental Stimuli	External Environment
		External Organizational Environment
		Environmental Conditions
		Work Environment
		Competitive Advantage
		Technological Growth and Internet Expansion
		Environmental Connection
		Resource Availability
		Constructive Competitive Context
	Legalism	Laws and Regulations
		Organizational Legal Requirements
		Bureaucracy
	Cultural Factor	Societal Culture
		National Culture
		Customs and Traditions
	Social Factor	Internal Organization
		Community and Surrounding Environment

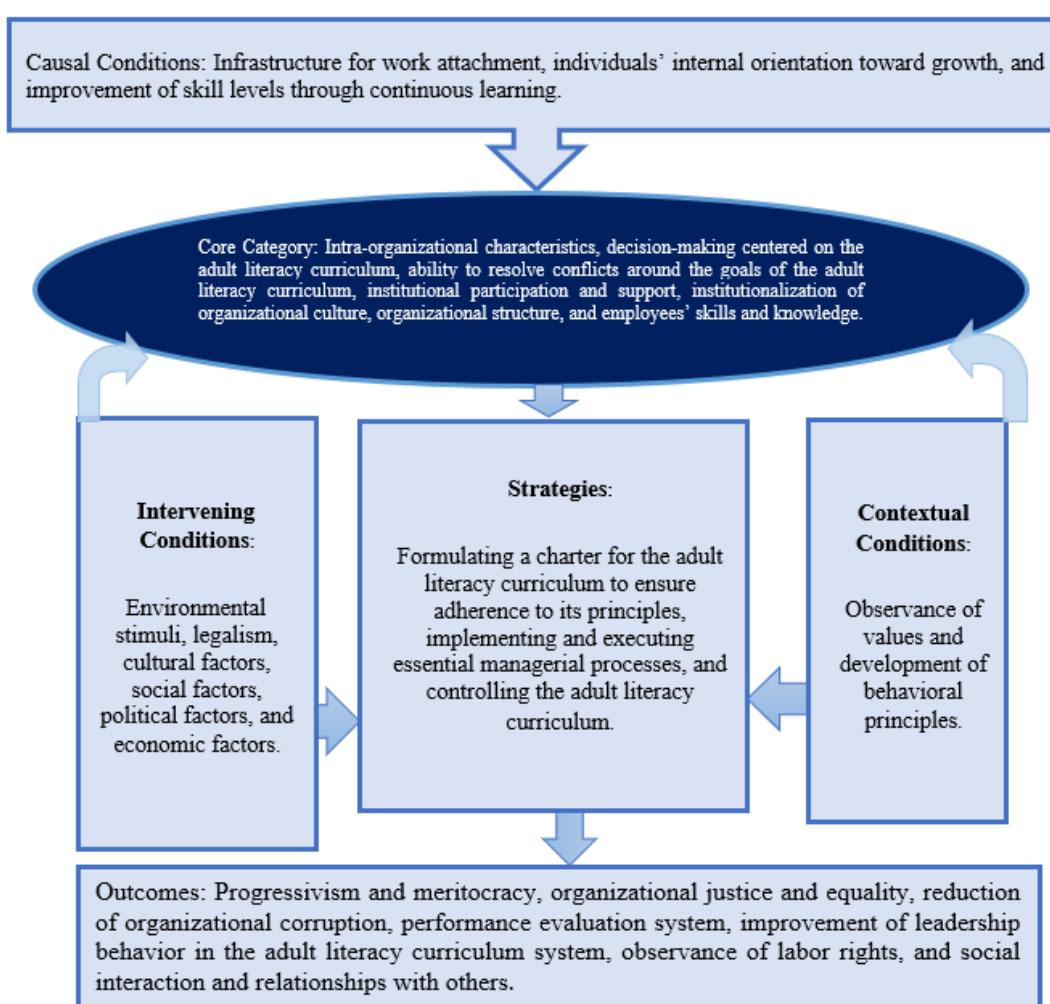|		
Political Factor		Governance Corruption Layers
		Organizational Interaction
		Customer Relations
		Political Strategies
		Curriculum Development Policies
		Misuse of Power
		Organizational Policies and Missions
		Strategic Decision-Making
		Political Manipulation
		Policy-Making
		Staff Politicization
Economic Factor		Creation of Economic and Financial Incentives
		Economic Growth Engine
		Financial Misconduct
		Resource Efficiency and Productivity
		Organizational Growth and Development
		Profitability and Effectiveness
		Individual Over Organizational Interests
		Organizational Profit and Alignment with Government Goals

Figure 1. Final Model of the Study

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to identify and validate the factors and components influencing the adult literacy curriculum with a focus on improving social and economic skills among learners in Tehran Province. Using a grounded theory approach, the findings revealed several key constructs, including causal, contextual, and intervening conditions; strategic components; and resulting outcomes. The causal conditions encompassed infrastructures for work attachment, individuals' internal orientation toward growth, and the improvement of skill levels through continuous learning. The core category included intra-organizational characteristics, decision-making around the adult literacy curriculum, conflict resolution related to curriculum goals, institutional participation and support, organizational culture institutionalization, organizational structure, and staff skills and knowledge. The findings further identified contextual conditions such as adherence to values and development of behavioral principles, as well as intervening conditions including environmental stimuli, legalism, and cultural, social, political, and economic factors. The strategies highlighted in the study—developing a charter for the adult literacy curriculum, implementing essential managerial processes, and enhancing curriculum control—led to several positive outcomes, including progressivism and meritocracy, organizational justice, reduction of organizational corruption, improved leadership behaviors, adherence to labor rights, and strengthened social relationships.

The findings of this study are consistent with the argument that literacy education for adults must transcend basic reading and writing instruction and incorporate dimensions that enhance employability, moral development, and social participation (1). The results underscore that work attachment and continuous learning are foundational to building self-efficacy and a sense of purpose among adult learners, which is in line with previous research emphasizing the necessity of integrating practical and vocational learning opportunities into literacy programs (4). Similarly, the finding that individuals' internal orientation toward growth plays a pivotal role resonates with Mälkki's argument that curriculum planning should cultivate autonomy, problem-solving, and reflection as essential elements of adult education (3).

The recognition of contextual conditions such as adherence to values and behavioral principles reinforces the view that adult literacy is not only a cognitive endeavor but also a moral and social one. According to Sharifan, Bagherzadeh, and Namjomanesh, literacy programs that incorporate social and ethical learning components foster civic responsibility and social cohesion (6). The emphasis on value-driven curricula also parallels Wilder's (2024) conceptualization of literacy as a tool for cultivating nonviolent, cooperative, and globally aware relationships (7). Within the Iranian context, where the Literacy Movement Organization has historically sought to combine educational and moral development, this alignment indicates that effective adult literacy programming must remain deeply rooted in social values (5).

The results also highlight the importance of institutional factors such as organizational culture, structural efficiency, and managerial decision-making, confirming that literacy education is inherently organizational as well as pedagogical. The findings that strong institutional support and participatory decision-making enhance program success align with Hashemi and Safari's observation that curriculum planning directly influences students' motivation, engagement, and academic achievement (1). Moreover, the institutionalization of a collaborative and value-oriented organizational culture corresponds with the broader literature on effective educational management, emphasizing that leadership and collective vision are necessary to sustain long-term learning outcomes (2).

Another major finding was the significance of continuous training as a pathway for skill enhancement and personal growth among adult learners. This outcome corresponds with the results of Mozahem and Adlouni, who found that entrepreneurial self-efficacy among learners improved when curricula incorporated ongoing learning, mentorship, and reflective practice (17). The same principle applies to Purusottama and Trilaksono's findings in Indonesia, where entrepreneurship-oriented literacy

programs effectively boosted participants' motivation and confidence (18). The inclusion of continuous education as a causal condition in this study thus reflects global recognition that adult literacy must be viewed as a dynamic and lifelong process rather than a limited intervention.

The intervening factors identified in this study—environmental, cultural, political, and economic—further support the systemic nature of literacy development. The influence of environmental stimuli and law-abiding behavior demonstrates how external factors shape internal organizational dynamics. Similar observations have been made by Wei and colleagues, who noted that policy frameworks and institutional accountability mechanisms significantly affect teachers' ability to deliver innovative and entrepreneurial education (20). The political and economic elements discovered in this study also correspond with Halfon's analysis of skills training for disadvantaged adults in the United Kingdom, where policy environments and financial support structures critically determine the success of literacy initiatives (4).

From a psychological and sociological perspective, the study's findings also underscore the critical interplay between personal attributes (motivation, responsibility, and positive attitude) and organizational structures. The results reveal that adult literacy programs succeed when they address learners' internal capacities for discipline, perseverance, and social belonging. These results mirror the conclusions of Nasr Esfahani and Etemadi, who emphasized the importance of psychological and spiritual intelligence in improving life satisfaction and educational persistence (23). Similarly, Miller and DiMatteo's research on family social support provides complementary evidence that motivation and adherence behaviors are more sustainable when supported by positive relational environments (24).

The findings related to the curriculum's outcomes—progressivism, meritocracy, organizational justice, and corruption reduction—reveal the transformative potential of adult literacy education. These outcomes correspond with the objectives of global education frameworks emphasizing fairness, inclusion, and accountability. As noted by Esmi, an effective curriculum framework not only improves academic competencies but also serves as a means of fostering social justice and equality (15). Moreover, the relationship between leadership behavior and curriculum outcomes confirms the vital role of ethical and visionary leadership in shaping the educational culture (2). When leaders demonstrate fairness, participatory decision-making, and accountability, they model the same values that literacy curricula aim to instill among learners (1).

The study also demonstrates that implementing a curriculum charter and managerial processes strengthens institutional control and transparency. This is consistent with Purzer and Nataraga's call for structured assessment and process-oriented evaluation methods in education (19). By promoting a systematic framework, adult literacy programs can achieve better alignment between planning, execution, and outcomes. The integration of such strategic frameworks further contributes to curriculum sustainability and responsiveness to social and technological change.

Cultural and social variables also emerged as powerful mediators in the relationship between literacy education and social participation. The cultural factor identified in this study—encompassing shared values, norms, and traditions—supports previous findings that culturally relevant curricula enhance learners' engagement and retention (22). The social factor, including interpersonal relations, community support, and teamwork, also aligns with Zamani et al.'s study on collaborative story reading, where group-based learning improved communication and literacy skills among at-risk students (21). Similarly, Walker and Troseth observed that social interaction and shared dialogue facilitate deeper learning and language acquisition, even among learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds (12, 13).

Moreover, the study found that adult literacy curricula promoting critical thinking, social interaction, and reflective discussion create better emotional and intellectual outcomes. These findings support Piasta and colleagues' argument that narrative skill and communication competence play essential roles in emergent literacy development (14). Though their

research focused on children, the underlying principle—that literacy growth is rooted in communication—applies equally to adult education contexts (25).

The link between socioeconomic status and learning outcomes, highlighted by this study, is consistent with evidence that literacy serves as both a consequence and a driver of socioeconomic equity (10, 11). Adults from lower-income backgrounds often face compounded disadvantages that literacy programs must explicitly address through contextualized and supportive pedagogies (8). Hence, the identified strategy of fostering institutional participation and social interaction in curriculum implementation helps mitigate such inequalities. These outcomes reaffirm the claim that adult literacy functions as a tool for empowerment, enabling learners to overcome economic marginalization and participate meaningfully in society (9).

Altogether, the findings of this research support the emerging consensus that adult literacy curricula must be holistic, integrated, and multidimensional. They must account for learners' psychological states, social contexts, and economic realities while maintaining institutional accountability and leadership ethics. Such an approach resonates with the interdisciplinary nature of literacy research, where educational, psychological, and sociocultural frameworks intersect (1, 7).

Despite its theoretical and practical contributions, this study faced several limitations. First, the research was confined to Tehran Province, which may limit the generalizability of its findings to other regions with different socio-economic, cultural, or institutional characteristics. Second, the qualitative sample, though rich in expertise, was limited to 20 participants, primarily educators and administrators; perspectives from learners themselves were not directly included. Third, while grounded theory provided depth in data analysis, the lack of longitudinal or quantitative validation means that causal relationships between variables should be interpreted with caution. Finally, the socio-political context in which the data were collected may have influenced participants' responses, particularly regarding institutional dynamics and organizational transparency.

Future studies could expand the scope of analysis by including diverse regions and populations to enhance the external validity of the model. Comparative research across provinces or between countries could reveal how different cultural, political, or economic environments affect adult literacy outcomes. Moreover, integrating mixed-methods approaches, combining grounded theory with quantitative modeling such as structural equation modeling, could strengthen causal interpretations. Researchers might also explore the longitudinal effects of implementing the identified curriculum strategies, particularly in relation to learners' long-term employment, social inclusion, and civic participation. Additionally, examining the role of digital literacy and online learning platforms in adult literacy education could offer valuable insights into the evolving landscape of lifelong learning.

Practically, educational policymakers and program designers should adopt a holistic framework that integrates moral, social, and economic competencies into adult literacy curricula. Institutions should emphasize continuous professional development for literacy educators and strengthen leadership accountability systems to ensure transparency and equity. Collaborative networks among governmental, non-governmental, and community organizations should be fostered to provide consistent support for learners. Furthermore, curriculum design should incorporate localized content and flexible delivery methods to meet learners' contextual needs while fostering self-efficacy, creativity, and social participation. Through these measures, adult literacy education can become a transformative force that promotes personal empowerment and sustainable community development.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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