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Integrating Chinese Language into Tanzania's Adult Education System: Policy Gaps, Lifelong Learning Opportunities and Implementation Pathways

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ABSTRACT

Tanzania's educational cooperation with China has expanded through Confucius Institutes, university programmes, secondary school syllabi, and the recent extension of Chinese language learning to primary and teacher education. Yet Chinese remains largely absent from adult and non-formal education, despite growing interaction between adult Tanzanians and Chinese actors in trade, tourism, construction, and digital commerce. This article examines the policy and institutional basis for integrating Chinese language education into Tanzania's adult learning system. It uses qualitative document review and comparative benchmarking of policy documents, curriculum materials, adult education frameworks, and selected African experiences. The analysis shows four main findings. First, Tanzania has a clear strategic rationale for extending Chinese language learning beyond formal schooling because language competence is increasingly linked to employability, business participation, and intercultural communication. Second, the adult education system provides practical entry points through the Institute of Adult Education, Folk Development Colleges, Community Learning Centres, vocational training programmes and distance learning platforms. Third, successful integration requires a localised, modular curriculum focused on functional Chinese for business, tourism, construction, community services and digital communication. Fourth, sustainability depends on teacher preparation, financing, monitoring, partnerships and adaptation to adult learners' linguistic backgrounds. The article proposes a phased implementation roadmap for pilot testing, curriculum development, teacher training, digital delivery, and policy institutionalisation. It contributes to debates on language policy, lifelong learning and South-South educational cooperation in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Language policy has become an increasingly important dimension of national development because it shapes who can participate in international trade, mobility, technology transfer, intercultural communication, and lifelong learning. In Tanzania, Kiswahili remains central to national identity and social cohesion, while English continues to play a major role in secondary education, higher education, administration, and global communication. However, changes in Tanzania's economic and diplomatic environment have widened the demand for additional foreign languages, particularly Chinese. China's growing role in infrastructure, commerce, manufacturing, mining, tourism, education and technology has made Chinese language competence a practical resource rather than a purely cultural interest.

Chinese language education in Tanzania has developed mainly through formal institutions. Confucius Institutes and Confucius classrooms have supported university-based teaching, while Tanzania has also introduced Chinese language curricula in secondary schools and, through recent curriculum reforms, extended the subject to primary education and teacher education.

This expansion indicates that Chinese has gained policy recognition as a strategic foreign language. Nevertheless, the formal education pathway has left an important gap: adult and non-formal education remain weakly connected to Chinese language learning; many adults interact directly with Chinese investors, employers, traders, tourists, technicians, and digital marketplaces.

The gap is important for equity and national development. Adult learners include informal traders, tour guides, workers in Chinese-supported projects, small entrepreneurs, migrant workers, women's groups, out-of-school youth, vocational learners and community leaders. These groups often operate in spaces where language skills have immediate economic value. A trader in Kariakoo, a tour guide in Zanzibar or Arusha, a construction worker on a Chinese-supported project, or a vocational learner preparing for employment may benefit more immediately from functional Chinese than a learner in a purely academic setting. Yet adult education programmes in Tanzania generally focus on literacy, numeracy, entrepreneurship, life skills, vocational competences and continuing education, with limited attention to foreign language learning beyond basic English.

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This article argues that integrating Chinese language education into adult and non-formal education would advance Tanzania's lifelong learning agenda while strengthening the practical value of China-Tanzania cooperation. The article does not propose replacing Kiswahili, English, or existing literacy priorities. Rather, it proposes a carefully targeted and localised approach in which Chinese is offered as a functional, optional and needs-based skill for adults whose livelihoods, employment, study or business activities require communication with Chinese-speaking partners. The article is guided by the following question: how can Chinese language education be integrated into Tanzania's adult education system in a manner that is policy-aligned, locally relevant, institutionally feasible and sustainable?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature supporting this article lies at the intersection of adult education, language policy, Chinese language education in Africa, international cooperation, and digital learning. Adult education scholarship emphasizes that adults learn best when learning is problem-centered, experience-based, flexible, and directly connected to real-life needs (Knowles, 1980; Knowles *et al.*, 2015; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Unlike children in formal schooling, adult learners often combine study with work, family responsibilities, and community obligations. This requires short, flexible, and practical learning opportunities rather than long academic programmes. Freire (1970) further reminds educators that adult learning should be empowering and rooted in the realities of learners' lives. For the present topic, this means that Chinese language modules should be linked to actual communicative situations such as greeting clients, negotiating prices, giving directions, explaining products, understanding safety instructions, or communicating in tourism settings. Lifelong learning literature also supports the inclusion of new skills across the lifespan. UNESCO (2015, 2016) positions lifelong learning as a foundation for inclusive development and Sustainable Development Goal 4. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2010, 2022) further argues that adult learning systems should support citizenship, employability, digital participation, and social inclusion. OECD (2019) and the World Bank (2019) similarly emphasise that changing labour markets require continuous upskilling. In Tanzania, adult and non-formal education policy has historically supported literacy, community development, and skills acquisition, but the changing economy now requires a broader understanding of adult skills. A foreign language linked to major trade and employment networks can therefore be considered part of the modern adult learning agenda.

Language policy and planning theory provides a useful lens for understanding why the integration of Chinese into adult education requires more than classroom teaching. Language planning involves decisions about language status, acquisition, function, and institutional support (Cooper, 1989; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Ricento, 2006;

Spolsky, 2004). Introducing Chinese into adult education would involve acquisition planning because it concerns how adults learn the language; corpus and materials planning because learning resources must be adapted to Kiswahili-speaking adults; and status planning because policy must define the legitimate place of Chinese within adult and vocational learning. Without such planning, Chinese may remain concentrated in universities and selected schools, while adults who need it for practical economic participation continue to depend on informal interpreters or mobile translation tools.

Studies on Chinese language education in Tanzania demonstrate the growing policy relevance of the language. Masanilo and Ammann (2024) show that Mandarin learning in Tanzania is connected with cultural exchange, scholarships, economic opportunities and people-to-people relations. Likoko and Wu (2025) examine how Tanzania's foreign language education policies shape Chinese language development in higher education, identifying both strong student interest and continuing challenges related to resources, qualified educators and localised materials. Kambaya and Xiao's work on Tanzania's language policy and the promotion of Chinese also points to the role of policy, Confucius Institutes, teacher preparation and learning resources. These studies collectively show that Chinese is no longer peripheral in Tanzania's educational landscape, although research on adult learners remains scarce.

The broader China-Africa literature helps explain the demand side of Chinese language learning. China-Africa cooperation has grown through trade, infrastructure, scholarships, construction projects, technical training and people-to-people exchanges (King, 2013; Li, 2015; Makundi *et al.*, 2017; Shangwe, 2017). Related evidence from E-Palli's multidisciplinary literature also shows how China-linked infrastructure can influence vocational education, technological transfer and technical skills development in neighbouring Asian contexts (Khinnithuck *et al.*, 2026), which is relevant to this article's focus on language, skills and employability. Confucius Institutes have been discussed as instruments of cultural diplomacy, soft power, and language promotion (Gil, 2017; Hartig, 2016; Hubbert, 2019; Paradise, 2009; Starr, 2009; Yang, 2010; Zhao & Huang, 2010). In Tanzania, this soft-power and educational cooperation context intersects with local economic realities. Adult traders, employees, and service providers do not necessarily need academic-level Chinese; they need functional communication, cultural orientation, and confidence to engage in everyday interactions.

Digital learning literature further strengthens the case for a flexible adult learning model. Mobile-assisted language learning can support vocabulary practice, pronunciation, listening, and learner autonomy (Godwin-Jones, 2011; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). In the Sub-Saharan African context, Selmi (2023) shows that ICT can support literacy promotion when technology is linked to access, inclusion and local learning needs. The COVID-19 period accelerated the use of flexible and

online learning models, while UNESCO (2023) cautions that technology must be used in ways that reduce rather than deepen inequalities. For adult Chinese learning in Tanzania, digital delivery may include WhatsApp-based micro-lessons, radio-supported learning, low-data audio files, mobile applications, blended community classes, and online support from trained instructors. However, digital delivery must be localised, affordable, and supported by human facilitation, especially for adults with limited literacy or limited access to stable internet.

Tanzania's adult education context has also been shaped by a long history of literacy, community development, non-formal education and skills provision (Bhalalusesa, 2020; Mushi, 2009; United Republic of Tanzania, 2014, 2019, 2020, 2021). Regional and international adult learning frameworks further emphasise system building, community learning centres, participatory monitoring and the need to connect adult education with livelihoods (ADEA, 2018, 2021; Bhola, 2006; DVV International, 2020, 2023; Institute of Adult Education, 2018, 2020; Ouane & Preece, 2010; Rogers, 2004, 2014). These sources suggest that Chinese language education for adults should be located within existing adult learning structures rather than introduced as an isolated project.

The internationalisation and language policy literature also shows that foreign language education is connected with mobility, identity, higher education, cultural exchange and global competitiveness (Altbach *et al.*, 2009; Baldauf & Kaplan, 2006; Jarvis, 2004; Mezirow, 1991; Tollefson & Pérez-Milans, 2018). In the China–Africa context, studies have examined African traders, intercultural communication, scholarships, cultural diplomacy and the practical role of language in economic relations (Bodomo, 2010; Mayer, 2019; Wang & Lemmer, 2015). This literature reinforces the argument that adult Chinese language learning should be analysed not only as a language issue, but also as a policy, economic, and intercultural development issue.

Despite these useful bodies of literature, three gaps remain. First, most Tanzanian studies focus on higher education or secondary education, not adult and non-formal education. Second, existing literature often treats Chinese language learning as a formal academic subject, while adult learners may need occupationally specific and short-cycle language modules. Third, there is limited discussion of how Tanzanian institutions such as the Institute of Adult Education, Folk Development Colleges, Community Learning Centres, vocational training centres, TIE, Confucius Institutes, and private sector actors could work together to design a sustainable adult Chinese language pathway. This article addresses these gaps by linking policy, institutional readiness, curriculum localisation, and implementation planning.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article used a qualitative document review and comparative benchmarking design. The design was suitable because the objective was not to measure learner

achievement or test the effectiveness of an existing programme, but to examine whether Tanzania has a policy and institutional basis for integrating Chinese language education into adult learning systems and to propose an implementation pathway. Document review is appropriate for policy-oriented education research because it enables the researcher to identify policy intentions, institutional mandates, implementation gaps, and points of alignment across different sources (Bowen, 2009).

The reviewed materials were grouped into five categories. The first category included Tanzanian education and adult learning policy documents, including the Education and Training Policy, adult and non-formal education frameworks, inclusive education strategies, and education sector development documents. The second category included Chinese language education materials and curriculum-related documents from Tanzania, including secondary and advanced secondary Chinese syllabi, recent curriculum reform documents, and documents describing the expansion of Chinese language learning to additional education levels (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2023; Tanzania Institute of Education, 2015, 2021). The third category included institutional materials relating to the Institute of Adult Education, Folk Development Colleges, Community Learning Centres, vocational education, and distance learning. The fourth category included published academic studies on Chinese language education in Tanzania and Africa. The fifth category included international literature on adult education, lifelong learning, language policy, digital learning and China–Africa educational cooperation.

The analysis followed four steps. First, documents were screened for relevance to Chinese language education, adult learning, policy alignment, curriculum development, teacher preparation, digital delivery, and institutional coordination. Second, relevant information was coded using broad thematic categories: policy gap, learner demand, institutional entry point, curriculum localisation, human resources, financing, technology, partnerships, monitoring and sustainability. Third, selected African experiences were used for benchmarking, not as models to be copied, but as examples showing how Chinese language teaching can be adapted beyond university classrooms. Fourth, findings were synthesised into an implementation framework and phased roadmap for Tanzania.

The study has two limitations. First, it is based on document review and benchmarking rather than direct interviews with adult learners, IAE officials, Chinese companies, tour guides, or informal traders. Therefore, the proposed roadmap should be treated as a policy-informed framework requiring pilot testing. Second, some policy and institutional documents may change over time. The article therefore emphasises adaptable implementation principles rather than a fixed national programme.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis produced five main findings. These are discussed in relation to policy alignment, demand for adult Chinese learning, institutional entry points, curriculum localisation, and sustainability conditions.

First, Tanzania has a strong policy rationale for extending Chinese language learning to adult and non-formal education, but the existing policy architecture remains fragmented. Chinese has entered formal education through universities, secondary schools, and recent curriculum reforms, showing that the language has gained official recognition. However, adult education policy and practice still focus mainly on literacy, numeracy, life skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational learning. These priorities are important, but they do not fully respond to changing economic relations. The absence of Chinese from adult education creates an access gap: young learners in formal institutions may access Chinese, while adults already active in trade, tourism, construction, or employment with Chinese-linked projects remain outside structured learning opportunities.

This finding has implications for social equity. If Chinese language competence becomes increasingly associated with scholarships, employment, trade, and cross-cultural business, then restricting access mainly to formal learners may reproduce inequality. Adult learners who missed earlier schooling or who are already working may not be able to enrol in university-based programmes. A lifelong learning approach would make basic and functional Chinese available through community-based, vocational and digital channels. This does not require a compulsory national Chinese programme; rather, it requires policy recognition that foreign language skills can be part of adult employability and community development.

Second, economic and social demand for functional Chinese is likely to be strongest among adults whose daily activities already involve Chinese-speaking actors. Potential learner groups include informal traders purchasing Chinese goods, workers in construction and manufacturing firms, tourism service providers, drivers, port and logistics workers, vocational learners, entrepreneurs, community leaders, and adults preparing for training or scholarship opportunities in China. For these groups, the relevant language need is not advanced literary Chinese. It is practical communicative competence: greetings, numbers, bargaining, product descriptions, safety instructions, directions, customer service, workplace expressions, basic cultural etiquette, and use of translation tools.

The Tanzania case therefore requires a Chinese for Specific Purposes approach. Chinese for business, Chinese for tourism, Chinese for construction safety, Chinese for hospitality, and Chinese for community services would be more relevant than a general academic syllabus. Such an approach is consistent with adult learning theory because it begins with the learner's immediate needs and builds language around real tasks. It also reduces psychological barriers because adults may fear that Chinese is too difficult due to tones, characters,

and unfamiliar grammar. A functional approach can begin with pinyin, oral communication, survival phrases, audio practice, and task-based dialogues before gradually introducing characters where necessary.

Third, Tanzania already has institutional entry points that could support pilot implementation. The Institute of Adult Education is the most relevant national institution because of its mandate for adult and non-formal education, distance learning, and community outreach. Folk Development Colleges and Community Learning Centres could provide local venues for evening, weekend, or short-cycle courses. Vocational institutions could integrate Chinese modules into hospitality, logistics, construction, textile, agriculture, and business courses. TIE could support curriculum development and localisation, while Confucius Institutes and university Chinese departments could support teacher training, materials development and cultural orientation. Chinese companies and business associations could support workplace-based language learning for employees and local partners.

The institutional implication is that no single agency should carry the programme alone. A sustainable model would require coordination among MoEST, IAE, TIE, vocational authorities, local government authorities, Confucius Institutes, universities, employers, and community organisations. Without coordination, adult Chinese learning may remain a scattered activity provided by private tutors or informal apps. With coordination, it can become a structured but flexible component of adult skills development.

Fourth, curriculum localisation is essential. Imported materials designed for university students or international learners may not fit Tanzanian adult learners, especially those with limited time, low literacy, or specific occupational needs. A localised curriculum should use Kiswahili support, familiar examples, Tanzanian market and workplace contexts, audio materials, role plays, and culturally relevant scenarios. It should also use modular progression. For example, a first module could cover greetings, self-introduction, numbers, money, and polite expressions. A business module could cover prices, product names, bargaining, and ordering goods. A tourism module could cover welcoming visitors, explaining destinations, emergency expressions, and cultural etiquette. A construction module could cover safety commands, tools, workplace instructions, and reporting problems. A digital module could teach learners how to use dictionaries, translation applications, and pronunciation tools responsibly.

Assessment should also be functional. Instead of relying only on written tests, adult learners could be assessed through role play, oral tasks, listening activities, simulated business conversations, workplace scenarios, and simple portfolios. Certificates could be issued for short modules, allowing learners to accumulate credits over time. This would align with lifelong learning principles because adults could learn in small units according to their needs

and availability.

Fifth, sustainability depends on human resources, financing, technology, monitoring, and partnerships. Teacher capacity is the most immediate challenge. Tanzania has a limited number of locally trained Chinese teachers, and many existing instructors are oriented toward school or university settings rather than adult pedagogy. Therefore, teacher preparation should include both Chinese language competence and adult education methodology. Native Chinese instructors can contribute, but they also need orientation in Tanzanian adult learning contexts, Kiswahili-supported teaching, participatory methods, and occupational language use. Local teachers should be prioritised for long-term sustainability.

Financing is another challenge. Adult education is often underfunded, and adding a new language area may be difficult without partnerships. Potential sources include government skills-development budgets, Chinese cultural and educational cooperation, Confucius Institutes, local Chinese companies, tourism bodies, business associations, NGOs, and modest learner contributions where appropriate. However, cost-sharing must not exclude low-income learners. Pilot programmes should therefore begin in high-demand areas where benefits are visible and where local partners can support delivery.

Digital learning offers an important but not sufficient solution. Mobile phones, WhatsApp groups, audio lessons, radio programmes and low-data applications can reduce access barriers. However, technology cannot replace teacher support, especially in pronunciation, tonal practice, and confidence building. The most realistic model is blended learning: short face-to-face sessions supported by audio files, mobile exercises, community radio, peer practice, and online support. Digital tools should also be evaluated for quality, data cost, language support, and accessibility for adults with different literacy levels.

Monitoring and evaluation are necessary from the pilot stage. Baseline data should be collected on learner profiles, occupations, motivation, attendance, completion, learning outcomes, and application of Chinese in real life. Pilot evaluations should ask whether learners actually use Chinese in business, tourism, workplace communication, digital trade, or further learning. Monitoring should also assess teacher performance, material relevance, cost, learner satisfaction, and institutional coordination. Without evidence, it will be difficult to justify expansion beyond pilots.

Table 1 summarises the proposed integration framework.

Table 1: Proposed framework for integrating Chinese into adult education in Tanzania

Component	Proposed strategy	Responsible actors
Policy alignment	Recognise functional Chinese as an optional lifelong learning and employability skill within adult and non-formal education.	MoEST, IAE, TIE, PO-RALG
Curriculum design	Develop short modular courses such as Chinese for business, tourism, construction, hospitality, and community services.	TIE, IAE, Confucius Institutes, universities, sector experts
Delivery model	Use evening, weekend, workplace, community, and blended learning formats.	IAE, FDCs, CLCs, VETA, LGAs, employers
Teacher preparation	Train local Chinese instructors in adult pedagogy and orient native speakers to Tanzanian contexts.	UDSM, UDOM, IAE, Confucius Institutes
Digital support	Use mobile audio lessons, WhatsApp groups, low-data platforms, radio and supervised language apps.	IAE, EdTech partners, CIs, community media
Financing	Use mixed financing through government, partners, the private sector, and targeted project support while protecting low-income learners.	MoEST, Chinese partners, companies, NGOs, tourism bodies
Monitoring	Track enrolment, completion, practical use, satisfaction, cost, and learning outcomes from the pilot stage.	IAE, MoEST, research institutions, local coordinators

It shows that Chinese language integration should not be treated as a single subject inserted into adult education, but as a system involving policy, curriculum, delivery, teacher capacity, technology, finance, and monitoring.

Table 2 proposes a phased roadmap from pilot preparation to national institutionalisation. The timeline is intentionally flexible because implementation should be evidence-driven and adjusted after pilot evaluation.

The immediate priority is not a rapid national rollout, but a credible pilot programme in carefully selected areas where adult demand is visible. The proposed roadmap should be implemented cautiously. Chinese language learning may bring economic benefits, but it also raises questions about cultural balance, linguistic equity, and national priorities. The programme should therefore be framed as optional, needs-based and supportive of

Table 2: Phased implementation roadmap for adult Chinese language education

Phase	Period	Main activities	Expected output
Preparation	Year 1	Stakeholder consultation, needs assessment, curriculum mapping, partner identification, and selection of pilot sites.	Policy note, pilot design, and draft modular curriculum
Pilot implementation	Year 2	Train instructors; launch short courses in selected urban, tourism, trade and vocational centres; introduce digital support.	Tested modules, trained instructors, and learner feedback
Evaluation and refinement	Year 3	Assess learning outcomes, cost, attendance, completion, occupational relevance, and institutional coordination.	Revised curriculum, assessment tools, and scaling recommendations
Expansion	Years 4-5	Expand to additional FDCs, CLCs, vocational institutions, and workplace learning centres.	Broader access and certified short courses
Institutionalisation	After Year 5	Integrate functional Chinese into adult learning policy, certification systems, and sustainable financing mechanisms.	Recognised adult Chinese language pathway

Tanzania's broader development objectives. Kiswahili should remain central to national cohesion, while English and other foreign languages should continue to serve their established roles. Chinese should be added where it responds to clear community, occupational, or strategic demand.

Another important issue is localisation and ownership. China-supported language programmes have sometimes been criticised for asymmetrical cultural diplomacy. In adult education, this risk can be reduced by ensuring Tanzanian institutional leadership, local curriculum development, Kiswahili-supported materials, community needs assessment, and joint monitoring. Adult Chinese language education should not be a one-way cultural transfer. It should become a practical tool enabling Tanzanians to participate more confidently and equitably in China–Tanzania cooperation.

The findings also show that adult Chinese language education can strengthen existing national efforts in skills development. For instance, workers in construction and logistics could benefit from safety-related communication, tour guides could improve services for Chinese visitors, traders could negotiate more directly, and vocational learners could improve employment readiness. These benefits will only be realised if language learning is directly tied to real-world tasks. A purely academic approach would likely fail to attract and retain adult learners.

Overall, the integration of Chinese into Tanzanian adult education is feasible, but feasibility depends on strategic design. The strongest model is a modular, localised, flexible, and partnership-based model rather than a conventional school subject model. Such a model aligns with adult learning theory, language policy planning, and lifelong learning principles. It also responds to Tanzania's changing economic geography without overburdening the adult education system.

A further implication concerns certification and learner progression. Adult learners are often motivated when

short learning experiences lead to visible recognition. For this reason, Chinese language learning for adults should not begin as an open-ended informal activity without certification. A three-level micro-credential structure could be introduced: basic survival Chinese, occupational Chinese, and applied workplace Chinese. Each level could include a small number of contact hours, guided self-study, oral performance tasks, and practical assessment. Such a system would allow traders, workers, tour guides, and vocational learners to demonstrate competence without enrolling in a long academic programme. It would also create a bridge for those who later wish to pursue more advanced Chinese courses through universities, Confucius Institutes, or online platforms.

The question of the language of instruction is also central. Since many adult learners are more comfortable in Kiswahili than English, teaching Chinese through English alone would weaken access. Kiswahili-supported materials would make the programme more inclusive and consistent with Tanzania's linguistic ecology. This does not mean that English should be excluded; rather, materials can use Kiswahili as the main bridge language while introducing useful English terms where relevant to business, tourism or digital trade. A trilingual presentation of key phrases, for example, Kiswahili-Chinese-English, would help learners connect new language forms with familiar communicative contexts. This would also make learning materials more usable for instructors whose Chinese competence is still developing.

The adult education route can also support local teacher development. Tanzania already needs more Chinese language teachers for formal education. Adult education programmes could become additional professional spaces for local teachers, graduates of Chinese programmes, and advanced learners. However, recruitment should be accompanied by short training in adult pedagogy. Teaching adults requires different classroom management, pacing, examples, and assessment methods from teaching

adolescents. Teachers need to know how to use learners' occupational experiences, how to support learners with different literacy levels, how to teach pronunciation without discouraging beginners, and how to design practical tasks rather than abstract grammar drills.

Partnership with employers should be handled carefully. Chinese companies, tourism firms, and business associations may be willing to support language training because it improves workplace communication and customer relations. However, public institutions should ensure that employer-supported programmes protect learners' interests and do not become narrow company training detached from national education standards. The role of IAE and TIE would therefore be to maintain curriculum quality, certification standards, and learner protection while allowing employers to provide sites, funding, occupational vocabulary, and real-life scenarios. A pilot programme should prioritise regions and sectors where demand is most visible. Dar es Salaam would be important because of trade, logistics, and Chinese business presence. Arusha and Zanzibar would be relevant because of tourism. Mbeya, Mwanza, Dodoma, and Tanga may provide opportunities linked to trade, transport, construction, and regional development. Rural pilots should not be ignored, but early implementation may be more successful where demand, partners and instructors are easier to mobilise. Once pilot models are refined, lower-cost digital and radio-supported versions could extend access to more remote areas.

The proposed integration also requires careful communication to the public. Some communities may ask why Chinese should be introduced when adult education still faces challenges in literacy, numeracy, and funding. The answer should be clear: Chinese language learning should not compete with core literacy priorities; it should be offered as an additional, optional skill where there is demonstrable demand. Policy communication should emphasise economic usefulness, learner choice, cultural understanding, and practical communication. It should also clarify that Kiswahili remains the national language and that Chinese learning is part of broader multilingual competence for global engagement.

Finally, research should accompany implementation. Baseline studies are needed to identify which adult groups need Chinese, what level of competence they require, which teaching methods work best, and whether language learning improves employment, business confidence, customer service, or workplace safety. Future studies should collect data from adult learners, instructors, employers, IAE officials, Chinese companies, tour guides, traders, and vocational trainees. Such evidence would help Tanzania avoid policy borrowing and instead build a locally grounded adult Chinese language model. The present article therefore offers a framework, but the next stage should be empirical pilot research.

There is also a need to think about the progression between non-formal adult learning and formal education. Some adult learners may start with a short course because

of immediate occupational need, but later develop interest in advanced study, professional certification, or study opportunities in China. A well-designed system should therefore make it possible for adult learners to move from short community modules to more structured programmes offered by IAE, universities, Confucius Institutes or online providers. This pathway would make adult education a bridge rather than an educational dead end. It would also support the wider national objective of expanding human capital in areas linked to international cooperation and economic transformation.

Another issue is materials development. Adult Chinese learning materials should not simply reproduce school textbooks. They should include sector-based dialogues, visual vocabulary, pronunciation audio, Kiswahili explanations, culturally sensitive examples, workplace safety expressions, tourism scenarios, and business communication tasks. Materials should also recognise Tanzanian realities such as informal markets, small-scale entrepreneurship, regional tourism, public transport, construction sites, and community service settings. A local materials development team should include Chinese language specialists, adult education experts, Kiswahili language experts, curriculum developers, sector practitioners, and learners themselves. This would improve relevance and ownership.

The integration of Chinese into adult education should also be assessed against inclusion principles. Women traders, youth outside formal schooling, rural learners, persons with disabilities, and adults with limited schooling may face different access barriers. Course schedules, fees, teaching venues, digital platforms, and assessment methods should therefore be designed to avoid exclusion. For example, evening and weekend classes may suit working adults, but women with family responsibilities may need flexible schedules or community-based delivery. Audio-based learning may support learners with limited reading confidence, while visual materials may support beginners. Inclusion should therefore be built into programme design rather than added after implementation problems emerge.

At the policy level, the proposed initiative could be placed within broader skills development and internationalisation strategies rather than treated as a stand-alone foreign language project. This framing is important because adult education often struggles for funding when programmes are seen as peripheral. If Chinese language learning is linked to employability, tourism quality, workplace communication, trade facilitation, entrepreneurship, and digital participation, it becomes easier to justify within national development planning. The programme can also contribute to diplomatic and cultural understanding, but its strongest policy argument in adult education is practical socioeconomic relevance.

Ethical and political sensitivity should also be considered. Language education is never neutral because it reflects power relations, cultural values, and access to opportunity. For this reason, Chinese language education for adults

should be presented as a learner-centred opportunity rather than an externally driven agenda. Communities should be consulted before courses are launched, and learners should be able to choose modules that match their needs. Transparent communication, Tanzanian institutional leadership, and regular evaluation would reduce suspicion and help ensure that the programme strengthens local agency rather than dependency. The article therefore proposes a balanced position. Chinese language education should be neither exaggerated as a solution to all employment problems nor dismissed as irrelevant to adult learners. Its value lies in specific contexts where communication with Chinese-speaking actors affects work, business, tourism, safety, training, or mobility. A focused, flexible, and evidence-based approach would allow Tanzania to test this value, refine delivery, and expand only where results justify further investment. In this sense, the programme should be understood as one carefully targeted part of a broader adult education reform agenda that values literacy, livelihood skills, digital competence, intercultural awareness and inclusive participation in a changing economy and diversified international partnerships.

CONCLUSION

This article examined the possibility of integrating Chinese language education into Tanzania's adult education system. The analysis shows that Tanzania has already recognised Chinese as a strategic foreign language in formal education, but adult and non-formal learning remain largely outside this development. This creates a policy and access gap because many adults who interact directly with Chinese-speaking actors in trade, tourism, construction, employment, and digital commerce lack structured opportunities to learn functional Chinese. The article concludes that Chinese can be integrated into adult education if it is treated as a practical lifelong learning skill rather than a conventional academic subject. The most suitable approach is a localised modular curriculum delivered through IAE, FDCs, CLCs, vocational institutions, workplace programmes and blended digital platforms. Modules should focus on functional communication for business, tourism, construction, hospitality, community services, and digital trade. Teacher preparation, financing, monitoring, and partnerships must be addressed from the beginning. The proposed roadmap recommends starting with needs assessment and pilots before broader expansion. Pilot evidence should guide curriculum revision, certification, financing, and institutionalisation. For sustainability, Tanzanian institutions should lead curriculum localisation and implementation, while Confucius Institutes, Chinese partners, universities and employers provide technical and resource support. In this way, adult Chinese language education can contribute to lifelong learning, employability, intercultural communication and more equitable participation in China-Tanzania cooperation.

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