

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE READING SKILLS AMONG LEARNERS IN ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION CENTERS IN KAKAMEGA COUNTY, KENYA.

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Abstract

This paper aimed to examine the instructional strategies for enhancing English language reading skills among adult learners in ACECs in Kakamega County, Kenya. A descriptive survey research design was used to generate both qualitative and quantitative data. The sample size for the study comprised 20 ACE instructors and 80 adult learners in ACECs, making a total of 100 respondents drawn from 16 Adult and Continuing Education Centers (ACECs) across four sub-counties in Kakamega County. Data was collected using instructor questionnaires and an observation schedule. The data collected are presented graphically. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and to establish the relationship among the study variables, the study employed inferential statistics, thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative data. The research findings revealed that conventional teaching strategies such as lecture method were prominently employed in teaching English language reading skills and were ineffective. The finding provided a foundation for enhancing instructional strategies to better meet the needs of adult learners in ACECs. It provided understandings that guided policymakers in developing effective curricula, teacher training programs, and resource allocation strategies to enhance mastery of English language reading skills among adult learners in ACECs in Kenya.

Keywords: *adult learners, Instructional strategies, Reading skills,.*

Introduction

In the United States, adult and continuing education plays a critical role in providing learning opportunities for individuals seeking to enhance their literacy skills, particularly in English language reading skills. As the demands of the 21st-century economy increasingly require higher literacy levels, effective instructional strategies have become central to improving adult learners' reading competencies. Many adult learners face challenges such as limited prior educational experiences, language barriers, and competing responsibilities like work and family, which make the adoption of appropriate instructional strategies essential for learning (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

Instructional strategies in adult education centers across South Africa have emphasized

learner- centered approaches, bilingual education methods, and the use of contextually relevant materials to improve English language reading skills. Strategies such as differentiated instruction, phonics-based interventions, and the integration of digital literacy tools are increasingly being employed to meet the diverse needs of adult learners. Research highlights that when instructional strategies are adapted to learners' backgrounds and real-world experiences, there is a significant improvement in reading comprehension and language fluency (Prinsloo & Baynham, 2021).

Education has been and continues to be a pillar of progress and a means for Kenya to free her citizens from its pre-independence challenges such as poverty, ignorance and diseases (Mugambi,2021). Adult and Continuing

Education (ACE) in Kenya plays a pivotal role in equipping individuals with essential literacy skills, thereby fostering personal and societal development. Literacy, particularly reading proficiency, is fundamental to lifelong learning, economic empowerment, and active citizenship (UNESCO, 2022). Despite the significant progress, literacy challenges persist, particularly among adults in rural regions, where limited access to quality education exacerbates the problem.

Many adult learners in Kenya struggle with reading proficiency due to challenges such as limited previous schooling, socio-economic factors, and language barriers (Ngugi, 2021). Instructional strategies, such as learner-centered approaches, differentiated instruction, and the use of technology, have been identified as critical in improving reading skills among adult learners. A balanced approach that integrates phonics, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension strategies has been suggested as best practice in adult education settings (Ochieng, 2020). However, there is a notable gap in the application of such strategies within Kenyan adult education centers. While there is an emerging body of literature highlighting effective instructional practices in adult literacy programs globally, research specifically focusing on the context of Kenyan adult learners remains scarce (Ochieng, 2020). Despite the significant role of adult education in Kenya's development agenda, instructional strategies often vary widely, and their effectiveness is seldom evaluated. Furthermore, there is insufficient research exploring the specific instructional strategies that most effectively support English reading skills in the Kenyan context (Wambugu & Kimani, 2019). This gap calls for more focused research to identify and evaluate the instructional methods that can best enhance reading skills among adult learners in Kenyan education centers. This paper therefore, had a single objective that sought to examine the instructional strategies for enhancing English language reading skills among adult learners in ACECs in Kakamega County.

Statement of the problem

Despite the crucial role that adult

education plays in Kenya's development agenda, adult learners, particularly in rural regions such as Kakamega County, continue to face significant challenges in acquiring English language reading skills. These challenges are intensified by factors such as socio-economic constraints, limited access to quality education, and diverse linguistic backgrounds, with many learners speaking local languages as their first language (Wambugu & Kimani, 2021). The persistent challenge of low literacy levels among adult learners in Kenya, particularly in rural areas such as Kakamega County, highlights the need for effective instructional strategies in Adult and Continuing Education Centers (ACECs). In spite of the efforts to improve adult literacy, research indicates that the instructional strategies employed for teaching English Language Reading Skills in ACECs remain inadequate, often failing to meet the diverse learning needs of adult learners. Existing studies have primarily focused on general literacy challenges in ACE, neglecting the efficacy of specific instructional strategies used to enhance reading skills.

Literature Review

Instructional strategies for teaching are tactics enacted by ACE instructors to improve adult learners' acquisition of English language reading skills. The teaching strategies are important in facilitating learners in acquiring reading skills. Proper strategies support instructors in making learning enjoyable and helps learners aspire to become taught (Jamison, 2012). Instructional strategies consider not only the techniques and atmosphere for teaching but also the educational content. This study examined all the instructional strategies for teaching adult learners English language reading skills in ACECs.

Teaching strategies can be realized in various ways; discussion, lecture, and demonstration among others. They can either be physical or on virtual platforms. For instance, Lin & Sun (2024) examined the influence of four ways of conducting discussions among adult learners virtually. The study aimed to know how varied discussion activities motivated adult learning process. These activities included video

discussions, problem-based discussions, self-created meme discussion, and debates. The study found out that all the four discussion strategies motivated adult learners to actively participate in learning. Accordingly, problem-based was the highly effective strategy whereas debating was the least engaging strategy to adult learners. The present study explored the use of varied teaching strategies inclusive of discussion in ACECs. However, the gap in literature lies in the fact that the prior study was conducted on virtual adult learners unlike the present study which was carried out among adult learners within ACECs in Kenya.

One commonly employed instructional strategy is explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics, which forms the foundation for reading fluency and word recognition. This approach involves direct teaching of letter-sound relationships, blending sounds, and decoding unfamiliar words. Research conducted by Kruidenier (2022) indicates that phonics-based instruction significantly improves reading outcomes among adults with low literacy, especially those learning English as a second language. Unlike children, adult learners benefit more from direct, systematic instruction that explicitly explains how the English sound-symbol system works. Teachers often begin with simple consonant-vowel-consonant patterns and progress to more complex word structures, integrating frequent review and practice sessions.

Another key strategy is vocabulary development through thematic instruction. In ACECs, instructors often use topics relevant to adult learners' lives such as; employment, health care, transportation, and civic engagement, as contexts for teaching new vocabulary. This approach not only enriches learners' word knowledge but also enhances their comprehension by providing meaningful connections to real-world applications. Burt, Peyton, and Van Duzer (2025) argue that thematic instruction increases motivation and retention, as learners are more likely to remember vocabulary that is directly applicable to their daily routines. This study analyses the strategies used to enhance reading skills among the adult learners in ACEC.

According to Wrigley (2023), certain strategies increase learner confidence and language fluency and help develop both academic and social uses of English. These approaches emphasize collaboration, learner autonomy, and instructional responsiveness to learners' needs and interests. In practice, this means instructors act more as facilitators than lecturers, encouraging learners to take an active role in setting learning goals and participating in instructional decisions. In reading instruction, collaborative strategies such as paired reading, peer tutoring, and small-group discussion are widely used. This study explored the widely used teaching strategies in ACECs in Kenya, and their effectiveness in enhancing reading skills.

In China, government-funded ACECs have adopted SDL tools like digital storybooks, personalized reading logs, and language-learning apps. Learners are encouraged to set personal literacy goals and access mobile platforms like Xuexi Qiangguo for extended reading practice (Zhao & Chen, 2021). However, the present study was conducted on a different population, experiencing varied learning contextual learning environment to establish effective teaching strategies in ACECs.

Purwaningsih (2024) conducted a study to examine operational problem-based learning strategies for teaching adult learners. The study considered the uniqueness of adult learners and believed proper strategies were necessary in achieving the learning objectives. Findings showed that implementation of the problem-based learning involved planning, implementation, and evaluation. The study revealed great progress in understanding and citizenship skills among adult learners. Specifically, adult learners established improved critical thinking, problem-solving capabilities and appreciation of values. Also, instructors observed an improvement in learner engagement and participation during learning session. The current study sought to all teaching strategies inclusive of problem-based learning activities to establish the extent in which they enhanced reading skills.

Methodology

The research article sought to examine Instructional strategies for enhancing English

language reading skills among adult learners in ACECs. This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design enabled the generation of quantitative data on identifying the instructional strategies for enhancing reading skills among adult learners. Such a design provided actual current facts of a phenomenon, increased opportunities for getting opinions, attitudes and preferences as well as in-depth and longitudinal explanations in social sciences and educational research, (Orodho, 2009). The targeted population of the study comprised of 20 ACE instructors and 80 adult learners in ACECs, making a total of 100 respondents drawn from 16 ACECs across four sub-counties in Kakamega County. To effectively elicit data for the research objective, multiple data collection instruments were employed. The choice of these instruments was guided by their ability to capture both qualitative and quantitative data, thereby enriching the study findings. The study used Questionnaires, and Observation

schedules to collect data. Piloting was conducted to ascertain the validity and reliability of the questionnaire before data collection.

Findings

According to this study, the study used both qualitative and quantitative research tools to collect data. These were, an ACE instructor structured questionnaire, and structured observation. The quantitative data is presented alongside qualitative data in narrations, to support the quantitative data. These descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts and percentage distributions, were used to determine how commonly each instructional strategy was applied across the sampled population of 100 respondents. These statistics were then visually represented using bar graphs generated through SPSS software version 29, enabling clearer comparison and interpretation of the usage trends of various instructional methods. The findings are presented in Figure 1 below.



Figure 4.1: Instructional strategies in ACECs

The study findings from Figure 4.1 reveal that discussion and reading comprehension strategies were the most frequently employed instructional methods, each accounting for 10.0% of total responses (n=10 out of 100 respondents). This suggests a preference for learner-centered techniques that theoretically foster active engagement and deeper understanding (Knowles,

Holton, & Swanson, 2025).

Similarly, while reading comprehension strategies are theoretically vital for developing critical literacy skills among adult readers (Pretorius & Spaul, 2025), the integration of observation schedule data indicates that their implementation was limited in scope and pedagogical depth. This discrepancy between

intended and enacted practice suggests that these strategies were ineffective in promoting English language reading skills among adult learners in ACE centers. This finding aligns with existing literature on the implementation gap in adult education, where well-intentioned instructional approaches fail to achieve their objectives due to inadequate execution or contextual constraints. The dominance of instructor-led approaches observed contradicts Self-Directed Learning Theory's emphasis on learner autonomy and agency, highlighting a critical tension between espoused instructional philosophy and actual classroom practice.

The findings of this study provide a nuanced perspective on the effectiveness of instructional strategies used to enhance reading comprehension in Adult Continuing Education Centres (ACECs). In comparison with the findings of Moge (2023), who reported that group discussion significantly improved students' reading comprehension using a pre-experimental single-group pre-test and post-test design, the present study yielded contrasting results. While Moge's study involved early school beginners at the primary level and demonstrated that group discussion effectively enhanced reading comprehension skills, the current study focused on adult learners and instructors. Within the ACE context, group discussions did not significantly enhance reading skills. This divergence may be attributed to contextual and demographic differences, particularly the distinct learning characteristics of adult learners, whose educational backgrounds, motivations, and literacy levels vary considerably. The ineffectiveness of discussion strategies in ACECs may also reflect inadequate facilitation techniques and insufficient adaptation of collaborative approaches to adult learning contexts.

The study further revealed that lecture methods (9%), phonics instruction (8%), and vocabulary development activities (8%) were frequently employed instructional strategies. This prevalence suggests that traditional direct instruction approaches remain dominant in ACECs. Such methods are often considered appropriate when introducing complex concepts

requiring systematic explanation, as supported by Merriam and Baumgartner (2020). However, despite their frequent use, these strategies were found to be largely ineffective in enhancing English language reading skills. Learners were not fully engaged in the instructional process, and formative assessment during instruction was rarely conducted. Consequently, the strategies became teacher-centred and passive in nature. Questionnaire responses further indicated that instructors tended to adopt these methods out of convenience and familiarity, prioritizing ease of execution over learner engagement. This preference inadvertently derailed the learning process and limited the development of functional reading competence among adult learners.

Other instructional strategies observed included the project method (6%), scaffolding of reading tasks (6%), group reading activities (6%), reading aloud (6%), and peer-to-peer learning (6%). These strategies theoretically align with adult learning principles, which emphasize collaboration, contextualized learning, and gradual mastery of skills through social interaction and practical application (Brookfield, 2023). Despite their pedagogical relevance, their implementation in ACECs was limited and moderately effective. The findings indicate that these methods did not significantly improve reading fluency or text interpretation skills among learners with diverse linguistic backgrounds and varying levels of English proficiency. During classroom observations, learners were often inattentive and insufficiently engaged. Instructors did not adequately differentiate instruction or balance group composition according to learners' linguistic abilities. As a result, peer pairing and collaborative tasks did not yield the anticipated learning outcomes. Moreover, reading aloud was sometimes perceived as embarrassing, particularly for learners without prior English language exposure, thereby undermining learner confidence and participation.

Overall, the findings suggest that while a variety of instructional strategies are employed in ACECs, their effectiveness is constrained by limited learner engagement, insufficient instructional differentiation, and inadequate

assessment practices. The results underscore the need for context-sensitive pedagogical approaches that are better aligned with adult learners' needs, promote active participation, and incorporate continuous assessment to enhance reading comprehension outcomes.

The study found the following as less frequently utilized teaching strategies: discovery learning (5.0%), deductive methods (5.0%), use of technology (5.0%), inductive approaches (4%), and individualized reading plans (4%). Similarly, the low usage of these teaching strategies was attributed to various justifications. For instance, the nature of adult learners in ACECs hindered them from self-directed learning such as discovery, deductive learning. This was common with learners who had never been to school previously. Also, the analysis revealed that instructors failed to guide learners on how to read on their own, in order to enhance their reading fluency, ability to interpret texts as well as improve their vocabulary acquisition. The lower usage of technology was due to limited knowledge on handling such technologies as mobile phones, essential in reading, and also limited internet enabled gadgets that enhance learning. This may reflect infrastructural limitations common in adult education centers in rural areas (UNESCO, 2022).

Aforementioned, the use of technological based teaching strategies was hampered by limited infrastructural facilities in the ACECs. The adult instructor technological awareness contributed on how much they initiated and embedded technology in their lessons. The commonest technological learning devices was the use of mobile phones in learning reading skills. In all the learning centers, the ACEC instructors acknowledged the use of mobile phones while teaching reading skills. However, the mobile phones were also a hindrance to learners who were unable to connect to electricity,

to charge their mobile phones.

In general, the effectiveness of the all the above teaching strategies was hampered by several related factors. They range from failure of ACE instructors to consider the adult learners learning uniqueness in reading skills acquisition, preoccupation of the adult learners limited their learning time, they seemed to lack time for self-discovery during learning of reading skills, unless during vocabulary identification sessions. Further, the used strategies for teaching reading skills did not involve as well as engage the adult learners during learning. Some reading activities such as peer reading was ineffective as adult learners disregarded being taught by their colleagues. They preferred being taught by their instructors only.

Conclusion

Basing on the descriptive survey research design on instructional strategies for enhancing English Language Reading Skills among adult learners in ACECs. This study concludes that according to the global significance attached to English language proficiency, having effective instructional strategies remains critical in attaining reading skills competence. However, all the instructional strategies employed to teach English language reading skills were ineffective in one way or another. They can only be effective if properly tailored in the context of the adult learners, in order to enhance English language reading skills.

The study found out that the instructional strategies used for enhancing English language reading skills are less effective in ensuring acquisition of reading fluency, and text interpretation. It is therefore recommended that ACE instructors to tailor the available strategies to the language learning needs of the modern adult learner for improved performance.

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Appendix I: Questionnaire for ACE instructors

This questionnaire aims to get information on instructional strategies of teaching and learning reading skills in adult and continuing education centers in western Kenya. Kindly respond to all the questions accurately being as honest as possible. The information given will be confidential and for academic purposes only.

Section A: Demographic Information

Gender: Male Female Age: _____

Highest Educational Qualification:

Diploma Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree Other: _____

Teaching Experience in Years: _____

Number of Years Teaching in ACECs: _____

Section B: Instructional Strategies Used in Teaching English Language Reading Skills

Please tick (✓) all the instructional strategies that you frequently use in teaching English reading skills to adult learners in ACECs: **List of Instructional Strategies (Grouped by Approach)**

A. Learner-Centered Strategies

(Focus on active learner involvement, autonomy, and participation)

Tick the strategies you frequently use:

- Group discussions and peer learning
- Role play and drama
- Brainstorming sessions
- Learner-led presentations
- Problem-based learning (PBL)
- Collaborative learning projects
- Reflective journaling
- Learning through storytelling
- Self-directed learning tasks (with minimal instructor input)
- Use of real-life simulations or community-based tasks

B. Teacher-Centered Strategies

(Focus on direct instruction and content delivery by the teacher)

Tick the strategies you frequently use:

- Lecture method (chalk and talk)
- Dictation and note-taking
- Reading aloud (by instructor)
- Demonstrations by the teacher
- Question and answer sessions led by the teacher
- Recitation and repetition drills
- Grammar-translation method
- Teacher explanation of vocabulary and reading passages
- Use of textbooks and teacher-guided exercises
- Controlled reading comprehension exercises

C. Blended / Technology-Enhanced Strategies

(Combination of learner and teacher roles, with digital tools or multimedia)

Tick the strategies you frequently use:

- Use of audio recordings (radio, MP3s)
- Use of videos or educational TV for comprehension
- Mobile-based reading apps or SMS reading tasks
- Blended learning (mix of in-person and digital tools)
- Computer-assisted reading programs (if available)
- Use of WhatsApp or other platforms for sharing reading materials
- Use of flashcards or digital slides
- Accessing online stories or reading passages
- Use of projector/slideshows for shared reading
- Interactive games or quizzes (Kahoot, word puzzles)

**D. Experiential and Context-Based Strategies
(Tied to learners’ environment and real-life experiences)**

Tick the strategies you frequently use:

- Field-based reading assignments (e.g., market signs, health brochures)
- Community reading clubs or discussion groups
- Use of local newspapers or posters
- Reading labels on food/drug containers for comprehension
- Interviewing local resource persons and reporting back
- Reading public notices and interpreting them
- Using learners’ personal stories for reading practice
- Involving learners in reading while performing practical tasks
- Using indigenous/local materials for reading practice
- Linking reading topics to learners' livelihoods (e.g., farming, business)

Section F: Frequency of Use

How frequently do you use the following strategies when teaching English reading skills? Please tick (✓) the appropriate option.

Instructional Strategy	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Lecture method	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Discussion method	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Reading comprehension strategy	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Phonics instruction	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Vocabulary development	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
... (continue with rest as above)					

Section G: Challenges Faced in Strategy Use

Briefly describe any challenges you face when implementing the above instructional strategies:

Appendix II: Observation guide

I am Rodgers Achesa, a MMUST student conducting an educational research on Efficacy of instructional strategies for teaching English language reading skills among learners in adult and continuing education centers in Kakamega County, Kenya.

Date.....Lesson topic.....Number of learners..... Starting timeEnding time
.....

Instructional strategies

Observed Instructional Strategies in ACECs – Kakamega County

This document presents observed instructional strategies used by instructors in Adult and Continuing Education Centers (ACECs) in Kakamega County, Kenya.

Observed Instructional Strategies

The following strategies were directly observed during classroom visits in ACECs. These strategies reflect actual teaching practices applied by instructors in reading sessions:

- Reading aloud by the teacher
- Use of charts and flashcards
- Group reading sessions
- Choral reading (whole class reads together)
- Use of textbooks and printed materials
- Teacher explanations and note dictation
- Question and answer sessions
- Writing key vocabulary on the board
- Pair reading (two learners read together)
- Silent individual reading time
- Use of local newspapers or pamphlets
- Learner-led story narration
- Use of real-life objects (realia) for reading activities
- Role playing of reading passages
- Reading practice during life skills activities (e.g., hygiene posters)
- *(indicate any other teaching strategy used by the ACE instructors)*