

Exploring the Effectiveness of Community-Based Literacy Programs on English Language Acquisition Among Adult Learners in Pankshin, Plateau State Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of community-based literacy (CBL) programs in enhancing English language proficiency among adult learners in Pankshin LGA, Plateau State, Nigeria. Using a mixed-methods approach, this research examined program characteristics, demographic factors, and language acquisition outcomes. The theoretical framework integrated language acquisition theory, adult learning theory, and community-based education theory. The study was conducted to address the scarcity of empirical research on community-based literacy programs in Nigeria, informing policy and practice in adult education. A standardized questionnaire as well as a self-designed language proficiency test were adopted. The findings showed that the CBL program adopted was quite effective in improving the English language acquisition skills of adult learners. It was therefore recommended that instructors in adult-learning facilities adopt the CBL approach in enhancing the language skills of adult learners thereby promoting English language proficiency and empowering adult learners.

Keywords: community-based literacy programs; English language acquisition; adult learners; language acquisition theory; adult learning theory.

Introduction

According to the most straightforward definition, literacy can be conceived of as the ability to read and write. While a proper definition of literacy is still not unanimously agreed upon (Perin, 2020), current perspectives tend to extend beyond a basic knowledge of written language to encompass the notion of function. Accordingly, literacy comprises not only the ability to read and write, but also the ability to use such skills to function in society. UNESCO, for example, describes literacy as “the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society” (UIS Glossary). Along this line, according to the OECD, “literacy is defined as the ability to understand, evaluate, use, and engage with written texts to participate in society, achieve one’s goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential” (OECD, 2013).

Nigeria, with over 200 million people, faces significant literacy challenges, particularly in English language proficiency. Adult literacy education is crucial for national

development, empowering individuals to participate in civic, economic, and social life. Community-based literacy programs have emerged as a vital strategy for promoting English language acquisition among adult learners. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), Nigeria's adult literacy rate stands at 73%, with significant disparities across regions and socio-economic groups. English language proficiency is a critical issue, hindering many Nigerians' access to education, employment, and economic opportunities. The Nigerian government has recognized the importance of adult literacy, establishing the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) to coordinate literacy efforts. Despite the importance of community-based literacy programs, there is a scarcity of empirical research examining their effectiveness in promoting English language acquisition among adult learners in Nigeria. This study aims to fill this knowledge gap.

Research aim and objectives

This research is aimed at examining the effectiveness of community-based literacy programs in improving English language proficiency among adult learners by:

1. Identifying the demographic characteristics of adult learners participating in community-based literacy programs.
2. Assessing the relationship between program duration and English language proficiency gains.
3. Investigating the impact of instructional methods on English language acquisition.
4. Exploring participant perceptions of program effectiveness and areas for improvement.

Research Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of adult learners taught using the community-based learning program and those who were not taught using the community-based learning program.

Literature Review

The English language has spread around the globe as a powerful means of education, information, and communication. English began to play a greater role in science, technology, and media after World War II replacing German (Kalpan, 2013). All the countries of inner, outer, and expanding circles desire to include English as the medium of instruction (EMI) in their academia so that they can produce a competent workforce in the globalized world. Both the English language and literature deserved a formal place in higher education as England was achieving world dominance as an imperial power. Although English offers the potential for employment, mobility, and modernity in the age of globalization, some critics and educators advocate for mother-tongue education to promote literacy together with local indigenous languages. English is indisputably an important language for personal development and it would be impossible for politicians and policymakers to deny people's access to it. English is an unavoidable language, but mother tongue education needs to be promoted to meet the goal of 'education for all' (Milligan and Tikly, 2016). The argumentation highlights the necessity of providing literacy education in the local indigenous language(s) despite the hegemony of the English language around the globe.

Similarly, mother tongue education instead of English has been advocated recently in Nigeria as well. Some scholars are worried about the future of indigenous languages facing pressure due to the hegemony of English. There is a great threat to indigenous languages and cultural heritages because of the rapid development of English and the preference of Nigerian indigenous languages for promoting English not only in academia but also in socio-political lives.

English as a Global Language

The global spread of English in the present time has several reasons. People tend to learn English expecting job opportunities, international mobility, and modernization in the globalized world. In this context, Hornberger and Vaish (2009) have argued that one of the consequences of the globalization process is the spread of English as the medium of instruction in national school systems across the globe. They further claim that disadvantaged communities are increasingly demanding access to English so that their children can join a workforce that mandates knowledge of the language. Policymakers, politicians, and educators must recognize learners' indigenous knowledge as the foundation for learning, connecting and broadening it to regional, national, and global levels through the English language (Taylor, 2010).

Inner circle countries take English as a sellable property backing up their national economy. They provide teachers' training and other English courses such as International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to the aspirants desiring to move to English-speaking countries from outer and expanding circle countries such as India, Malaysia, China, and Nepal. In the name of Standard English, especially the UK, the USA, and Australia collect a good sum of currency from around the globe.

Literacy Education and English

Countries adopt literacy policies according to their local needs and political systems. Some countries are promoting mother tongue education while the majority of the countries are desirably incorporating English in their education system expecting to produce a global workforce in the competitive world. Although the colonization of England ended, the world seems to be colonized with their language as a strong weapon even today. In the current globalized world, Jahan and Hamid (2019) claim that the relationship between language, identity, and society faces struggles for the maintenance of identity and status, particularly in the field of education where English is the dominant language and English is used as a medium of instruction (EMI). Moreover, Milligan and Tikly (2016) have expressed their examination that almost all low- and middle-income postcolonial countries now use English as the medium of instruction at the secondary and tertiary levels. They assert that an increasing number of countries use English as the medium of instruction (EMI) in the latter stages of primary schooling and at preschool levels. The predominance of English is linked in part to the colonial and post-colonial legacies favouring global languages and often leading to the underdevelopment of indigenous languages.

Adult Education and Community Development

A number of studies have been undertaken on adult learning and community development indicating that education is universally accepted as an important element needed for societal

growth economically or socially. Community development refers to activities aimed at enhancing living standards through policies geared towards economic stability, social cohesion and political involvement. In these processes adult education plays a crucial role by providing individuals with skills and knowledge required for effective participation in community life leading to its development.

Adult education can promote social inclusion and economic enfranchisement as the UNESCO's Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) shows. Adult education programs can significantly lower unemployment, raise earnings and improve overall economic situation in a society. This adult education fosters social cohesion by bringing together people from different backgrounds to share their experiences as well as understanding one another. For this reason, it is important to have such a social capital to ensure that there exists resilient and inclusive communities.

Teaching Literacy to Adult Second Language Learners

Studies on effective reading instruction practices have been abundant in the last decades, but the bulk of research has been carried out with a focus on children. The findings summarized by the National Reading Panel (2000) highlighted that, in order to be successful, reading instruction should concentrate on the enhancing of decoding skills and phonemic awareness (frequently jointly referred to as 'alphabetic'), fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and efficient comprehension strategies. Given the similarities characterizing children's and adults' path to literacy acquisition, the same core areas were given attention in a seminal review of effective practices in adult reading instruction (Kruidenier, 2002). Among the reviewed studies, however, data concerning second language students were often lacking or extremely limited. Though, on the one hand, it has been repeatedly suggested that some techniques can be suitable for instructing non-literate adults, if carefully adapted (Burt *et al.* 2008), recent reviews of the literature on adult illiterate L2 learners have pointed out that a separate reading pedagogy for these learners should be implemented (Faux and Watson 2020).

Methodology

Research Design

The research was conducted by collecting quantitative data through structured and self-administered questionnaires and structured language assessment test.

Population and Sampling

The study was conducted within Pankshin Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. The population of the student involved 864 enrollees in 13 Adult Learning Institutions within the study area. The sampling involved randomly selected 200 adult learners selected from these institutions. 100 participants will form the control group without exposure to this study's structured Community-Based Literacy (CBL) program, while the remaining 100 will form the experimental group that will be exposed to the CBL program.

Research Instrument

The research utilized structured questionnaires and a developed testing system titled "English Language Proficiency Test for Adult Learners (ELPTAL)". The questionnaire included five (5) sections to collect data on the following: demographic spread, program participation, language proficiency, program satisfaction and instructional quality. The ELPTAL also had five (5)

sections to test the participants on the following aspects of English Language proficiency: reading comprehension, writing, listening, speaking and grammar & vocabulary. The five sections were accorded 20 marks each and 100 marks in total.

The instructors were first trained on the five aspects covered by the ELPTAL for one week for a total of 10 hours. The CBL program lasted for 12 weeks of instruction, with the instructors meeting with the participants for four hours per week.

Data Collection and Analysis

All questionnaires and ELPTAL answer sheets were collected and recorded. Marks scored for each segment of the ELPTAL testing was recorded. The data collected from the questionnaire were subjected to simple percentage descriptive analysis while the research hypothesis were subjected to t-test analysis.

Result

Questionnaire

Table 1

Section 1: Demographic Information

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
18-24	10	10
25-34	12	12
35-44	64	64
45-54	14	14
55-Older	10	10
Gender		
Male	43	43
Female	57	57
Educational Level		
None	40	40
Nursery	22	22
Primary	36	36
Secondary	2	2
Occupation		
Employed	40	40
Unemployed	33	33
Retired	27	27

Table 1 above shows the demographic spread of the participants. 64% of the participant fall within the age range of 34-44. 57% percent were of the female gender. 40% of the participant have never been enrolled in any school prior to the adult institution they now attended. 40% were employed.

Table 2

Section 2: Program Participation

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. How did you hear about the CBL program?		
a. Family/Friend	30	30
b. Social Media	1	1
c. Local Community Centre	46	46
d. Other	23	23
2. What motivated you to join the program?		
a. Improve English language skill	12	12
b. Enhance job prospects	32	32
c. Increase confidence	25	25
d. Meet new people	16	16
e. Others	15	15
3. How many hours do you attend the program per week?		
a. 1-2 hrs	49	49
b. 3-4 hrs	15	15
c. 5-6 hrs	24	24
d. More than 6 hrs	12	12
4. How long have you been participating in the program?		
a. Less than 3 weeks	14	14
b. 3-6 weeks	56	56
c. 7-9 weeks	13	13
d. 10-12 weeks	17	17

Table 2 shows details of the participants with respect to the program participation. 46% claimed to have heard about the program from their local community centre. 32% of them claimed to have been motivated to join the program to increase their job prospects. 49% of sample spent between 1-2 hours to attend the program per week. 56% spent between 3-6 weeks during the CBL program.

Table 3

Section 3: Language Proficiency

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Rate your current English language proficiency (EL)		
	14	14
a. Beginner	13	13
b. Intermediate	66	66
c. Advanced	5	5
d. Proficient	2	2
e. Fluent		
2. Which areas of EL skills do you struggle with the most?		
a. Reading	20	20
b. Writing	22	22
c. Speaking	20	20
d. Listening	12	12
e. Grammar	26	26
3. Have you noticed improvement in your EL skills since joining the program?		
a. Yes	57	57
b. No	13	13
c. Undecided	30	30

Table 3 shows details of the English language proficiency of the participants. 66% of the participants rated their language proficiency at the end of the program to be advanced. 26% of them claimed to be struggling with the grammar aspect of the EL skills, however, 57% of them noticed improvement in their EL skills at the end of program.

Table 4

Section 4: Program Satisfaction

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Rate your overall satisfaction with the program		
a. Very dissatisfied	0	0
b. Dissatisfied	2	2
c. Neutral	5	5
d. Satisfied	30	30
e. Very satisfied	63	63
2. What do you like most about the program?		
a. Instructor quality	25	25
b. Curriculum relevance	20	20
c. Class size	35	35
d. Support services	5	5
e. Others	15	15
3. Have you experience any challenges or barriers in the program?		
a. Yes	27	27
b. No	73	73

Table 4 above shows the participant response on their overall program satisfaction. 63% of them were very satisfied with the program. 35% of them preferred the class size of the program to other aspects. 73% claimed to have had no challenges or barrier during the program.

Table 5

Section 5: Instructional Quality

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Rate the quality of instruction		
a. Poor (1)	7	7
b. Fair (2)	12	12
c. Good (3)	33	33
d. Excellent (4)	42	42
e. Outstanding (5)	6	6
2. Rate the instructor's ability to explain concepts clearly		
a. Poor (1)	6	6
b. Fair (2)	8	8
c. Good (3)	28	28
d. Excellent (4)	37	37
e. Outstanding (5)	21	21
3. Rate the instructors' ability to provide feedback		
a. Poor (1)	11	11
b. Fair (2)	3	3
c. Good (3)	22	22
d. Excellent (4)	48	48
e. Outstanding (5)	16	16
4. Rate the instructors' ability to encourage participation		
a. Poor (1)	13	13
b. Fair (2)	12	12
c. Good (3)	21	21
d. Excellent (4)	47	47
e. Outstanding (5)	17	17

Table 5 above shows the response of the participants on the quality of instruction and instructors used during the program. 42% of them rated the quality of instruction to be excellent. 37% rated the instructors' ability to explain concepts as excellent. 48% rated the instructors' ability to provide feedback as excellent. 47% also rated the instructors' to encourage participation as excellent.

ELPTAL Test

Table 6

Pre-Test Mean Scores of participants in ELPTAL.

Groups	Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking	Grammar
Experimental	6	11	7	10	8
Control	3	4	8	7	5

Table 6 provides the mean scores of the pre-test scores of both the experimental and control groups in the ELPTAL prior to exposure to the CBL program. The experimental performed better in aspects of reading, writing, speaking and grammar as compared to the control group.

Table 7

Post-Test Mean Scores of participants in ELPTAL

Groups	Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking	Grammar
Experimental	14	13.5	15	12	13
Control	5	6	6	9	7

Table 7 provides the mean scores of the post-test scores of both the experimental and control groups in the ELPTAL after exposure to the CBL program. The experimental performed better in all aspects of the test as compared to the control group.

Discussion

Research Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of adult learners taught using the community-based learning program and those who were not taught using the community-based learning program.

Table 8

Summary of t-test analysis for experimental and control group

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	t _{cal}	t _{cri} $\alpha=.05$
Experimental	100	61.2	14.27	198	22.77	1.653
Control	100	25	7.11			

Table 8 above shows the t-test analysis of the post-test results of the experimental and control groups, after the experimental group had been exposed to the CBL program. It shows that the t-cal was 22.77 while the t-cri was 1.653 at significance level of 0.05 and degree of freedom at 198. This informed the decision to reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of adult learners taught using the community-based learning program and those who were not taught using the community-based learning program. It shows clearly that the CBL program was effective in improving the English language skills of adult learners.

From the questionnaire results in Tables 1-5, some deductions were also made. In Table 1, the demographic information obtained showed clearly that the adult learners were mostly within the age-range of 35-44 years old, female and mostly employed, though on part-time jobs. Table 2 answered questions on the program participation. 46% of the participants heard about the

program from their local community centre as this was the major means of information communication among the populace. Their major motivation for joining the program was to enhance their job prospects, since most of them are subsistent farmers and guardsmen. 49% of the participants were only able to devote within 1-2 hours per week during the CBL program and this might be one of the reasons their mean performance was below 70%. Most of them also attended the CBL program for only about 3-6 weeks of the 12 weeks during which the program lasted. About 66% of them rated themselves as advanced users of English language as a communicating tool after the program, thereby further stating the effectiveness of the CBL program. It was also noted by 26% of the participants who had challenges with the grammar and vocabulary aspects of the program. This might be due to the interference of mother-tongue and the relatively few English words they were already used to. They however noticed improvements in the EL skills since joining the program.

Tables 4 and 5 focused on their perception of the program and the impact of the instructional methods used. 63% of the participants were very satisfied with the overall program, while 35% preferred the class size of 10 to be quite effective. On the impact of the instructional method, 33% rated the quality of the instruction as good while 47% of them rated the ability of the instructors to encourage participation as excellent.

Tables 6 and 7 showed the mean performance of the participants in the ELPTAL test before and after exposure to the instrument respectively. It was observed that their reading skills was quite poor as the mean score was 6 for the experimental group and 3 for the control group out of a possibility of 20 marks. Considerable improvements were however seen after they were introduced to the CBL program.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study investigated the effectiveness of community-based literacy programs on English language acquisition among adult learners in Pankshin, Plateau State, Nigeria. The results of the study revealed a significant improvement in the English language proficiency of adult learners who participated in the community-based literacy program. The study's findings suggest that community-based literacy programs can be an effective strategy for promoting English language acquisition among adult learners in Pankshin.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Scaling up community-based literacy programs: The government and non-governmental organizations should scale up community-based literacy programs in Pankshin and other similar communities to promote English language acquisition among adult learners.
2. Capacity building for instructors: The instructors of community-based literacy programs should be provided with regular training and capacity-building programs to enhance their teaching skills and methodologies.
3. Development of contextualized teaching materials: Contextualized teaching materials that reflect the local culture and experiences of adult learners should be developed and used in community-based literacy programs.
4. Establishment of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms: Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established to regularly assess the effectiveness of community-based literacy programs and identify areas for improvement.

5. Encouraging community participation and ownership: Community members should be encouraged to participate in and take ownership of community-based literacy programs to ensure their sustainability and effectiveness.
6. Integration with other development programs: Community-based literacy programs should be integrated with other development programs, such as health, agriculture, and economic empowerment programs, to promote holistic development among adult learners.

By implementing these recommendations, community-based literacy programs can be more effective in promoting English language acquisition among adult learners in Pankshin and other similar communities.

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