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**EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF EARLY LITERACY INTERVENTION ON READING
COMPREHENSION AMONG ADULT LEARNERS IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Literacy is a fundamental skill that plays a critical role in individuals' socio-economic development, particularly in today's knowledge-driven world. However, millions of adults in Nigeria, including those in Kogi State, still struggle with basic literacy skills, hindering their ability to fully participate in the country's development. Early literacy intervention has been identified as a crucial factor in improving reading comprehension among the adult learners. This study aims to investigate the impact of early literacy intervention on reading comprehension among adult learners in Kogi State and used mixed method approach. By exploring the effectiveness of targeted literacy programmes, this research seeks to contribute to the development of evidence-based policies and interventions that can enhance adult literacy rates and promote lifelong learning in the state. This evidence-based position research draws on a 12-week field study and used simple random sampling technique to select one Local Government Area (LGA) from three senatorial districts of the state. Two functional adult literacy centres each (6 centres) with high learners' enrolment were selected from Okene, Dekina and Lokoja Local Government Areas. Twenty (20) adult learners were randomly selected from each literacy centres making a total of 120 adult learners. The study concludes that early literacy intervention significantly improves reading comprehension among adult learners in Kogi State. It recommends adoption of the 12-week module and inclusion of mother-tongue wordlists in the primer.

Keywords: Adult Literacy, Early Reading Strategies, Comprehension, Local Language Support, Kogi State.

Introduction

Literacy refers to the capacity to read for information, express ideas in writing, and engage in analytical thinking. It is therefore best understood as an ongoing learning process that individuals must pursue to function effectively in all areas of human life.

According to the NMEC, literacy rate is defined as the percentage of individuals aged 15 and above who can read and write simple statements for daily life. Therefore, it is deemed 'shameful' by the NMEC that Nigeria, in the 21st century, continues to grapple with a large

number of non-literates, with little significant action taken by authorities to rectify the situation. Nigeria's literacy statistics pale in comparison to those of other nations, considering the crucial role of education in national development. The prevalence of non-literacy significantly contributes to Nigeria's low level of development, as the growth and progress of any nation heavily rely on the education and proficiency of its populace.

Nevertheless, the government has made concerted efforts over the years to elevate literacy levels by establishing strategic institutions, commissions, and learning centres nationwide. While some states have made commendable strides in improving literacy rates by ensuring the functionality of dedicated centres and raising awareness among target populations, others have merely paid lip service to this critical issue. Unfortunately, the objectives of many of these institutions and agencies have been misconstrued, leading to a neglect of functional literacy development. Neglecting education, results in a larger portion of the populace remains non-literate, contributing minimally to societal advancement.

Literacy plays a vital role in national development, akin to health, and is integral to improving the quality of life for individuals. A literate population brings numerous advantages, including resource conservation. Therefore, investment in formal basic education, youth and adult literacy, and non-formal education is imperative to ensure that individuals of all ages have access to sufficient educational opportunities to develop their literacy skills.

The provision of adult literacy education, aimed at eradicating non-literacy among adults and equipping them with skills relevant for enhanced economic productivity, has been a global concern. Education, viewed as a fundamental human right, is enshrined in major United Nations and other international charters. The adult literacy sub-sector holds significance for skill acquisition, particularly for individuals outside the formal education system. Despite the implementation of various literacy programmes, literature indicates that adult non-literacy remains a significant challenge.

The goal is to break the cycle of poverty, reduce social problems, and attain personal fulfillment. Across the globe, literacy is regarded as a key driver of national development (World Economic Forum, 2015). This is because an educated population promotes the efficient use of human and natural resources for societal progress. By extension, literacy education is central to reducing non-literacy and achieving sustainable human development.

Literacy remains a core competency for socio-economic advancement, especially in a knowledge-based economy. Yet, millions of adults in Nigeria, including those in Kogi State, still lack basic reading and writing skills. This gap limits their participation in national development. Research shows that introducing comprehension strategies early in literacy instruction is critical to improving reading outcomes. This study therefore examines how early literacy intervention affects reading comprehension among adult learners in Kogi State. The aim is to provide evidence that can guide policy and programme design to improve adult literacy and promote lifelong learning.

National data indicate that Nigeria's adult literacy rate stands at 62%. In Kogi State, the situation mirrors this disparity. According to the State Agency for Mass Education (2024), 42% of adults cannot read a simple sentence. The ability to derive literal, inferential, and evaluative meaning from text determines whether literacy translates into better health choices, civic

engagement, and improved livelihoods. UNESCO (2017) also notes that comprehension skills taught within the first three months of instruction are the strongest predictors of long-term retention. Despite being a development priority, adult literacy programmes in Nigeria continue to record poor completion rates, with Kogi State being no exception.

Data on the literacy index published by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2017) reveal a persistent educational gap between southern and north-central states nearly six decades after independence. The report shows that 77.12% of people in northern states lack basic reading and writing skills, compared to lower rates in the south. Non-literacy rates in the North East, North West, and North Central are 67%, 58%, and 56% respectively, against 31% in the southern zones. For years, northern states have lagged behind in educational attainment, not due to lack of funding, but due to systemic challenges. In Kogi State, adult literacy centres record high enrollment but also high early leaver and weak comprehension outcomes (KSAME, 2022). A major reason is that most centres spend months on letter recognition and decoding before introducing meaning-making activities.

Reading Comprehension Literacy

Reading comprehension literacy is the ability to derive and construct meaning from text, beyond simply pronouncing words. It answers the WHY of reading. Basic reading, by contrast, involves decoding letters, matching sounds, and forming words, e.g., c-a-t- cat. Comprehension, however, asks, why did the cat run? What would you do? An adult who can read Take 1 spoon, 3 times daily but does not know the timing has decoded without understanding. That gap can be dangerous.

General literacy is broad. It includes reading, writing, numeracy, and digital skills. Reading comprehension literacy is a specific subset focused on understanding text. Functional literacy applies reading, writing, and comprehension to daily life, work, and civic duties, while reading comprehension is the cognitive process of interpreting written material. Momoh (2024). Functional literacy demands problem-solving and decision-making. Reading comprehension is measured by tasks such as summarising, identifying main ideas, and answering questions.

UNESCO (2017) defines literacy as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, and communicate through written materials for societal participation. Within this, comprehension is the cognitive foundation. The RAND Reading Study Group (Snow, 2002) describes comprehension as the simultaneous process of extracting and constructing meaning through the interaction of reader, text, and context. Perfetti's Lexical Quality Hypothesis further explains that rich word knowledge allows readers to shift quickly from decoding to meaning. Adults who pronounce words correctly but lack vocabulary or integrative skills often remain word callers (Perfetti, 2007).

Determinants Of Comprehension Literacy

Four broad factors shape comprehension outcomes:

- 1. Linguistic:** Vocabulary size is the strongest predictor of comprehension. Nagy and Scott (2000) estimated that 40–50 common words make up 50% of daily texts. Cummins' Common Underlying Proficiency theory also shows that skills in L1 can transfer to L2 reading, supporting brief use of mother tongue in instruction.

In Kucer's (2010) analysis, the linguistic aspect concentrates on communication and the construction of meaning. When engaging with written text, making sense of it involves a multi-faceted process categorised into three cueing systems: semantic, syntactic, and graph phonetic. These systems collaborate to aid readers in deriving meaning from the text. Utilising context clues and drawing on prior knowledge, adults decipher unfamiliar words within the context, a process referred to as the semantic cueing system. The syntactic cueing system assists readers in comprehending text by applying grammatical rules and sentence structures. Meanwhile, the graph phonetic cueing system facilitates text decoding by linking letter sounds with spoken words.

2. Cognitive: The cognitive aspect centres on mental strategies and processes employed by the mind to construct meaning. Skilled readers utilise this approach to adopt a metacognitive stance, enabling them to actively construct meaning. Learners are encouraged to employ these strategies to oversee and evaluate their comprehension while reading. Working memory, inferencing, and self-monitoring affect understanding. Teaching strategies like Question-Answer Relationship [QAR] helps adults track and repair breakdowns in understanding.

3. Instructional: The National Reading Panel found that explicit comprehension strategy instruction yields effect sizes of 0.32–0.55. For adults, delaying comprehension until decoding is perfect is counterproductive because they need immediate, practical application.

4: Contextual: Texts that reflect learners' lives or daily experiences boost interest and reduce cognitive load. Paris and Stahl refer to this as authenticity. In Kogi, passages on malaria, voter registration, and cassava farming are more meaningful than foreign examples.

Kucer's (2010), Amidst the focus on professional development concerning content and assessment due to testing and standards pressures, it's crucial not to overlook the socio-cultural aspect and its impact on learning. Cooperative learning strategies such as think-pair-share, jigsawing, role-playing, and graphic organisers prove valuable in teaching the necessary social skills. Despite being in the same grade, learners may not be at identical developmental stages. Some may require more support from peers, facilitators, and supervisors to succeed. With guided assistance and practice, learners can eventually grasp the skills and strategies. Facilitators must be mindful of learners' various learning styles, interests, and abilities to cater to all effectively.

Challenges of Reading Comprehension Literacy Among Adults in Kogi State

For adults learning English as a second language in a multilingual, low-resource setting, comprehension is difficult because it requires several skills at once.

i. Linguistic Challenges

Limited Vocabulary: Many adults know only 500–1,000 English words, far below the 10,000 needed for basic texts. When one in five words is unknown, meaning breaks down (Nagy & Scott, 2000).

Weak Decoding, Strong Oral Language: Many Kogi adults speak Ebira, Igala, or Yoruba fluently but struggle with English decoding. Simple View Reading (SVR) shows that if decoding is weak, comprehension fails even with strong background knowledge.

Absence of L1 Support: English-only policies ignore Cummins' finding that L1 can scaffold L2 learning. Without occasional mother-tongue explanation, learners overuse working memory for

translation. Grammatical Differences. English Subject, Verb, and Object (SVO) structure and tense markers differ from Ebira/Igala structures, making complex sentences hard to process.

ii. Instructional Challenges: Decoding First Approach, NMEC primers often spend 4–6 months on letters before real texts. This works for children but not for adults who need to read health or civic information now.

Irrelevant Content: Primers with topics like snow or London buses feel disconnected. Paris and Stahl note that inauthentic texts can reduce retention by 30–40%.

Large Classes and Limited Training. Ratios of 1:60–80 are common. Most facilitators are trained for children, not adults. Knowles (1984) emphasizes that adults need relevance and respect, which large classes undermine.

iii. Contextual/Social Challenges: Various social constraints, such as restrictions on girls' education or forced marriages, contribute to non-literacy. In regions where girls' education is discouraged, organisations advocating for women's education have emerged. Additionally, societal norms prohibiting female education and caste-based discrimination limit educational opportunities, perpetuating non-literacy among affected populations (Momoh, 2024)

Poor Print Environment as homes often lack books, newspapers, or labels, so skills decay quickly after class.

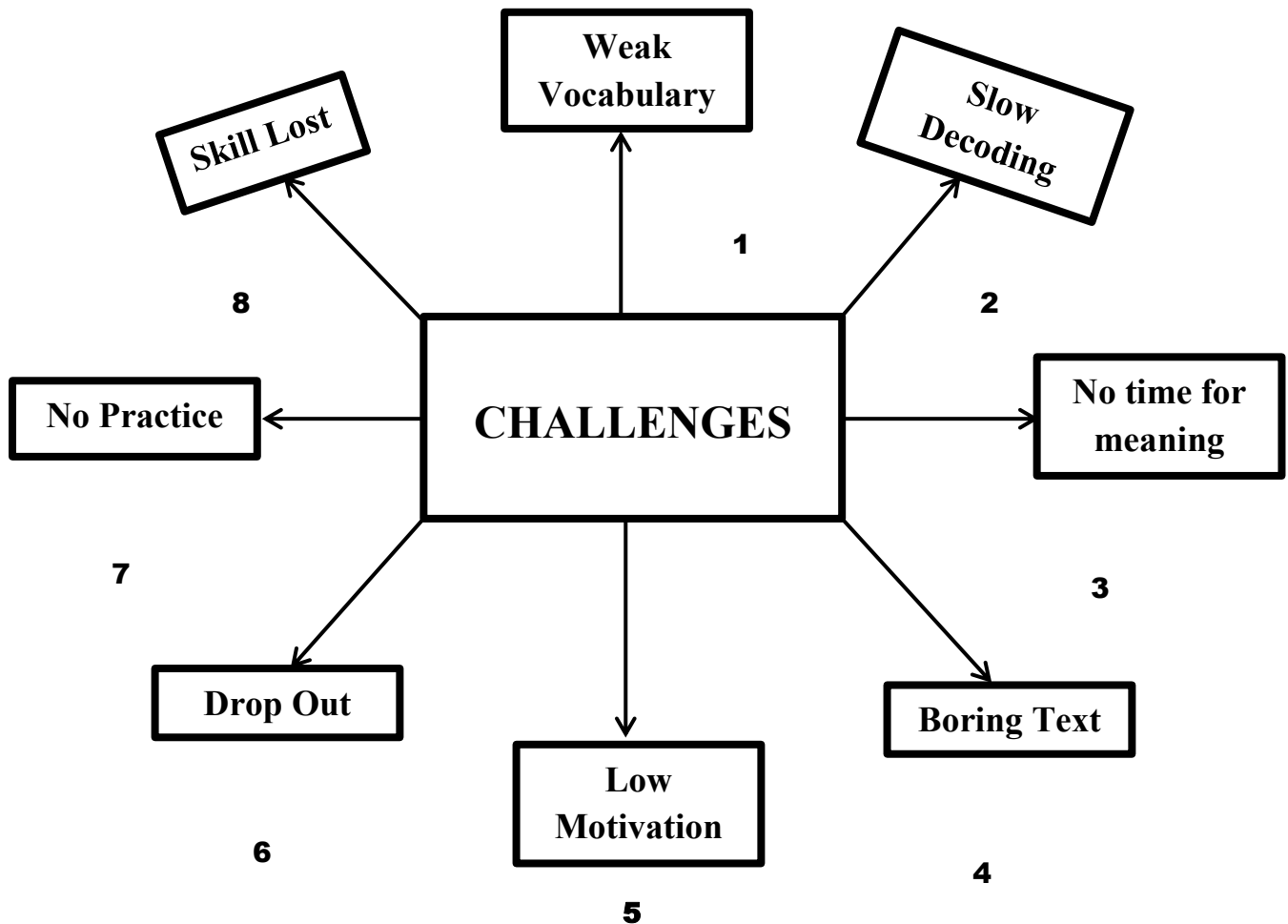
Economic Pressures: Most learners are farmers and traders. If lessons are not immediately useful, they prioritise income over attendance.

Multilingual Fatigue: Switching between Ebira, Igala, Yoruba, Hausa, and English in daily life creates cognitive strain.

The Interaction Cycle: Poor vocabulary → slow decoding → no capacity for meaning → boring texts → low motivation → dropout → no practice → skill loss.

HOW THESE CHALLENGES INTERACT: It's a cycle: Weak vocabulary → slow decoding → no time for meaning → boring texts → low motivation → dropout → no practice → skills lost.

INTERACT CYCLE OF CHALLENGES



Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Simple View of Reading [SVR] by Gough and Tunmer (1986). SVR states that reading comprehension [RC] = Decoding × Linguistic Comprehension [LC]. If either component is zero, comprehension is zero. Decoding is word recognition, while linguistic comprehension is deriving meaning from oral language (Gough and Tunmer, 1986; Hoover and Gough, 1990). [D]SVR is relevant to Kogi because NMEC (2024) and studies by Omole (2022) and Ojo and Adebayo (2021) show adults can decode but cannot answer inferential questions. This points to weak linguistic comprehension. SVR therefore justifies interventions that strengthen LC, such as metacognitive strategies and strategic L1 use (Cummins, 2007). To address SVR's limitations, the Construction-Integration Model was also adopted. It explains comprehension in two stages; first building a literal "text base," then constructing a "situation model" by linking text to prior knowledge.

Discussion of Findings

The literature points to three practical directions:
Start comprehension early, Use L1 strategically, and use relevant local content.

This study conducted a 12-week field trial. Using simple random sampling, one LGA was selected from each senatorial district: Okene, Dekina, and Lokoja. Two high-enrollment centres per LGA were chosen, making 6 centres. Twenty learners were randomly selected from each centre, totaling 120 participants. The study tested whether early comprehension instruction within 12 weeks improves outcomes. Both test scores and interviews were used.

Results

The early-intervention group scored 69% on comprehension tests, compared to 42% for the standard group. That is a 27-percentage point difference. Interviews revealed three reasons for the result such as reduced anxiety toward English, confidence from early success, and engagement with familiar topics like farming, health, and voting. Early comprehension instruction therefore improves both scores and retention. The model is low-cost and adaptable to Kogi's three major languages.

Intervention Design. 3 hours weekly for 12 weeks. Week 1–4: phonemic awareness and 40 core words like water, clinic, farm, price, vote. From week 3 there begin QAR questioning. Brief L1 explanation of 1 key word per sentence, no full translation. Six local passages on malaria, cassava, PVC, road safety, business, and community support replaced generic texts. The control group used standard NMEC materials.

Quantitative Outcome: Post-test average was 69% for the experimental group and 42% for control. The difference was statistically significant with a large effect size. Gains cut across gender, age, and location. Learners with no prior schooling improved nearly as much as those with some primary education.

Qualitative Insights

- a. L1 hints reduced fear. Learners said one-word explanations in Ebira, Igala, or Yoruba made English less intimidating. Participation increased.
- b. Early questions-built confidence. Answering correctly by week 3 was a turning point. Peer support boosted attendance.
- c. Local topics improved relevance. Learners called the passages our story. Some reported health behaviour changes and voter registration after civic readings.

Combined Interpretation. Brief L1 use lowered anxiety, early success built self-efficacy, and local content made learning practical. Together, these explain the performance gain.

Conclusion

Adult reading comprehension cannot rely on decoding alone. It requires language, strategy, and context taught together. For Kogi and similar contexts, the shift should be from decoding-first to comprehension-from-day-one. The study concludes that early literacy intervention significantly improves adult reading comprehension in Kogi State. Introducing comprehension strategies within the first 12 weeks prevents poor reading habits and speeds up functional literacy. The large effect size shows adults can achieve functional literacy when decoding and comprehension are taught together with L1 support. Given limited budgets and subsidy removal, this 12-week model is cost-effective compared to long, low-impact programmes. Ignoring early comprehension wastes resources on enrollment without learning.

Investment in early, structured intervention is therefore both educationally and economically justified.

Recommendations

- To Kogi State Agency for Mass Education (KSAME) and State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) should make the 12-week Early Comprehension Module compulsory in Term 1 of all basic literacy centres. Revise curriculum to include phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension from week 1 and inclusion of mother-tongue wordlists in the primer.
- Language Policy should be made to encourage strategic use of Ebirá, Igala, Yoruba, and other L1s for explanation to bridge comprehension gaps. Replace outdated materials and provide modern instructional materials.
- Funding and Access. Government, stakeholders, and donors should prioritise funding for early intervention. Literacy centres should be sited close to learners to reduce early leaving.
- Curriculum Review. Avoid months of decoding-only instruction. Regularly review curriculum to keep content relevant and minimise early leaving.

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