

Reading Skills Acquisition among Adult Learners in Basic Education Programme in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the constraints associated with reading skills acquisition among learners of Adult Basic Education Programmes in Lagos State, Nigeria. The descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The sample consisted of 546 respondents selected through simple random sampling from the six major zones of Lagos State. Data were collected using the Questionnaire on Constraints of Reading Skills in Adult Basic Education Programme with a reliability coefficient of 0.87 established through Cronbach Alpha. Descriptive statistics, t-test, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used for data analysis at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that major constraints affecting reading skills among adult learners included difficulties in pronunciation, comprehension, fluency, sentence construction, and age-related sensory impairments such as poor hearing and vision. The study also found no statistically significant gender difference in respondents' perceptions of the constraints affecting reading skills among Adult Basic Education learners. However, a statistically significant age difference was found in respondents' perceptions of the impact of reading skills on adult learners. Younger learners demonstrated more positive perceptions of reading skill development than older learners. The study concluded that reading skill challenges remain a major issue among adult learners in Lagos State. It was recommended that facilitators should possess adequate andragogical competence and adopt flexible instructional approaches that accommodate learners' pace and learning needs.

Keywords: *Reading skills, Adult Basic Education, Adult learners, Literacy development, Reading Constraints.*

Introduction

Reading is a fundamental skill that supports learning, communication, and lifelong education. It remains one of the most important activities at all levels of education because it enables individuals to acquire knowledge, broaden their intellectual capacity, and develop language competence. Apena and Osikomaiya (2025) explained that reading is a core language skill and essential to academic success, lifelong learning, and personal development. Reading is not merely the recognition of written symbols; rather, it is an active cognitive process involving interpretation, comprehension, critical thinking, summarization, and evaluation of ideas. Harris and Hodges (2020) defined reading as the meaningful interpretation of printed and written symbols, while Araromi and Olatunji (2020) viewed reading as the process of interpreting and understanding written materials. This definition implies that effective reading is an interactive and meaning-making process that involves active engagement between the reader, the text, and the writer to facilitate comprehension and knowledge construction. The interactive nature of reading is further supported by the reader-response theories of Stanley Fish and Louise Rosenblatt (1978), who emphasised that meaning is actively constructed by readers through engagement with texts. In the same vein, Osikomaiya (2017) explained that reading is an interactive process requiring the reader's active participation with written texts for effective comprehension. Reading therefore involves many interrelated skills such as decoding, vocabulary development, fluency, background knowledge, and comprehension strategies. When these skills are properly developed, learners become capable of independent learning and critical reasoning. Consequently, reading is regarded as the bedrock of all academic activities because success in virtually every subject depends largely on the learner's reading ability. Good reading habits foster sustained reading, promoting independent and voluntary reading, and thus ensure the sustainable development of reading literacy and the overall core competencies (Narentuya, & Zhang, 2024).

In recent years, the importance of reading has also been linked to sustainable learning and lifelong education. Sustainable learning refers to knowledge and skills that remain useful over time and encourage continuous learning. According to Ben-Eliyahu (2021), sustainable learning is "learning that lasts," while Hays and Reinders (2020) noted that sustainable education should empower learners to contribute positively to society. This aligns with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education and

lifelong learning opportunities for all. Reading proficiency therefore plays a significant role in promoting sustainable human development, employability, civic participation, and social inclusion.

Adult basic education programmes are established to provide adults with essential literacy, numeracy, and communication skills required for effective functioning in society. These programmes are designed for individuals who missed formal education opportunities, dropped out of school early, or require literacy improvement for occupational and personal advancement. Apena (2019) explained that adult basic education ensures access to reading, writing, and numeracy skills needed for meaningful participation in community life. The programmes are often organized by governments, private organizations, and non-governmental agencies in schools, community centres, correctional facilities, and non-formal learning environments. Despite the importance of these programmes, many adult learners continue to experience difficulties in reading acquisition. Such difficulties include poor decoding skills, pronunciation problems, inability to identify vowel and consonant digraphs, poor fluency, and limited comprehension ability.

Furthermore, some adult learners experience age-related sensory impairments such as visual and hearing problems that negatively affect their reading performances. Visual impairments such as myopia and hyperopia, as well as auditory difficulties including conductive and sensorineural hearing loss, may hinder effective reading development. In addition, studies have shown that variables such as age, gender, motivation, and educational background influence adult learners' reading achievement. Bamise and Akande (2021) found that female learners demonstrated stronger reading habits than males, while Miyamoto, Gauly, and Zabal (2024) reported that male adults performed better in literacy assessments. Similarly, Innocent (2022) observed that self-efficacy and motivation significantly influence adult learners' reading achievement.

Although numerous studies have examined adult literacy and reading development, many of them focused mainly on the challenges confronting adult education programmes rather than the specific constraints affecting reading skills acquisition among adult learners. Consequently, many adults who completed adult basic education programmes in Nigeria still struggle with effective reading and comprehension skills needed for academic, occupational, and social advancement. It is against this background that this study investigates the constraints associated with reading skills

acquisition among adult learners who completed adult basic education programmes in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to investigate the constraints of reading skills in adult basic education programme in Lagos State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to address the following:

1. To determine constraints of reading skills among Adult Basic Education learners.
2. To examine the significant gender difference in respondents' perception of the constraints of reading skills in Adult Basic Education learners.
3. To examine the significant age difference in respondents' perception of the impact of reading skills on Adult Basic Education learners.

Hypotheses

The following two hypotheses were generated to guide the study:

H₀₁: There is no significant gender difference in respondents' perception of the constraints of reading skills in Adult Basic Education learners.

H₀₂: There is no statistically significant difference in respondents' perceptions of the impact of reading skills on Adult Basic Education learners across different age groups.

Review of Literature

Existing literature suggests that reading skills acquisition among adult learners is influenced by multiple interacting factors, particularly within developing countries where adult education programmes often face structural and instructional challenges. Scholars argue that adult literacy acquisition is shaped by cognitive, environmental, socioeconomic, and pedagogical variables that either facilitate or hinder learning outcomes. Adult learners frequently encounter barriers such as inadequate prior educational exposure, insufficient learning resources, inappropriate teaching strategies, language difficulties, poor motivation, and competing occupational and family responsibilities. These factors collectively reduce participation and persistence in literacy

programmes and ultimately constrain reading development. Klauth and Garza Mitchell (2023) observed that adult learners' literacy experiences are highly contextual and strongly influenced by the availability of support systems, instructional approaches, and motivational factors.

Studies focusing on reading processes among adults indicate that reading proficiency depends largely on the interaction among decoding ability, vocabulary knowledge, linguistic comprehension, and fluency. According to Talwar, Greenberg, Tighe, and Li (2021), adults with low literacy proficiency often demonstrate persistent weaknesses in decoding and linguistic comprehension, making reading comprehension difficult to achieve. Their findings, grounded in the Simple View of Reading, revealed that foundational literacy deficits significantly constrain adult learners' reading performance. Similarly, Bar-Kochva, Vágvölgyi, Dresler, Nagengast, Nagengast, Schröter, Schrader, and Nuerk (2021) found that adults with deficient reading comprehension exhibit weaknesses in word recognition, decoding fluency, phonological awareness, and rapid naming skills. These deficiencies limit reading efficiency and create long-term barriers to literacy acquisition among adult learners. Their study further emphasized that weak foundational reading skills continue to affect adult literacy performance even after participation in literacy programmes.

Within the Nigerian context, adult literacy programmes continue to face challenges associated with limited instructional resources, irregular participation, socioeconomic pressures, and inadequate infrastructural support. Such constraints are particularly evident in urban centres where adult learners often combine education with work and family obligations. Therefore, understanding context-specific barriers remains essential for improving adult literacy outcomes in Lagos State. Overall, literature demonstrates that constraints affecting reading skills acquisition among adult learners are multidimensional and interconnected. However, there is limited empirical evidence specifically examining how these constraints operate among Adult Basic Education learners in Lagos State, Nigeria. This contextual gap provides justification for the present study.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research design. A descriptive research design is a method used to describe existing conditions or characteristics of a population without manipulating variables. It is suitable for the study because it helps the researchers to examine the current state of reading skills acquisition among adult learners in Basic Education Programmes in Lagos State through data collection such as questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The study was conducted across the six major zones of Lagos State. Using a simple random sampling technique, 91 learners were selected from each zone, resulting in a total sample of 546 participants. Data were collected using the *Questionnaire on Constraints of Reading Skills in Adult Basic Education Programme* (reliability coefficient, $r = .89$). To establish content validity, the instrument was reviewed by experts from the Department of Foundation at the National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja specifically those in the Adult Education and Tests and Measurement Units. This review ensured that the questionnaire comprehensively addressed all components of the research questions and hypotheses. Subsequently, the 10-item instrument was pilot-tested in the Mowe-Ibafo Area of Ogun State to confirm its reliability and applicability. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was calculated using Cronbach Alpha's measure and the instrument yielded a reliability index of 0.87. The instrument was therefore regarded generally as valid and reliable. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistical analyses, including the t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), were employed to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Furthermore, Scheffe's post hoc pairwise comparison was applied to determine specific differences in respondents' perceptions.

Findings and Discussion

Constraints of Reading Skills Faced by Adult Basic Education Learners

Research objective one examined the constraints affecting reading skills among Adult Basic Education learners. The items investigated included factors such as difficulty in comprehension and diminished sensory abilities, particularly hearing and vision, associated with aging. The overall mean response of 2.37, approximated to 2.0, indicates respondents' general disagreement with the item statements (Table 1).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Constraints of Reading Skills faced by Adult Basic Education Learners

Items	SD(%)	D(%)	A(%)	SA(%)	Mean	SD
I have difficulty in pronouncing words	44(8.1)	77(14.1)	128(23.4)	297(54.4)	3.24	0.98
I lack self-confidence to read in the presence of other people	273(50.0)	186(34.1)	54(9.9)	33(6.0)	1.72	0.87
I struggle with reading skills ability	263(48.2)	206(37.7)	44(8.1)	33(6.0)	1.72	0.85
I have problem pronouncing some English words	109(20.0)	77(14.1)	88(16.1)	272(49.8)	2.96	1.11
I am not fluent in reading	120(22.0)	109(20.0)	66(12.1)	251(46.0)	2.82	1.23
I find it difficult to comprehend	77(14.1)	65(11.9)	96(17.6)	308(56.4)	3.16	1.11
I find it difficult to join words to form correct sentences	43(7.9)	65(11.9)	108(19.8)	330(57.7)	3.33	0.97
I have difficulty in identifying silent consonants in words	328(60.1)	164(30.0)	22(4.0)	32(5.9)	1.56	0.82
I have problems when multiple consonants come together in a word	283(51.8)	219(40.1)	33(6.0)	11(2.0)	1.58	0.61
I have reduced hearing and seeing ability due to aging	285(52.2)	185(33.9)	33(6.0)	43(7.9)	1.61	0.81
Grand Value					2.37	0.94

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant gender difference in respondents' perception of the constraints of reading skills in Adult Basic Education learners.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Perception of the Constraints of Reading Skills in Adult Basic Education learners based on gender

	Gender	N	Means	Std Dev.	Std Error Means
Constraints					
Constraints of Reading in	Male	274	23.6095	2.87672	.17379
Adult Basic Education learners	Female	272	23.9632	3.66172	.22202

Table 3: T-test Analysis of Respondents' Perception of the Constraints of Reading Skills in Learners of Adult Basic Education based on Gender

Gender	F	Sig	T	df	Mean Diff	Std. Err. Diff	Decision
Equal var. assumed	27.414	.000	-1.256	-544	-.35375	.28171	Do not Accept H ₀₂
Equal var. not assumed			-1.255	513.470	-.35375	.28195	

Tables 2 and 3 present the analysis of respondents' perceptions of the constraints of reading skills among Adult Basic Education learners based on gender. The results show a calculated t-value of -

1.256 and a p-value of 0.000 at a 0.05 level of significance. Although the F-value (27.414) indicates a significant variance between groups, the calculated t-value does not reveal a statistically significant difference in the mean perception scores between male and female respondents. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which postulated that there is no statistically significant gender difference in respondents' perceptions of the constraints of reading skills among Adult Basic Education learners, was retained. This implies that gender has no significant influence on how respondents perceive the constraints affecting reading skills.

H₀₂: There is no statistically significant difference in respondents' perceptions of the impact of reading skills on Adult Basic Education learners across different age groups.

Table 4: *Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Perceptions of the Impact of Reading Skills among Adult Basic Education Learners by Age Group*

Years	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error
31-40 years	207	101.1884	8.60843	.59833
41-50 years	88	104.5000	8.62234	.91915
51-60 years	65	96.2769	2.49066	.30893
Above 60 years	110	102.9000	7.40190	.70574
Total	546	102.6026	9.17503	.39266

Table 5: *ANOVA of Respondents' Perception of the Impact of Reading Skills on Adult Basic Education learners across different age groups*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	6686.452	4	1671.613			Do not Accept
Within Groups	39192.304	541	72.444	23.074	.000	H ₀₃
Total	45878.756	545				

From tables 4 and 5, the F-value is 23.074 and the P-value is 0.00 at 0.05 levels of significance. Since the p-value is less than the level of significance set for the study (0.05) the hypothesis is therefore not retained. Thus, there is significant age difference in respondents' perception of the impact of reading skills on adult basic education learners. To determine the actual sources of significant differences observed in tables 4 and 5, Scheffe post hoc test was employed and the result is presented in table 6 below:

Table 6: *Scheffe's Post Hoc Pairwise Comparison of Respondents' Perception of the Impact of Reading Skills on Adult Basic Education learners across different Age Group*

(I) Respondents' Age	(J) Respondents' Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
+21-30 Years	31-40 years	8.04844*	1.14157	.000
	41-50 years	4.73684*	1.33283	.014
	51-60 years	12.95992*	1.43796	.000
	60 years & above	6.33684*	1.26957	.000
31-40 Years	21-30 years	-8.04844*	1.14157	.000
	41-50 years	-3.31159	1.08314	.054
	51-60 years	4.91148*	1.21016	.003
	60 years & above	-1.71159	1.00427	.574
41-50 Years	21-30 years	-4.73684*	1.33283	.014
	31-40 years	3.31159	1.08314	.054
	51-60 years	8.22308*	1.39203	.000
	60 years & above	1.60000	1.21730	.786
51-60 Years	21-30 years	-12.95992*	1.43796	.000
	31-40 years	-4.91148*	1.21016	.003
	41-50 years	-8.22308*	1.39203	.000
	60 years & above	-6.62308*	1.33158	.000
60 Years & above	21-30 years	-6.33684*	1.26957	.000
	31-40 years	1.71159	1.00427	.574
	41-50 years	-1.60000	1.21730	.786
	51-60 years	6.62308*	1.33158	.000

The Scheffé post hoc analysis presented in Table 6 revealed significant variations in respondents' perceptions of the impact of reading skills on Adult Basic Education learners across different age groups. Specifically, the 21–30 years age group demonstrated significantly higher mean perception scores compared with all other age categories, as indicated by p-values less than the 0.05 level of significance. Furthermore, the 31–40 years age group exhibited a significantly higher mean perception than the 51–60 years group, while respondents aged 41–50 years also recorded significantly higher mean scores than those in the 51–60 years category. In addition, the 51–60 years age group showed a significantly higher perception of the impact of reading skills compared with respondents aged 60 years and above. These results suggest that younger participants (particularly those aged 21–30 years) tend to perceive the impact of reading skills on Adult Basic Education more positively than older participants, indicating that age may influence how learners value and respond to reading skill development within the programme.

Discussion

The study found that declining health conditions associated with aging constitute one of the major constraints affecting the development of reading skills among Adult Basic Education learners. Respondents indicated that persistent difficulties in word decoding and comprehension hinder effective reading proficiency among adult learners. The finding further revealed that sensory impairments such as poor eyesight and hearing difficulties, which are common among aging learners, negatively influence reading and learning activities. This finding agrees with Gedik and Akyol (2022), who reported that learners experiencing challenges in word recognition and reading fluency usually demonstrate lower comprehension levels. This implies that age-related physical and cognitive challenges significantly affect the acquisition and development of reading skills among adult learners. However, the finding contradicts Olubodun and Apena (2023), who observed that adult learners' reading performance has improved in recent times due to better living standards and increased educational awareness.

The study also found that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female respondents in their perception of the constraints affecting reading skills among Adult Basic Education learners. This indicates that both male and female learners experience similar reading challenges irrespective of gender. The finding corroborates the studies of Apena (2019) and Hannon (2014), who similarly reported no significant gender difference in adult learners' performance. According to these authors, learners' achievement in literacy and numeracy depends largely on the competence, dedication, and instructional effectiveness of facilitators in adult learning centres. This suggests that effective facilitation and quality instruction are more important determinants of reading skill development than gender differences. Nevertheless, the finding disagrees with the studies of Jiajing, Chuang and Ziyu (2025) who found out that females exhibited significantly higher levels of motivational beliefs and enjoyment in learning English.

Furthermore, the study revealed a statistically significant difference across age groups in respondents' perceptions of the impact of reading skills on Adult Basic Education learners. This finding suggests that learners from different age categories perceive the importance and influence of reading skills differently, possibly because of variations in learning experiences, educational exposure, and cognitive abilities. The finding is consistent with Olubodun and Apena (2023), who

also reported significant age-related variations in learners' perceptions of reading skill impact. The result implies that age plays a significant role in shaping adult learners' views and experiences regarding reading skill development. However, the finding contradicts Hannon (2014), who found no significant difference in respondents' perceptions based on age. The disparity in findings may be attributed to differences in socio-cultural background, demographic characteristics, and learning environments of the respondents involved in the studies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is concluded from this study that there were constraints of reading skills in learners of Adult Basic Education. The constraints range from assimilation to identification of words and joining them together to make up phrases, clauses and sentences among others. Fluency is imperative for free interaction and belongingness within and around the community where they belong. Learners' commitment, determination and frequent practice with support and encouragement from family, friends and the society at large will no doubt go a long way in improving their performances. The following recommendations were proposed based on the findings of this study: Facilitators should possess adequate qualifications and practical experience in andragogical methods to effectively guide and motivate adult learners in their studies. Instruction schedules should be designed with consideration for learners' convenience, and facilitators should adopt a flexible teaching pace that aligns with learners' individual learning abilities and progress, that is, facilitators must go at student's pace.

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