

Strategies used in Teaching the Adult English Language Learners: A Case of Adult Literacy Centres in Imenti-North sub-county, Kenya.

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ABSTRACT:

This study investigated the acquisition of English as a second language in adult post-literacy level learners in the adult literacy centres in Imenti-North Sub-County. The study utilised the descriptive research design. The target population comprised of all the adult learners at the post-literacy programme level and the adult English instructors in the centres. The post-literacy programme is a part of continuing education that provides opportunities for adults and out-of-school youths to retain, improve and apply basic educational skills for personal, community and national development. The study found out that further 55 per cent indicated that they used scaffolding techniques. Some scaffolding techniques include giving mini-lessons where new concepts are broken down into bite-sized pieces that build on one another. The study concluded that the most frequently used strategies are demonstrations and group work. More scaffolding should be incorporated into the lessons. In teaching strategies teachers have measurable effects on the students' quality of English Language Skills. The study recommended that teachers need to carefully select strategies to use in teaching the English Language to help adult learners acquire skills.

Key Terms: Adult English language, adult literacy centres.

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INTRODUCTION

Adult Education plays a very crucial role in the development aspect of any society. It is recognised widely as a powerful tool for eradicating adult illiteracy, reducing poverty and attaining the Millennium Development Goals (UNESCO, 2015). In the field of adult education, scholars have defined it in several ways; Merriam and Brockett (1997) explained adult education as activities intentionally designed to bring about learning among those whose social roles, age or self-perception define them as adults.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Merriam and Brockett (1997) note that adult basic education is an education provision for people aged 15 years and or above who are not engaged in formal schooling or higher education level of less than grade nine. This study defines adult education as a practice of engaging adults in sustained and systematic self-educating activities to gain new forms of knowledge, values, attitudes or skills. The study puts forward that; adult education means any form of learning which adults are engaging in is beyond traditional schooling, enclosing basic literacy to personal fulfilment as a lifelong learner. Instructing adult English language learners can be both an exciting and overwhelming adventure (Dahlen, 2017). These classrooms have various learning environments full of individuals motivated from all walks of life with a common objective of mastering the English language. As students, they tend to be enthusiastic as they are in the classroom for the purpose of gaining the knowledge and skills necessary to make their own lives and their families live better. However, these varied experiences, backgrounds, and deeds of students can create a challenge for educators during the lesson planning and finding effective instructional approaches.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section captures and evaluates the research data on the strategies used in teaching adult English language learners and the measures to improve the learning of

English by adult learners. This data was obtained from the interviews carried out with the adult instructors. Data was interpreted in the form of explanations, discussions and tables. The findings are presented as follows:

Strategies Used in Teaching the Adult Language Learners

Table 1: Adult Instructors Responses on Instructional Strategies

Strategies	Freq.	Percentage
Demonstration	8	88
Modelling of tasks	5	55
use of visuals to support instruction	7	77
Use of scaffolding techniques to support tasks	5	55
Group Discussion	8	88
Use of simple language through Oral Presentation	7	77

Results from the table reveal that Adult English Instructors use some strategies more frequently than others. For example, the majority of the instructors indicated that they used demonstration at 88 per cent. Reinforcing this observation in the face to face interview, a teacher commented that:

Excerpt 1

When teaching the adult learners English, I use demonstration because it creates a picture in their minds, so they are not likely to forget the content learnt.' The demonstration is an old teaching technique but still very effective. For example, I demonstrate and then teach the theory in my class. Over a period of time, I have noted that students make greater learning strides are made by students whereby they see the visual skill performed first.

The word demonstration means giving demos or performing a particular activity or concept (Janelle, 2017). The demonstration is a method of teaching used in communicating an idea with the aid of visuals. The adult instructors should plan for demonstrations that are suited for adult learners. In the demonstration method, the teaching-learning process is systematically carried out. The adult instructors should have it well planned; use simple and clear language so that the adult learners can understand concepts easily. Teaching by demonstration is the most effective method of helping students as it makes learning easier and creates interest which helps the adult learners to remember what is being taught. Based on the findings, demonstration as a strategy is important in teaching English language skills as it develops an interest in the learners and motivates them for their active participation.

Mohammad (2007), in his study “demonstration technique to improve Vocabulary and Grammar Element in Teaching, speaking at EFL Learners”, he found out that demonstration technique was significantly effecting in teaching, speaking especially in improving the vocabulary element and grammar in teaching, speaking to EFL Learners. The current study concurs with Mohammad’s study in that from the findings; the adult instructors stated that the demonstration method was important in teaching English language skills as the adult learners were able to recall the Language Structures taught. Adults, at times, can be quite sceptical in the process of teaching and learning. Thus, teaching is a powerful tool when accompanied by evidence. If the adults would also see and hear what is being taught, they are likely to believe and completely grasp what is taught.

From the results in a table, 55 per cent of the adult instructors indicated that they used modelling of tasks as a strategy when teaching English. Modelling is a teaching strategy where a teacher explicitly shows the students how

to complete an activity or assignment before the students begin (Michael, 2020). Modelling provides a clear picture of how to handle the task at hand in a student’s mind. For example, during an interview session, one of the teachers had the following to say:

Excerpt 9

I use modelling of tasks so that it can be easy for the adult learners to understand the content learnt and how they can do the tasks given. When I give an exercise to them, I model one or two examples so that they see exactly what is expected of them. I also provide sentence frame models for the kinds of conversations the adult learners should have.

Modelling is referred to as an instructional method whereby the teacher demonstrates a new concept or technique and observe the students learn (Baldwin et al., 2006). Whenever a teacher gives a demonstration of a concept for a student, that teacher is modelling. From the findings, the adult instructors explained that modelling provides the adult with learners’ confidence on how to complete the assignments given in the English language. This is because the teacher can show how to do it step by step, and then students can start working on the second by thereon. A teacher can immediately address what to do and what not to do by doing the first problem together. The adult learners will know and can actually see the steps they should take.

Another way to model teaching English is by using cloze activities to guide reading and writing (Michael, 2020). Cloze reading is an instructional technique where learners fill in the blanks within the passage. Close activities can minimise confusion and aid in building sentence and language structures without overwhelming the learner depending on the ELL language level. Modelling as a strategy is important in learning English language skills in that it builds the learners’ confidence and, in turn, improve their language skills.

Table 1 also revealed that 77 per cent of adult instructors use simple language in their process of delivery. This was a strategy used by many adult instructors where they said they made instructions crystal clear by using simple language. They also said that they used lots of repetition and drilling in addition. Words are the tools of instruction, and therefore it is important to choose them carefully to match your level of language to your audience. From the interview, one of the adult instructors said that:

Excerpt 10

We use simple language when teaching because if we use big words, the Adult learners will not understand because of their language level. Plain and clear language helps the adult learners to read, understand and use the information we give them.

Using plain and clear language helps your audience understand and use the information you are giving them. Words are the instructor's tools so it is important to choose them carefully. The adult instructors should therefore use simple words, avoid ambiguity and use short sentences. The adult instructor should speak slowly and clearly and provide the adult learners with enough time to formulate their responses whether in speaking or writing.

Based on the findings from this study 7 percent of the adult instructors said they use visuals to support instruction. Visual aids are powerful tools that can be used to assist the teachers in teaching a foreign language (Marioara et al., 2018). They can be used to display complex information clearly and introduce variety into activities in the class. From the interview one of the adult instructors had the following to say:

Excerpt 11

I apply different teaching aids like charts and drawing, and other aids. We also do group work. I encourage them to also organise group projects outside the classroom to help raise some income

and help them remain in school and complete their studies.

Results of the findings indicated that further 88 percent of the adult instructor indicated that they used group work as can be seen from the above excerpt. Cohen (1994) defines group work as students working together in a group small enough so that everyone can participate on a task that has been clearly assigned. Group work is an effective technique for achieving certain kinds of intellectual and social learning goals. Group work can start as a problem solving session. The group is given a problem which they must come up with a solution. This helps develop critical-thinking skills. The respondents stated that through group work the students learn how to communicate by communicating with each other. There is also peer learning where the weak learners can learn from those that are knowledgeable.

Amanda (2011) in her study "For what purpose do Language teachers use group work in their lessons?" Found out that learners are more active during the lessons and they participate more. The findings of the current study concur with Amanda's findings and in addition the respondents stated that the adult learners get encouraged to work as a group and they motivate each other to work hard and complete their studies. There is also an increased social integration in group work. Social integration has been shown to have a significant positive effect on retention. Small groups of adult learners at the same level of career maturity create a social environment that motivates them to persist in the learning process. Group work allows adults to share and to learn from their very experiences, skills and values.

From the findings of the study further 55 percent indicated that they used scaffolding techniques. Scaffolding learning is a way to provide support for students by breaking learning down into manageable chunks as they progress toward stronger understanding and ultimately greater

independence (Elizabeth, 2021). Some of the scaffolding techniques includes: Giving mini-lessons where new concepts are broken down into bite-sized pieces that build on one another. Breaking tasks into smaller steps slowing down where teachers give learners time to process and other scaffolding techniques like incorporating visual aids and demonstration which have already been discussed in this study from some of the interview sessions with the respondents. When practicing a new academic skill, scaffolding involves using well-known material so the students are not struggling with information while they are trying to learn a new skill. Through scaffolding, students receive comprehensible input and are able to successfully complete tasks at their level. Scaffolding includes whatever it takes to make the instruction meaningful for the student in order to provide a successful learning experience.

Excerpt 12

When I teach, I am not fast in the delivery of content. Instead, I slow down so that the adult learners can follow, and this helps them in mastering the content. I also break down the lesson into small parts that build on one another. Instead of passive lecturing, I involve them actively in learning.

From the above excerpt the respondents agreed that slowing down the pace when teaching decreases the emotional tension and consequently improves the performance. Since adults are self-directed, instruction should allow learners to discover things for themselves providing guidance and help when mistakes are made. Instructors should concentrate on the use of open-ended questions to draw out relevant student knowledge and experience. The respondents added that breaking down the lesson into small parts helps as adult learners tend to prefer single concepts that focus heavily on the application of the concept to relevant problems. There is also need to explain why specific things are being taught to the adult learners.

From the results presented in table 55 percent of the adult instructors indicated that they used modelling of tasks as a strategy when teaching English. Modelling is a teaching strategy where a teacher explicitly shows the students how to complete an activity or assignment before the students begin (Michael, 2020). Modelling provides a clear picture in a student's mind as how to handle the task at hand. During an interview session one of the teachers had the following to say:

Excerpt 2

I use modelling of tasks to make it easy for adult learners to understand the content learnt and how they can do the tasks given. For example, when I give an exercise to them, I model one or two examples so that they see exactly what is expected of them. I also provide sentence frame models for the kinds of conversations the adult learners should have.

Modelling is an instructional strategy in which the teacher demonstrates a new concept or approach to learning and they learn by observing (Baldwin et al., 2006). Whenever a teacher demonstrates a concept for a student, that teacher is modelling. From the findings the adult instructors explained that modelling gives the adult learners confidence on how to complete the assignments given in English language. This is because the teacher can show step by step how to do it and then students can begin working on the second by themselves. By doing the first problem together a teacher can address what to do and what not to do immediately the adult learners will know and can actually see the steps they should take. Another way to model in teaching of English is by using cloze activities to guide reading and writing (Michael, 2020). Cloze reading is an instructional strategy where students fill in the blanks within a reading passage. Depending on the language level of an ELL close activities can reduce confusion and help build sentence and language structures

without overwhelming the student. Modelling as a strategy is important in learning English language skills in that it builds the learners' confidence and in turn improve their language skills.

Table 5 also revealed that 77percent of adult instructors use simple language in their process of delivery. This was a strategy used by many adult instructors where they said they made instructions crystal clear by using simple language. They also said that in addition they used lots of repetition and drilling. Words are the tools of instruction and therefore it is important to choose them carefully to match your level of language to your audience. From the interview one of the adult instructors said that:

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I use modelling of tasks to make it easy for adult learners to understand the content learnt and how they can do the tasks given. For example, when I give an exercise to them, I model one or two examples so that they see exactly what is expected of them. I also provide sentence frame models for the kinds of conversations the adult learners should have.

Using plain and clear language helps your audience understand and use the information you are giving them. Words are the instructor's tools so it is important to choose them carefully. The adult instructors should therefore use simple words, avoid ambiguity and use short sentences. The adult instructor should speak slowly and clearly and provide the adult learners with enough time to formulate their responses whether in speaking or writing.

Based on the findings from this study 7 percent of the adult instructors said they use visuals to support instruction. Visual aids are powerful tools that can be used to assist the teachers in teaching a foreign language (Marioara et al., 2018). They can be used to display complex information clearly and introduce variety into activities in the class.

From the interview one of the adult instructors had the following to say:

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I apply different teaching aids like charts and drawing, and other aids. We also do group work. I encourage them to also organise group projects outside the classroom to help raise some income and help them remain in school and complete their studies.

From the above excerpt the respondents agreed that slowing down the pace when teaching decreases, the emotional tension and consequently improves the performance. Since adults are self-directed, instruction should allow learners to discover things for themselves providing guidance and help when mistakes are made. Instructors should concentrate on the use of open-ended questions to draw out relevant student knowledge and experience. The respondents added that breaking down the lesson into small parts helps as adult learners tend to prefer single concepts that focus heavily on the application of the concept to relevant problems. There is also need to explain why specific things are being taught to the adult learners.

Results of the findings indicated that further 88 percent of the adult instructor indicated that they used group work as can be seen from the above excerpt. Cohen (1994) defines group work as students working together in a group small enough so that everyone can participate on a task that has been clearly assigned. Group work is an effective technique for achieving certain kinds of intellectual and social learning goals. Group work can start as a problem solving session. The group is given a problem which they must come up with a solution. This helps develop critical-thinking skills. The respondents stated that through group work the students learn how to communicate by communicating with each other. There is also peer learning where the

weak learners can learn from those that are knowledgeable.

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From the findings of the study further 55 percent indicated that they used scaffolding techniques. Scaffolding learning is a way to provide support for students by breaking learning down into manageable chunks as they progress toward stronger understanding and ultimately greater independence (Elizabeth, 2021). Some of the scaffolding techniques includes: Giving mini-lessons where new concepts are broken down into bite-sized pieces that build on one another. Breaking tasks into smaller steps slowing down where teachers give learners time to process and other scaffolding techniques like incorporating visual aids and demonstration which have already been discussed in this study from some of the interview sessions with the respondents. When practicing a new academic skill, scaffolding involves using well-known material so the students are not struggling with information while they are trying to learn a new skill. Through scaffolding, students receive comprehensible input and are able to successfully complete tasks at their level. Scaffolding includes whatever it takes to make the instruction meaningful for the student in order to provide a successful learning experience.

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Based on these results, it shows that the most frequently used strategies are demonstrations and group work. More of scaffolding should be incorporated in the lessons. Sengupta (2000), notes that teaching strategies teachers use have measurable effects on quality of the students learning of English Language Skills. Therefore, there is need for teachers to make a careful selection on strategies to use in teaching English Language in order to help the adult learners to acquire skills that will enable them achieve both spoken and written competence.

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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion: Based on these results, it shows that the most frequently used strategies are demonstrations and group work. More scaffolding should be incorporated into the lessons.

Recommendation: Therefore, teachers need to carefully select strategies to use in teaching the English Language to help adult learners acquire skills.

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