

## Individualized Instruction, Cooperative Learning Strategy and Reading Performance of Adult Learners in Selected Study Centres in Ibadan

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### ABSTRACT

This study explored the effectiveness of individualized instruction and cooperative learning strategy in enhancing the reading performance of adult learners in selected study centres in Ibadan. A quasi-experimental design with three groups (individualized instruction, cooperative learning, and a control group) was used. Participants were 45 first-grade adult learners with reading difficulty identified with the help of instructors and selected using purposive sampling technique. The selection was made across 3 study centres within Ibadan. Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (RECAT; reliability coefficient = 0.71) was used to assess the reading comprehension of the participants for pretest and post-test. Findings showed a statistically significant improvement in reading comprehension for both individualized instruction ( $X=42.7$ ,  $SD=6.8$ ,  $t=10.77$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and cooperative learning ( $X=39.4$ ,  $SD=2.84$ ,  $t=10.04$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) groups compared to the control group ( $X=30.3$ ,  $SD=3.5$  and  $X=33.3$ ,  $SD=3.51$  respectively). In addition, individualized instruction ( $X=42.67$ ,  $SD=2.6$ ) demonstrated higher reading comprehension scores than cooperative learning ( $X=39.47$ ,  $SD=2.8$ ,  $t=3.21$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). These findings reveal the efficacy of both strategies in enhancing adult literacy, with individualized instruction demonstrating a stronger impact than the other method. The study recommends two learner-centred approaches be integrated into adult literacy programmes and continuous training and capacity building for adult instructors to effectively implement them.

### Introduction

Adult education, according to National Policy on Education, (2014) is functional literacy, remedial, continuing, vocational, artistic, and civic education for adults and youths outside the official school system. Literacy skills are the ability to read and write (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1981). Reading is the process of decoding meaning from printed or written words. As pointed out by Wami (2022), the recipients of adult education programmes need to be able to apply gained literacy skills in their daily activities to improve their personal life and the society at large. Despite the efforts to eliminate illiteracy in Nigeria, Nigeria still has many illiterates. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Wami (2022), Nigeria's adult illiteracy rate as of 2023 was over 43%. Still,

many adults cannot read and or write, so this indicates the need for literacy skill. Reading is absolutely important in daily life and school. It is a skill gained by humans when given suitable circumstances and most people acquit easily. Beyond simple reading, reading comprehension is a vital component of education; it is also a multi-faceted process with various degrees of knowledge. Reading comprehension is the capacity to understand the text or written material being read. Reading comprehension describes the capacity to make sense from written and connected text; it is a multi-faceted process which is both intentional and interactive and needs the employment of numerous underlying subcomponent skills (Emily, Grimma, McIntyre & Denton, 2018). Ideally a reader should have a thorough knowledge of what was read, but that is not always the case. It therefore is crucial for educators to understand how a student interacts with material so that he/she may figure out which teaching technique will be most effective. While No Child Left Behind legislation demands that schools use potent scientific research-based methods and instructional strategies to improve literacy (Frey, Mandlawitz & Alvarez, 2012), it is surprising to remark that know that no such body of scientific research has been documented for adult literacy interventions. Therefore, need for it cannot be over-stressed. There is the need to identify and document, through study finding, the practices that can increase and enhance reading comprehension of adults. This will in turn yield good outcome in their performance in other academic subjects such as Basic Arithmetic.

Individualized instruction is a strategy that can be applied to teaching reading comprehension. It involves one-on-one interaction between the teacher and the student. It affords the teacher the opportunity to personally educate a learner on a particular idea or address a problem area. It is a learner-centre method that has to do with the teacher teaching reading comprehension to an adult who pays attention. Learners have individual differences which relate to their academic demands, backgrounds, and abilities. As a result of this, it is imperative to come across them where they are so that we can make optimum use of their learning potential (Shukla&Pandey,2020). One method to do this is to utilize tailored instruction.

Individualized instruction refers to the practice of method, resources, and assessments to satisfy the demands of one particular learner. It ensures that a scholar is receiving the right supervision, flexibility, and learning assistance tailored towards his need to magnify opportunities for academic growth (Shukla & Pandey, 2020). A learner's profile gives educator clues that demonstrates both a learner's strengths and deficiencies. Individualized reading teaching gives significant benefits for enhancing reading fluency (Galappaththy & Karunarathne, 2022). By personalizing instruction to each learner's needs, teachers can create a more engaging and suitable learning environment, leading to increased reading skills (Journals, Nwachukwu & Nwafor, 2015). According to Ugwu (2019), this strategy provides for personalized feedback and focused interventions, addressing areas where students are experiencing setback, thereby increasing their fluency and comprehension.

Cooperating learning strategy allows students to work together in small groups to attain learning objectives. It makes every member of the group an active and participating member and encourages cooperation among learners. For adults learning to read and understand, cooperative learning procedures should involve separating the adults in small groups with combinations of ability. This means that each group need to have adults who are stronger readers and weaker readers. Teacher can then set a target to each of the group as they go ahead to answer the problem, thus making all members of the class to grow along. Ugwu (2019) asserted that in most of the adult literacy courses witnessed, there is no evidence of teachers routinely assessing learners' needs or evaluating whether education satisfied individual or group needs.

Cooperative learning practices, according to Ugwu (2019) promotes students' participation and improves student reading comprehension. Research demonstrates that students employing cooperative learning methodologies outperformed those in traditional settings, demonstrating that cooperative learning can considerably enhance reading comprehension scores (Ugwu, 2019). Galappaththy et al. (2022) found the cooperative learning practices encourages

students to become critical thinkers, helps students to build communication and social skills and helpful for varied learners. Reading comprehension is crucial to academic performance as it is required to grasp other concepts. Reading is important for day-to-day activities in the present society. Therefore, the necessity to look into strategies for boosting reading comprehension and document them in the literature is the purpose behind this work.

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Learning and Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences are the theoretical underpinnings for this investigation. Vygotsky (1978) underlines the essence of social interaction and scaffolding in cognitive development. Central to his idea is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which proposes that learners perform better when supported by more competent individuals, such as peers or instructors. This principle highlights the effectiveness of cooperative learning practices, which are particularly beneficial for adult learners who succeed in collaborative situations that draw on shared experiences. Complementing this, Gardner (1983) contends that individuals possess numerous intelligences - such as linguistic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal - each indicating different methods of processing information.

The notion provides the argument for tailored instruction, allowing educators to tailor content and instructional approaches to suit learners' different skills, interests, and backgrounds. Given the heterogeneous character of adult learners in terms of age, experiences, and cognitive styles, both theories reaffirm the value of adaptive and socially based educational strategies. By integrating tailored instruction with cooperative learning, educators can boost engagement, comprehension, and overall reading performance in adult education settings.

### **Literature Review**

Individualized instruction is a method of instruction in which there is one-to-one teaching and self-paced learning based on an outline of progressive goals leading to the course/curriculum objectives. Differently put, a democratic society also needs schools and teachers bearing responsibility for individualized implementation of the education process (Nwokedi & Ogundele, 2020). Individualized instruction is a differentiation strategy that is based on the following principles that teaching must meet collective and individual needs of students, differentiated teaching must be implemented in a way that benefits all students and that schools must therefore alleviate the socially conditioned learning differences and provide all students with equal opportunities for their optimal development (Bushie, 2015; Deunk, Smale-Jacobse, de-Boer, Doolaard, & Bosker, 2018; Dixon, Yssel, McConnell & Hardin., 2015).

Benefits of individualized instruction includes allowing a student who is above or below "average" to proceed at the student's own pace for optimal learning, allowing students to learn the self-discipline needed to motivate themselves and to keep their progress on target and students can feedback and seek help when needed (Deunk et al., 2018).

According to Jacob, Edozie and Pillay (2022), in cooperative learning, students are assigned to small groups to work together to complete a group activity. The implementation of cooperative learning strategy is a unique notion that aims at further development in the previous methods of teaching. Most recently, the idea of cooperative learning practices has been introduced by language scholars emphasizing the need for a change in the typical teaching environment where an average student has been deemed inert, indifferent and bored (Muhammed & Khaled, 2017). In connection with cooperative learning strategy, student-focused teaching has widely been used in research literature with different terms like students-centred learning, flexible learning, experimental learning, and self-directed learning which is associated with the work of Jean Piaget (1896-1980) (Nwokedi & Ogundele, 2020). Cooperative learning tactics provide for a condition where students are involved with their peers to learn and enjoy the teachings under the careful supervision of their teachers.

The basic elements of cooperative learning that distinguish it from other teaching strategies are positive interdependence, face to face promotional interaction, individuals' accountability and personal responsibility, frequent use of interpersonal and small groups' social skills and regular group processing of current functioning. According to Thomas and George (2016), adoption of cooperative learning is concerned with competent endurance from the teacher

to monitor and promote the peers' engagement to reach the common goals. Focus on the learners' engagement with their peers in the class is a critical aspect that is inevitable for successful language education.

### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- i. There is no significant mean difference in the reading comprehension of the participants exposed to individualized instruction and the control group.
- ii. There is no significant mean difference in the reading comprehension of the participants exposed to cooperative learning and the control group.

There is no significant mean difference in the reading comprehension of the participants exposed to individualized instruction and cooperative learning.

### Methodology

Quasi-experimental research design was adopted for the study. The independent variables are individualized instruction and cooperative learning strategy while the dependent variable is reading comprehension. The study population comprised 987 adult learners enrolled in Adult Learning Centres within Ibadan Metropolis. Purposive sampling technique was to select 45 adult learners who are deficient in reading comprehension for the study. They were selected across 3 study centres in Ibadan. The study made use of three groups (Individualised Instruction, Cooperative Learning and the Control Group). Participants were 45 first-grade adult learners with reading comprehension difficulty in some Adult and Non-Formal Education Centres, Ibadan, Oyo State, who were randomly selected for the study. They were nominated by their instructors and their intention and wiliness to participate in the study was secured. They were divided into three major groups namely as presented in Table 1.

Group	Treatments	Number
Group 1	Individualised Instruction	15
Group 2	Cooperative Learning	15
Group 3	Control Group	15

Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (RECAT) was used to collect data for the study. RECAT was a comprehension passage with questions which test various levels of comprehension such as literary, critical and inferential. The face and content validity of the instrument was achieved through vetting by a teacher in one of the Adult Education Centre and two experts in the field of Adult Education. It was subjected to pilot-tested via test-retest on similar adults and it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.71. The participants were subjected to treatments (individualized students' instruction for and cooperative learning strategy). The three groups were subjected to the same test and their scores compared.

### Treatments

**1<sup>st</sup> Treatment:** The first treatment was the teaching of reading comprehension to 15 adults for 30 days using individualized instruction. It involved the researcher personally teaching reading comprehension to the 15 adults one by one. Each adult was taught for two days. With the assistance of the resident adult teacher, the areas of difficulty of each student in relation to reading comprehension were identified and this guided the investigator to adopt appropriate peculiar approach for each student.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Treatment:** The second treatment was the teaching of reading comprehension to 15 adults for 30 days using cooperative learning strategy. It involved grouping the adults into three and telling them the objective of the classification. They were guided to work on mastering the pronunciation and meaning of key words in the compression

passage, to master reading of the passage and to be able to answer questions attached. With the assistance of the resident teacher, a leader was chosen for each group based on the reading comprehension ability. These students served as the leader of the group. Each of the groups worked on the task for 10 days.

**Control group:** The third treatment was the teaching of reading comprehension to 15 adults for 30 days using conventional method. It involved the researcher personally teaching reading comprehension to the 15 adults using the traditional methods. This was also done for 30 days. Data collected was analysed using independent t-test. Data collected was analysed using independent t-test to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level.

## Results

**Table 2:**

*Independent t-test showing the Showing Difference between Reading Comprehension between Individualised Instruction (IDI) Group and the Control Group*

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal	P
Individualized instruction	15	42.7	6.8	10.77	*S
Control group	15	30.3	3.5		

S = significant at 0.05

Table 2 shows that significant difference exist between the mean and standard deviation of the participants exposed to individualized instruction group ( $\bar{X} = 42.7$ ; SD= 6.8) and the control group ( $\bar{X} = 30.3$ ; SD= 2.5). The calculated t-test ( $t=10.77$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) is also significantly higher than the tabulated value of 1.76. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is significant mean difference in the reading comprehension of the participants exposed to individualized instruction and the control group.

**Table 3**

*Independent t-test showing the Difference between Reading Comprehension between Cooperative Learning Strategy Group (CLS) and the Control Group*

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal	P
Cooperative learning	15	39.4	2.84	10.04	*S
Control group	15	33.3	3.51		

S = significant at 0.05

Table 3 shows that significant difference exist between the mean and standard deviation of the participants exposed to cooperative learning strategy ( $\bar{X} = 39.4$ ; SD= 2.84) and the control group ( $\bar{X} = 33.3$ ; SD= 3.51). The calculated t-test ( $t=10.04$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) is also significantly higher than the tabulated value of 1.76. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is significant mean difference in the reading comprehension of the participants exposed to cooperative learning strategy and the control group.

**Table 4**

*Independent t-test showing the Difference between Reading Comprehension between Individualised Instruction (IDI) and Cooperative Learning Strategy Group (CLS)*

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal	P
Individualized instruction	15	42.67	2.6	3.21	*S
Cooperative learning	15	39.47	2.8		

\*S = significant at 0.05.

Table 3 above shows that significant difference exists between the mean and standard deviation of the participants exposed to individualized instruction group ( $\bar{X} = 42.67$ ;  $SD = 2.6$ ) and those exposed to cooperative learning strategy ( $\bar{X} = 39.47$ ;  $SD = 2.8$ ). The calculated t-test ( $t = 3.21$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) is also significantly higher than the tabulated value of 1.76. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is significant mean difference in the reading comprehension of the participants exposed to individualized teaching and cooperative learning strategy. It can be interpreted therefore that individualized instruction enhances reading comprehension of the participants more than cooperative learning strategy.

### Discussion of Findings

It was found that significant mean difference existed in reading fluency of adult taught with individualized instruction and the control group. Individualized instruction, characterized by one-on-one teacher-learner interaction, enables targeted teaching of specific reading comprehension skills tailored to each learner's needs. This is in line with the findings of Shukla and Pandey (2020) who found that individualized instruction supports learners' diverse academic backgrounds and abilities by offering customized strategies and assessments. Also, the study of Galappaththy *et al.* (2022) found that such tailored approaches significantly enhance reading fluency, while Ugwu (2019) reported that adult learners receiving individualized instruction demonstrated marked improvements in comprehension due to personalized feedback and specific interventions. Similarly, Journals, *et al.* (2015) observed that individualized reading instruction fosters student engagement and academic achievement by addressing unique learner profiles. These findings collectively affirm that individualized instruction creates a supportive and flexible learning environment, which is empirically proven to lead to superior reading comprehension outcomes compared to traditional group-based methods.

Galappaththy *et al.* (2022) found that such tailored approaches significantly enhance reading fluency, while Ugwu (2019) reported that adult learners receiving individualized instruction demonstrated marked improvements in comprehension due to personalized feedback and specific interventions. Similarly, Journals, *et al.* (2015) observed that individualized reading instruction fosters student engagement and academic achievement by addressing unique learner profiles. These findings collectively affirm that individualized instruction creates a supportive and flexible learning environment, which is empirically proven to lead to superior reading comprehension outcomes compared to traditional group-based methods.

It was found that significant mean difference existed in the reading comprehension of the participants exposed to cooperative learning strategy and the control group. This is because cooperative learning strategy allows students to learn from their mates and promotes peer interaction. Furthermore, cooperative learning affords students the freedom and opportunity to ask their mates questions they may not be able to ask their teachers. This finding is supported by Ugwu (2019) found that students engaged in cooperative learning significantly outperformed their counterparts in conventional classrooms, highlighting the strategy's effectiveness in boosting reading comprehension. Cooperative learning encourages peer interaction, which fosters deeper understanding and engagement with reading materials. Galappaththy *et al.* (2022) also confirmed that such strategies promote critical thinking, social interaction, and inclusivity, which are essential for adult learners.

Conversely, Ugwu (2019) observed that many adult literacy classrooms lacked systematic assessment and individualized instruction, undermining the effectiveness of traditional methods. Individualized instruction, when embedded within cooperative strategies, further enhances comprehension by addressing learners' specific needs (Journals *et al.*, 2015; Galappaththy & Karunarathne, 2022). This approach not only offers targeted support but also improves fluency through personalized feedback (Ugwu, 2019). Hence, the empirical findings consistently reveal a statistically significant advantage for learners taught through cooperative methods, underscoring the need for educators to adopt these strategies to maximize reading comprehension gains among adult learners.

While both cooperative learning and individualized instructional strategies have significant effects on reading comprehension of the adult learners, individualized instruction is more potent than cooperative learning. The reason for this is that individualized instruction, typified by one-to-one teaching, affords the teacher better avenue to provide targeted reading comprehension instruction for the student and also provide the opportunity to closely monitor how the student is faring Shukla and Pandey (2020) emphasized that individualized instruction caters to diverse learner profiles by offering tailored strategies, resources, and assessments, thereby ensuring academic growth. Galappaththy and Karunarathne (2022) found that personalized instruction significantly improves reading fluency, as learners receive direct, focused support on areas of difficulty. Ugwu (2019) also noted marked comprehension gains among adults exposed to individualized instruction, attributing success to specific feedback and targeted interventions.

Journals *et al.* (2015) further reported that individualized strategies improve engagement and comprehension by addressing the unique needs of each learner. In comparison, cooperative learning strategies also yield significant improvement over traditional methods (Ugwu, 2019; Galappaththy *et al.*, 2022), promoting collaboration and critical thinking. However, the one-size-fits-all nature of group strategies may limit personalized attention. Therefore, while cooperative learning enhances comprehension through peer interaction, individualized instruction offers a more focused and adaptable approach, leading to greater academic gains. This positions individualized instruction as a more effective method for improving reading comprehension among adult learners.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study show a significant mean difference in reading comprehension of adult learners exposed to individualized instruction and those in the control group. A significant mean difference was also equally observed between participants exposed to cooperative learning strategies and the control group. Both individualized instruction and cooperative learning showed potency in improving reading comprehension of adult learners.

However, individualized instruction demonstrated more effectiveness in improving the reading comprehension of adult learners. This can be because it is a learner-centred teaching strategy, which allows for tailored interventions, specific feedback, and focused support based on individual needs. This implies that although cooperative learning fosters collaboration and peer engagement, it does not adequately address each adult learner's unique reading challenges.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following were recommended:

1. Adult literacy centres and educational institutions should pay good attention to the use of personalized teaching strategies such as individualized instruction as it was found to be more effective than cooperative learning in enhancing reading comprehension.
2. Give the effectiveness of both individualized instruction and cooperative learning in improving reading comprehension of adult learners, educators of adults should incorporate cooperative strategies and individualized methods into their classroom instruction when teaching reading to adults.
3. Continuous capacity building is germane for instructors of adults to ensure effective delivery of both individualized and cooperative learning strategy.

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