



REL Pacific Ask A REL Response

Literacy, Other

December 2019

Question:

What does the research say about resources and best practices to support low-literacy adults to build their reading and writing skills?

Response:

Following an established REL Pacific research protocol, we conducted a web-based search for resources related to resources and best practices around adult literacy (see Methods section for search terms and resource selection criteria). We focused our search in particular on studies in the Pacific and other indigenous contexts for greater relevancy to our partners in the Pacific region; however, we included studies with more generalizable findings due to the limited amount of research available in these contexts.

References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. Descriptions of the resources are quoted directly from the publication abstracts. We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, our search included the most commonly used research resources, but they are not comprehensive and other relevant references and resources may exist.

Research References

Blackmer, R. & Hayes-Harb, R. (2016). Identifying effective methods of instruction for adult emergent readers through community-based research. *Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education*, 5(2), 35–49. Retrieved from: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1125471>

From the abstract: “We present a community-based research project aimed at identifying effective methods and materials for teaching English literacy skills to adult English as a second language emergent readers. We conducted a quasi-experimental study whereby we evaluated the efficacy of two approaches, one based on current practices at the English Skills Learning Center (ESLC), and the other involving a number of innovative methods and materials. In addition, we collected written reflections from the instructors in the study and conducted interviews with the students. The qualitative and quantitative data together suggest that while both approaches led to student gains, the one based on current practices led to greater student gains.”

Hanemann, U. & Scarpino, C. (Eds.). (2016). *Harnessing the potential of ICTs: Literacy and numeracy programmes using radio, TV, mobile phones, tablets and computers* (2nd edition). UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED573633>

From the abstract: “The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) has published a second edition of ‘Harnessing the Potential of ICTs: Literacy and Numeracy Programmes Using Radio, TV, Mobile Phones, Tablets and Computers.’ This compilation of case studies from all world regions presents promising literacy and numeracy programmes that use information and communication technologies (ICTs) in their access and outreach strategies. The twenty-six case studies illustrate how ICTs such as radio, TV, mobile phones, tablets and computers can be used as media of instruction, can supplement face-to-face teaching, and can help to develop and strengthen youth and adult literacy, language and numeracy skills. The case studies featured in this publication can also be found in the UNESCO Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices Database (LitBase).”

Kruidenier, J. R., MacArthur, C. A., & Wrigley, H. S. (2010). *Adult education literacy instruction: A review of the research*. National Institute for Literacy. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED521229>

From the abstract: “The Adult Literacy Research Working Group (ALRWG), a panel of experts on adult reading research and practice, was established by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) in collaboration with the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). It was part of the Institute's efforts to provide educators, parents and others with access to scientifically based reading research, including research-based tools for improving literacy programs and policies for children, youth and adults, through the Partnership for Reading. The purpose of the ALRWG was to identify and evaluate existing

research related to adult literacy reading instruction in order to provide the field with research-based products including principles and practices for practitioners. This document is a follow-up to the original review of Adult Education (AE) reading instruction research, 'Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction Research.' It presents findings from an analysis of the AE reading instruction research base and is designed as a resource for practitioners and reading researchers. It focuses on 'findings' that can be derived from the research and their application in AE settings."

Lesgold, A. M. & Welch-Ross, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Improving adult literacy instruction: Developing reading and writing*. National Academies Press. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED536366>

From the abstract: "More than an estimated 90 million adults in the United States lack the literacy skills needed for fully productive and secure lives. The effects of this shortfall are many: Adults with low literacy have lower rates of participation in the labor force and lower earnings when they do have jobs, for example. They are less able to understand and use health information. And they are less likely to read to their children, which may slow their children's own literacy development. At the request of the U.S. Department of Education, the National Research Council convened a committee of experts from many disciplines to synthesize research on literacy and learning in order to improve instruction for those served in adult education in the U.S. The committee's report, *Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Options for Practice and Research*, recommends a program of research and innovation to gain a better understanding of adult literacy learners, improve instruction, and create the supports adults need for learning and achievement. 'Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Developing Reading and Writing,' which is based on the report, presents an overview of what is known about how literacy develops the component skills of reading and writing, and the practices that are effective for developing them. It also describes principles of reading and writing instruction that can guide those who design and administer programs or courses to improve adult literacy skills. Although this is not intended as a 'how to' manual for instructors, teachers may also find the information presented here to be helpful as they plan and deliver instruction."

Lesgold, A.M. & Welch-Ross, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Improving adult literacy instruction: Options for practice and research*. National Academies Press. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED536344>

From the abstract: "A high level of literacy in both print and digital media is required for negotiating most aspects of 21st-century life, including supporting a family, education, health, civic participation, and competitiveness in the global economy. Yet, more than 90 million U.S. adults lack adequate literacy. Furthermore, only 38 percent of U.S. 12th graders are at or above proficient in reading. *Improving Adult Literacy Instruction* synthesizes the research on literacy and learning to improve literacy instruction in the United States and to recommend a more systemic approach to research, practice, and policy. The book focuses on individuals ages 16 and older who are not in K–12 education. It identifies factors that affect

literacy development in adolescence and adulthood in general, and examines their implications for strengthening literacy instruction for this population. It also discusses technologies for learning that can assist with multiple aspects of teaching, assessment, and accommodations for learning. There is inadequate knowledge about effective instructional practices and a need for better assessment and ongoing monitoring of adult students' proficiencies, weaknesses, instructional environments, and progress, which might guide instructional planning. *Improving Adult Literacy Instruction* recommends a program of research and innovation to validate, identify the boundaries of, and extend current knowledge to improve instruction for adults and adolescents outside school. The book is a valuable resource for curriculum developers, federal agencies such as the Department of Education, administrators, educators, and funding agencies.”

Lesgold, A.M. & Welch-Ross, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Improving adult literacy instruction: Supporting learning and motivation*. National Academies Press. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED536388>

From the abstract: “Virtually everyone needs a high level of literacy in both print and digital media to negotiate most aspects of 21st century life—succeeding in a competitive job market, supporting a family, navigating health information, and participating in civic activities. Yet, according to a recent survey estimate, more than 90 million adults in the United States lack the literacy skills needed for fully productive and secure lives. At the request of the U.S. Department of Education, the National Research Council convened a committee of experts from many disciplines to synthesize research on literacy and learning in order to improve instruction for those served in adult education in the U.S. The committee's report, *Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Options for Practice and Research*, recommends a program of research and innovation to gain a better understanding of adult literacy learners, improve instruction, and create the supports adults need for learning and achievement. ‘*Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Supporting Learning and Motivation*,’ which is based on the report, describes principles of effective instruction to guide those who design and administer adult literacy programs and courses. It also explores ways to motivate learners to persist in their studies, which is crucial given the thousands of hours of study and practice required to become proficient. The booklet concludes with a look at technologies that show promise for supporting individual learners and freeing busy adults from having to be in a particular place in order to practice their literacy skills. Although this booklet is not intended as a ‘how to’ manual for instructors, teachers may also find the information presented here to be helpful as they plan and deliver instruction.”

Nielsen, K. (2015). Teaching writing in adult literacy: Practices to foster motivation and persistence and improve learning outcomes. *Adult Learning*, 26(4), 143–150. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1076597>

From the abstract: “Writing is critical to success in education, the workplace, and everyday communication yet receives limited attention in the research, particularly the topic of writing instruction in adult education. Adult literacy practitioners frequently lack training in writing

instruction and must rely on a confusing array of information, primarily derived from K-12 pedagogy. This literature synthesis investigates findings from studies of writing focusing on adult literacy and explicates specific instructional practices and strategies for teaching writing to adult learners. Findings highlight the importance of fostering motivation, persistence, and self-efficacy and indicate motivation and achievement increase when instructors introduce specific writing micro-goals, share explicit feedback, and provide evidence of progress. Classrooms should incorporate opportunities for creative expression, authentic materials and communication, writing task contextualization, explicit strategy instruction, regular journaling and personal writing, and technology and multimedia integration. Research gaps in supporting adult learner writing are identified, and implications and ideas for future research are offered.”

Perin, D. (Ed.). (2019). *The Wiley handbook of adult literacy*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED598829>.

From the abstract: “This handbook presents a wide range of research on adults who have low literacy skills. It looks at the cognitive, affective, and motivational factors underlying adult literacy; adult literacy in different countries; and the educational approaches being taken to help improve adults' literacy skills. It includes not only adults enrolled in adult literacy programs, but postsecondary students with low literacy skills, some of whom have reading disabilities. The first section of ‘The Wiley Handbook of Adult Literacy’ covers issues such as phonological abilities in adults who have not yet learned to read; gender differences in the reading motivation of adults with low literacy skills; literacy skills, academic self-efficacy, and participation in prison education; and more. Chapters on adult literacy, social change and sociocultural factors in South Asia and in Ghana; literacy, numeracy, and self-rated health among U.S. adults; adult literacy programs in Southeastern Europe and Turkey, and a review of family and workplace literacy programs are among the topics featured in the second section. The last part examines how to teach reading and writing to adults with low skills; adults' transition from secondary to postsecondary education; implications for policy, research, and practice in the adult education field; educational technologies that support reading comprehension; and more. (1) Looks at the cognitive processing challenges associated with low literacy in adults; (2) Features contributions from a global team of experts in the field; and (3) Offers writing strategy instruction for low-skilled postsecondary students. ‘The Wiley Handbook of Adult Literacy’ is an excellent book for academic researchers, teacher educators, professional developers, program designers, and graduate students. It's also beneficial to curriculum developers, adult basic education and developmental education instructors, and program administrators, as well as clinicians and counselors who provide services to adults with reading disabilities.”

Note: REL Pacific was unable to locate a free link to the full-text version of this resource. Although REL Pacific tries to provide publicly available resources whenever possible, this resource may be of sufficient interest to the reader to warrant finding it through university or public library systems.

Peyton, J. K., Moore, S. C. K., & Young, S. (2010). *Evidence-based, student-centered instructional practices*. CAELA Network Brief. Center for Adult English Language Acquisition. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED540599>

From the abstract: “The field of adult education has a longstanding tradition of student-centered approaches to learning. More recently, there has been an increased emphasis in K–12 and adult education on using evidence-based instructional practices. While there has been some tendency to dichotomize these two approaches, instruction of any kind is more effective when it is supported by evidence of its success. The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, which is Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, requires that local education providers funded under the Act use instructional practices that are based on a strong research foundation. Therefore, it is critical that instructional developers in states, regions, and programs know the research base for specific instructional practices. This brief describes evidence-based and student-centered instruction and gives examples of instructional approaches that are supported by evidence. It also describes how teachers of adults learning English as a second language can work together in learning communities to increase their knowledge of and skills with student-centered instructional practices that are evidence-based. This brief is written for teachers and program administrators seeking to implement evidence-based, student-centered instruction in programs and classes that include adults learning English as a second language. It will also be of use to professional developers who support teachers in this work.”

Sabatini, J. P., Shore, J., Holtzman, S. & Scarborough, H. S. (2011). Relative effectiveness of reading intervention programs for adults with low literacy. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 4(2), 118–133. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ920177>

From the abstract: “To compare the efficacy of instructional programs for adult learners with basic reading skills below the 7th-grade level, 300 adults were randomly assigned to 1 of 3 supplementary tutoring programs designed to strengthen decoding and fluency skills, and gains were examined for the 148 adult students who completed the program. The 3 intervention programs were based on or adapted from instructional programs that have been shown to benefit children with reading levels similar to those of the adult sample. Each program varied in its relative emphasis on basic decoding versus reading fluency instruction. A repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance confirmed small to moderate reading gains from pre- to posttesting across a battery of targeted reading measures but no significant relative differences across interventions. An additional 152 participants who failed to complete the intervention differed initially from those who persisted. Implications for future research and adult literacy instruction are discussed.”

Additional Organizations to Consult

Coalition on Adult Basic Education: <https://coabe.org/>

The Coalition on Adult Basic Education exists to provide leadership, communication, professional development, and advocacy for adult education and literacy practitioners to advance quality services for all adult learners. COABE represents the field of 55,000 adult educators and provides a variety of services, including professional development through annual, state-of-the-art national conferences, more than 40 webinars annually, and a peer reviewed journal. COABE is organized to advance national and international adult education and literacy opportunities for all persons. One of the main purposes of COABE is to promote adult education and literacy programs, including Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, English for Speakers of Other Languages, Family Literacy, Skills Development, Workforce Development, and other state, federal, and private programs which assist undereducated and/or disadvantaged adults to function effectively.

Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy Center: <https://lincs.ed.gov/state-resources/federal-initiatives/teal>

The Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy (TEAL) Center, funded by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) of the U.S. Department of Education, was designed to improve the quality of teaching in adult education in the content areas. Focusing on the content area of writing for Adult Basic Education (ABE) students, the TEAL Center offered an intensive program of professional development and individualized technical assistance to participating local staff in 12 states.

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning: <http://uil.unesco.org/>

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) is located in Hamburg, Germany, and is one of UNESCO's seven education Institutes. UIL supports Member States in the field of lifelong learning with a focus on adult and continuing education, literacy and non-formal basic education. It pays special attention to UNESCO's Global Priority Africa and Global Priority Gender Equality. It has one of the largest libraries in the world within its specialized field and hosts the world's longest-running journal of comparative education and lifelong learning.

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- "adult literacy."
- "adult literacy" and "instruction."

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences, for relevant resources.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

REL Pacific searched ERIC and other academic journal databases for studies that were published in English-language peer-reviewed research journals within the last 10 years. REL Pacific prioritized documents that are accessible online and publicly available, and prioritized references that provide practical information based on peer-reviewed research for the education leadership who requested this Ask A REL.¹ Sources included in this document were last accessed in December 2019. Methodological priorities and considerations were given in the review and selection of the references to the following:

- Study types: randomized control trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, and literature reviews.
- Target population, sample size, and study duration.
- Limitations and generalizability of the findings and conclusions.

¹ This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educational stakeholders in the Pacific Region (American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Hawai'i, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL Pacific) at McREL International. This memorandum was prepared by REL Pacific under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-17-C-0010, administered by McREL International. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.