

Effects of Language Experience Approach on Students' Reading and Comprehension Levels in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria

SAMUEL MILAHAM
University of Jos, Nigeria

Abstract. Many students in public Junior Secondary Schools in Nigeria are unable to read text books meant for their classes meaningfully. In the schools, they are taught to read using recitation or choral reading methods. This makes the students to have poor vocabulary for use to communicate in English language. This study investigates effects of Language Experience Approach on students reading and comprehension levels in Jos north LGA Plateau state. Two research questions and hypotheses were set to guide the study. Quasi experimental research, specifically; equivalent group pretest posttest design was used for the study. Eighty four (84) students with reading difficulty were used as population for the study with sample forty (40) students. Simple random sampling technique was employed for the study. Sight Word Recognition Test (SWRT), Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) and Language Experience Approach (LEA) were used for data collection. Data collected was analyzed using percentage and t-test. The results showed significant improvement in the students' reading and comprehension levels. The students were able to read meaningfully and answer inferential and critical comprehension questions. The researcher concluded that the improvement recorded was due to the intervention given using LEA. The researcher recommended that students should be made to read texts that are based on their background knowledge and experiences. The text must be at their reading and comprehension levels.

Keywords: Language experience Approach, Student' reading and comprehension level

1. Introduction

Reading is one of the important skills students need in order to succeed in their academics. It is the main source of language input and is needed to improve

other language skills such as speaking, listening and writing. Reading comprehension according to Oyetunde (2009) is the act or process of understanding the nature or meaning of something. This suggests that comprehension cannot be found on printed page, but in the mind of the reader who reads the words. Comprehension is building bridge between the new and the known. It is reporting verbatim what was read. Reading comprehension helps the reader to get information, gain knowledge and relates same for a purpose.

Learning disability is a childhood disorders characterised by difficulty with certain skills such as reading and writing in individual with normal intelligence. U S Department of Education (1999) states that these disorders affect the individual's ability to acquire, retain, understand, organise or use verbal and non verbal information for a purpose. Learning disability also affects the students' ability to reason, think and interpret what they read, seen and heard. These result in their inability to link information from different sources within their brain. In this paper, the researcher examined three levels of comprehension namely; Literal or factual where the reader is asked to recognise or locate the main ideas, details, sequences, cause-effects and characters that are explicitly stated in the passage. Inferential or interpretive involves reading between and beyond the lines. It is a higher level though process where the reader makes inferences from the fact, reach conclusion and generalisation. Critical or evaluative comprehension: This is the highest level of cognitive processing and involves passing of judgements by the reader on the content of the passage read.

Reading helps the reader interacts with the immediate and outside environment. Reading is a complex activity that involved recognition and comprehension

process with comprehension as the goal of the reading process. Andzayi and Umolu (2004) express that in reading comprehension, students do not just read the text, but also understand what they have read, the message from the text and information that is sent by the writer. However, Tati (2017) states that most students in public secondary schools cannot read. They have difficulties with reading comprehending. This is because reading is a receptive skill and so most students have difficulty in understanding the text, vocabulary and purpose of the text. In schools, teachers focus more on making the students speak English language. This is because the approach to language teaching and learning genre in school is based on English language so the students are exposed more on oral than reading.

Language Experience Approach (LEA) is a method of teaching literacy skills to students based on their background knowledge and experiences. In this study, the researcher used LEA to see how the students' reading level and comprehension skills can be improved. The teachers used the students' experiential background to develop the reading text. The teacher provides items for the experience. For example, he tells them story of how he spent his holiday, the favourite book he likes and his experience in the Zoo. Students were asked to retell talk about their vacation or favourite stories and discuss its content. Milaham and Zaram (2017) express that when the students have been provoked, the teacher engages the students discussing their experience. Students were asked to dictate their story to the teacher based on their experiences and the teacher writes it down. The teacher explained areas in the students' story which he considered difficult to understand. The text was used to teach them to learn how to read and answer questions based on the developed text.

Many students' ability to read comprehensively is very low. Such students found reading very difficult and frustrating. They have limited vocabulary for use to communicate their feelings and ideas. During reading, they are not motivated to set purpose for what they are going to read about. Milaham (2018) states that the technique and strategy use in teaching and learning to read are mostly traditional such as; recitation, memorization and choral reading. Andzayi and Umolu (2004) note that students are often asked to read passages from texts which are either at their frustration level or read in language that is not familiar. In some instances, they are taught to read a passage which they have no background knowledge about its content or the text is far removed from their experiential background. Most texts are not based on

the students' instructional level. Eka and Yunita (2012) and Milaham (2018) express that couple with frustration students with learning disabilities experience during reading, teachers also teach them to learn to read using memorisation, recitation and choral approach. These methods only make the student call words without understanding their meanings. In the class, teachers do not consider the difficulty level of the text the students are given to read, such as; independent level (students read and answer questions on their own), instructional level (students read and answer questions with teacher's assistance) and frustration level (student cannot read the text even with teacher's assistance). Teaching students with poor method and using text or passage that is at their frustration level only makes reading a bored and frustrating activity.

My personal experience in working with students at the junior secondary for eight years shows that on entry in secondary schools, most students have poor literacy skills and poor vocabulary in the language they are learning to read. The students saw reading as the most difficult subject to understand. Reading is a bored activity. Most sentences in their class text books are very long, unfamiliar words are use. In fact, the students are made to read texts that are at their frustration level, they are always asked to read and answer factual, inferential and critical comprehension level at the same time.

The students are not taught to read using such methods as; LEA, phonics approach, linguistic approach or multisensory approach. LEA supports students to become active in learning to read. It motivates students to apply what they have listened to, seen and written about. It is based on this background that the researcher used Language Experience Approach to determine its effects on students' reading and comprehension levels.

2. Statement of the Problem

The use of Language Experience Approach in the teaching reading and reading comprehension to students with in secondary schools is either absent or is poorly used by teachers in secondary. Many students enter secondary unable to read text that is meant for their class level. In the school, they are taught to read using the traditional recitation and choral reading methods. They have poor or very limited vocabulary for use to communicate their feeling and ideas. Lack of enough vocabulary knowledge by students is mostly attributed to the difficulty level of their class text books. These text or passages are being read at frustration level, in rare

cases, few of the students read it at instructional level while none of them read could read the text at independent level. Their comprehension level is also very poor. Few of the students could only manage to answer questions at factual level of comprehension, while majority of them could not read and answer question at the inferential and evaluative levels. This means that the students are not either ready or interested in reading. This makes reading to be bored, difficult and a frustrating experience to the students.

3. Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to find out the effects of LEA on students' reading comprehension level in Jos North LGA, Plateau State. Specifically, the objectives are to find out the effects of LEA on students' reading levels and comprehension levels.

Research Questions

- What is the reading level of students with reading difficulty before and after exposure to LEA?
- What is the reading comprehension level of the experimental and control groups before and after exposure LEA?

4. Hypotheses

- There is no significant difference between the reading difficulty mean scores of the experimental and control groups before exposure to LEA
- There is no significant difference between the reading comprehension mean scores of the experimental and control groups before exposure to LEA

5. Methodology

This study employed quasi experimental type, specifically; equivalent group pretest posttest design was used. The participants were grouped into experimental group control. This was done to determine the effects of LEA on the reading and comprehension levels of the students before and after intervention. A pretest was administered to the experimental and control groups to determine their entry behaviour before treatment. Only the experimental group was given treatment using LEA. The control group was taught using the conventional method. Thereafter, posttest was administered to both the experimental and control groups to determine if there was gain score existed in their reading and comprehension levels after intervention.

The population of the study consisted of all public secondary schools students in Jos North Local Government Area (LGA) of Plateau State. The local government had seventeen (17) public secondary schools with a population of Eighty four (84) JSS 2 students with reading difficulty. Junior Secondary Three Students were chosen based on the fact that they can read comprehensively in readiness for their Junior Secondary School Certificate in JSS3. Similarly, the use of public secondary schools was based on the research reports by Beaty (2008) and Milaham (2018) which indicated the prevalence of poor reading comprehension among students in public schools and their glaring poor performances in JSCE, NECO and WEAC.

The sample for this study comprised of forty (40) students drawn from the eighty-four (84) students who exhibited difficulties in reading comprehension. These students were between the fourteen and fifteen years. The choice of one school for the study was to allow the researcher to have enough time with the students in their class during the intervention period. Twenty (20) pupils were randomly assigned to the experimental and twenty (20) to the control group. The experimental group was attended to by the researcher in different classrooms during their English period. This helped to prevent the control group from having access and knowledge of the intervention materials given to the experimental group. The sampling technique used for this study was simple random sampling. This technique was used to select the study school. All the students were screened using Sight Word Recognition Test (SWRT). Simple random sampling technique was also used to get 40 participants out of the 84 students for the study. To assign participants into experimental and control groups, the researcher wrote "Yes" on 20 pieces of paper and "No" on 20 pieces of paper. The remaining 44 papers were left blank. The pieces of paper were put in a box, mixed and all the 84 students were asked to individually pick one without looking at the content. Those who picked "Yes" were tagged experimental group while those who picked "No" were tagged control group, while those who picked the blank papers were excluded from the study. The researcher wrote down the pupils' names in each of the group to ensure that they did not change their group.

This method gave all the students equal chance of being represented. This is in line with Awotunde, Ugodulunwa and Ozoji (2002) idea who recommended that in simple random sampling technique, every element in a population should have an equal chance of being included in the sample size.

The participants in the two groups (experimental and control) were maintained throughout the period of the intervention.

Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) and Language Experience Approach (LEA) were used for data collection. IRI is a graded passage taken from the students' English text book. This was used to test the students' reading and comprehension levels. The passages taken were used to screen the students reading and comprehension level. The students must read the passages in the IRI and answer the questions correctly before they were considered to be ready for reading. The passages were typed on a sheet of papers. In each passage, there were comprehension questions for the students to answer. Each student was given the passage to read and answer the questions that follow. Instructions on what the students would do were written on each passage.

Scoring: The students were asked to read each passage within 15 minutes. A score of 20 marks was given to each of the five questions answered

correctly. Students who scored from 1 to 44 were considered as reading the passage at frustration level. Those who scored were 45 to 59 were considered as reading the passage at instructional level, while those scored 60 and above were considered as reading the passage at independent level.

Data for this study was collected and analyzed using percentage. The post-test scores of the experimental group was correlated with the post-test scores of the control group in order to establish whether there were differences in the students' performance. For the hypotheses, the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the experimental and control groups were analyzed using t-Test at 0.05 level of significance for independent sample. This was done to compare the pre-test mean scores of the experimental and control groups with their post-test mean scores. Furthermore, it was carried out to help the researcher show the degree of mean difference in reading and comprehension between the experimental and control groups before and after intervention.

Research Question 1: What is the reading level of students with reading difficulty before exposure to Language Experience Approach?

Table 1: Students' Reading Difficulty Levels

Reading Levels	Experimental		Control	
	Pre-test	(%)	Pre-test	(%)
Frustration	20	(100)	20	(100)
Inferential	0		0	
Independent	0		0	
Total	20	(100)	20	(100)

Source: SPSS V.21

Table 1 shows the reading level of students with reading difficulty before exposure to LEA. Before exposure to LEA, 100% of students in both the experimental and control groups read at frustration level. The result shows that both the experimental and control groups showed significant difficulty in their reading level. None of them was able to read or comprehend at instructional level.

Research Question 2: What is the reading comprehension level of the experimental and control groups before and after exposure to Language Experimental Approach?

Table 2: Students' Reading Comprehension Levels

Comprehension Level	Experimental				Control			
	Pre-test (%)		Post-test (%)		Pre-test (%)		Post-test (%)	
Factual	20	(100)	0		20	(100)	20	(100)
Inferential	0		9	(45)	0		0	
Evaluative	0		11	(55)	0		0	
Total	20	(100)	20	(100)	20	(100)	20	(100)

Source: SPSS V.21

Table 2 shows the reading comprehension level of the experimental and control groups before and after exposure to LEA. Before exposure to LEA, 100% of the students in experimental group reading comprehension level fall under

factual level, while 100%, representing 20 students in control group reading comprehension fall under factual level. This result indicates that both the experimental and control groups showed significant difficulty in their reading comprehension level.

Research Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the reading ability levels mean scores of experimental and control groups before exposure to Language Experience Approach

Table 3: Reading Ability Level Mean Score of the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	t-cal	P-value
Experimental	20	29.1000	1.99737	38	1.302	.201
Control	20	28.4500	.99868			

Source: SPSS V.21

Table 3 indicates significant differences between the reading level of experimental and control groups before exposure to LEA. The pupils in the experimental group had a mean score of 29.10 and standard deviation of 1.20, whereas the control group had a mean score of 28.45 and standard deviation of 0.20. This shows that there was no significant difference between the reading level mean score between the experimental and control groups. In addition, the calculated value of t was 1.30, while the P-value was 0.20. Since the P-value of 0.20 was greater than 0.05, it means that there was greater than 2% chance that the differences between the reading comprehension mean scores of the experimental and control groups before and after exposure to LEA occurred by chance. Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no significant differences between the reading levels mean scores of the experimental and control group before exposure to LEA.

Research Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the reading comprehension levels mean scores of experimental and control group before and after exposure to LEA

Table 4: Reading Comprehension Levels Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	t-cal	P-Value
Experimental	20	60.1000	4.30300	38	21.922	.010
Control	20	36.9000	1.97084			

Source: SPSS V.21

Table 4 indicates the significant differences between the reading comprehension mean scores of experimental and control groups before exposure to LEA. The students in the experimental group had a mean score of 60.10 and standard deviation of 4.30, whereas the control group had a mean score of 36.90 and standard deviation of 1.97. This shows that there was no significant difference between the reading comprehension mean score of the experimental and control groups. In addition, the calculated value of t was 21.92, while the P-value was 0.01. Since the P-value of 0.01 was greater than 0.05, it means that there was greater than 1% chance that the differences between the reading comprehension mean scores of the experimental and control groups before and after exposure to LEA occurred by chance. Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no significant differences between the reading comprehension mean scores of the experimental and control group before exposure to LEA.

6. Discussion of Results

Research question one, table 1, shows the reading level of the students before exposure to LEA. Before the students were exposed to LEA, 100% of these in the experimental group read at frustration level, while in the control group, 100% of the students also read frustration level. This indicated that both the experimental and control groups showed significant difficulties in reading and comprehension levels. None of them could read either at instructional or independent level.

In research question two, the researcher investigated the reading comprehension levels of the experimental and control groups before and after exposure to LEA. Before exposure to LEA, 100% of both the students in the experimental and control groups can only read and answer factual comprehension questions. After the experimental group was exposed to intervention using LEA, 45% of them were able to answer inferential comprehension questions, while 55% answered critical comprehension questions correctly. The control group who were taught using the

conventional method, their comprehension level score was 100% based on factual comprehension. They were rated as beginning readers. They showed difficulty in their reading ability as compared with the result of experimental group. This result corroborates with Britta (2005) who stated that for students to comprehensively read a passage, they should be able to connect new and known ideas and give good judgement. This result is also in line with the finding of Andzayi, (2004), Oyetunde (2009) and Milaham (2018) who stated that students who were taught to read using their background experiences performed better than those who were taught to read using text above their experiences.

In testing the hypotheses, data collected were analyzed using t-test for independent samples. The results indicated that there was no significant differences in the reading ability mean scores of the experimental and control groups on reading ability levels before they were exposed to LEA. The pre-test t-test results showed that the pre-test p.values for reading ability levels is greater than 0.05. This shows that the differences in the pre-test reading ability levels mean scores between the experimental and control groups based before exposure to LEA occurred by chance. The experimental group was taught using LEA, while the control group was taught using conventional method. Both groups were post-tested using IRI. The experimental group showed significant improvement in reading ability mean scores than the control group. This was also ascertained by the post-test t-test analysis results indicated in table 4, where the post-test p.values of 0.01 scored in reading comprehension levels is less than 0.05. This shows that the differences in the post-test reading ability and comprehension levels mean scores between the experimental and control groups occurred as a result of intervention received in LEA when compared to that of the control group.

This finding agreed with Milaham and Davwar (2003) who stated that students acquired reading skills through active involvement in activities based on their background knowledge and experiences in formal and informal ways. Similarly, Andzayi and Umolu (2004) also stated that exposing students to places of interest to them, telling and retelling of familiar stories are useful activities to help students learn to read comprehensively because the passage being read is based on the personal experiences. Bierman and Domitrovich (2008) expressed that the use of enriched environment with familiar pictures, story books and activities also help students to acquire enough vocabulary for effective reading.

7. Conclusion

The study investigated the effects of Language Experience Approach on Students Reading Comprehension Levels in Jos North LGA, Plateau State. The experimental group were exposed to different pictures, animals, story books and folklores. They were asked to name items that are found in school or home and discuss the use of each. After the experimental group were engaged in learning to read using LEA, they were able to use their background knowledge and experiences to reading their developed written texts. There were able to answer most of the comprehension questions set from their English text book at the inferential and critical level. This significant improvement recorded was mainly due to the intervention given using LEA.

8. Recommendations

Based on the conclusion reached, the researcher suggests that:

Students should be made to read texts that are based on their background knowledge and experiences. The text must be based on their reading level and comprehension level. They should be given enough practices in discussing activities within their locality to enable them associate to enable them connect these with new ideas they might found books. Students should be actively engaged in learning to read through participation in LEA activities to enable them gain background knowledge and experiences from which they will use it to generate their reading materials.

References

- Andzayi, C., & Umolu, J. (2004). Reading instruction in primary and secondary schools. Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Jos, Jos.
- Oyetunde, T. O. (2009). Beginning reading scheme: Empowering teachers to help their pupils become good readers. Jos: LECAPS Publishers.
- Milaham, S. B., & Davwar, M. J. (2003). Relevance of pre-reading activities for the development of pre-reading skills in the pre-school child. In D. S. Bukar, P. P. Deshi, & J. G. Longkat (Eds.), *Towards effective teaching in primary school* (pp. 124-134).
- Milaham, S. B. & Zaram, N. G. (2017). Effects of oral language activities on reading abilities of pupils with reading difficulties in Jos

- South Local Government Area Plateau State, Nigeria. In A. Abdullahi,, T. A. Ajobiewe, G. J. Bila & S. M. Yakwal (Eds.). Issues in special needs education. A publication of the National Association of ExceptionalChildren (NAEC).
- Milaham, S. B. (2018). Effects of reading readiness activities on primary one pupils' ability to learn to read in Mangu Local Governement Area, Plateau State. Nigeria. A Ph.D Thesis, University of Jos, Faculty of Education
- U.S Department of Education (199) Definition and criteria for defining students as learning disabled. Federal Register, 64 (48).
- Tati (2017). Implementation of Language Experience Approach in Learning Speaking Skill at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri. From: <https://www.syekhnurjatati.ac.idat11/08/18>.
- Eka & Yunita (2012). Improving achievement in reading comprehension through the application of language experience approach. From: <https://journal.unimed.ac.idatthe11/08/18>.