



Effect of Concentrated Language Encounter Method in Development of Beginning Literacy Skills of Letter Knowledge Words Among Primary School Pupils in Cross River State

Emmanuel Uminya Ikwen

*Department of Special Education, Faculty of Education, University of
Calabar, Cross Rivers State, Nigeria*

ABSTRACT

The paper examined the effects of concentrated language encounter method in developing letter Knowledge words skill among primary school pupils in cross river state. The purpose of the study was to find out the effect of Primary One pupils' reading level, English letter Knowledge words involving small and capital letters of the alphabets skill. It also examine the extent to which the CLE method of teaching reading will help to develop letter words skill of Primary One pupils. One research question and one hypothesis were posed for investigation. The study utilized pretest, posttest quasi experimental designs (expost factor). Thirty (70) primary one pupils participated in the study. The instrument used included the Letter Knowledge Test (LKT) which was a standardized instrument, used in several prior studies in English. A total of 26 small letters of the alphabet and another 26 capital letters, making a total of 52 letters., which was assessed during pretest and posttest. Result indicated that the general reading ability of the pupils with reading problem needs was poor and at frustration level but the experimental group gained more small and capital letters and even sight words after intervention using concentrated language encounter method. Based on this finding, the researchers made some recommendations for the improvement of reading ability of primary school pupils with reading problem in public school settings.

INTRODUCTION

In view of the significance of reading and the activities involved, beginning reading instruction is an important stage in the learning to read process. The content of a beginning reading programme and the initial approach to the teaching of reading are of extreme importance. Developing appropriate

Effect of Concentrated Language Encounter on Early Literacy Skills

reading skills in pupils means giving them tools which will prepare them to continue learning and growing independently. However, many teachers take the development of reading skills for granted. Their assumption is that pupils learn to read automatically in the normal course of schooling. But competence in reading does not just happen and reading skills do not develop in a vacuum. Therefore, to acquire proficiency in it, pupils need to be taught basic reading skills under adult guidance in addition to being given enough opportunities to practise them.

The alphabet-letter is the basic unit of reading and writing in English. To be successful readers, pupils need to be familiar and comfortable with the letters of the alphabet; they should be able to identify them without hesitation and confusion. Although pupils may not be with the 'names' of the conventional alphabet-letters, past research results have established that pupils learning to read should be able to easily and automatically discriminate the letters from each other and from numbers and other letter-like symbols (Wren, 2004; Adams, 1990;).

The ability to quickly identify letters of the alphabet either, letter name, sound, or a word that begins with the letter is one of the best predictors of future reading (National Centre to Improve the Tools of Educators, 2004). Studies by Ruby (2004), Rosenberg (2006), and Ford (2005) reveal that all pupils, particularly pre-scholars, kindergarten and first-grade age pupils can benefit from alphabet recognition instruction. Pupils must become expert users of the letters they will see and use to write their own words and messages. Without a firm knowledge of letters, pupils will have difficulty with all other aspects of early literacy, particularly reading. Stahl (2001) affirms that letter knowledge should be fluid and automatic while Juel (2001) reported that letter recognition significantly influences the development and acquisition of the pre-requisite understanding that words are composed of individual letters, and that these letters correspond to sounds, and so on. These pre-requisite skills are essential for the development of word recognition abilities which, in turn, enhance reading comprehension and other higher order reading activities (Garcia, 2000).

A parent's education level and minority-language status are also contributing factors to the gap in reading achievement (See Stahl, 2001; ADEA, 2001). This gap has been demonstrated to impact negatively on alphabet recognition skills (Hart & Risley, 1995; Bradley & Stahl, 2001). According to ADEA (2001) only ten percent of pupils, aged six to eight (living in poverty) recognize up to eight letters in the alphabet, as compared to 28 percent of non-poor pupils who recognize all the letters in the alphabet.

Pupils who begin school and are able to quickly and accurately identify and articulate the letters of the alphabet, have an advantage in learning to read (Chard & Osborn, 2002). As soon as pupils are exposed to many literacy activities, they begin to recognize and discriminate letters. Pupils who have already learnt to recognize most letters, as pre-schoolers, will have less to learn upon formal school entry (Lyon, 2003). Pupils whose knowledge of

letters is not well developed when they start school require organized instruction and practice that will help them learn to identify, name, and write letters (Rosenberg, 2006).

Recent research continues to reveal that phoneme manipulation and phoneme- segmentation skills are closely associated with letter knowledge and 'letter-sound' knowledge (Gunning, 2000; Mann & Fog, 2003). Carroll (2004) conducted two studies investigating the links between letter knowledge and phonemic awareness. The first study evaluated a group of 3-4 year old pupils on letter knowledge, receptive vocabulary, and phonemic awareness tasks. Results revealed that no pupil was successful on any phoneme awareness task unless he/she knew at least one letter, and those pupils who scored significantly higher on the phoneme completion or phoneme deletion tasks recognized at least four letters correctly. In the second study, another group of 4 year old pupils were provided 20 minutes training in letter recognition for a total of 18 sessions. The results from this research indicate that letter knowledge instruction can improve letter-knowledge performance and that such knowledge is strongly correlated to the development of reading skills in pre-literate pupils (Carroll, 2004).

The initial step in learning to read is learning about letters (Adams, 1990; Davis, 2000). If pupils have a firm grasp of letter names (Adams, 1990) and visual- shapes (Reitsma, 2003) pupils can tackle the harder task of matching sound to a letter. Activities that promote extended discourse and scaffolding, such as shared reading and writing, are wonderful avenues for learning about letters (Davis, 2000). Knowledge of letters is not very valuable unless pupils have a direct interest in how they work in print and how print conveys information. Actual opportunities to engage in reading and writing, at first through a more "knowledgeable other", are of paramount importance (See Rosenberg, 2006; Davis, 2000).

To achieve this, teachers should be acquainted with foundational reading skills for beginning readers and the strategies they can use to teach beginning reading (learning to read) and comprehension skills (reading to learn). This calls for a well designed beginning reading programme to equip teachers with the various reading objectives, content, lessons, activities, strategies and assessment techniques to help them develop reading skills in pupils. In addition, teachers need to understand the nature of the reading process because instructional activities are usually influenced by the teachers' concept of reading (Oyetunde, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

Most Nigerian public primary school pupils are not learning to read. The Nigerian education system has failed in developing efficient beginning reading skills, especially in public primary school pupils. (See Oyetunde & Muodumogu, 1999; Umolu, 1998). Experiences of parents and teachers as well as studies conducted by scholars indicate that most primary and secondary school leavers are illiterates or semi-illiterates persons. (See

Effect of Concentrated Language Encounter on Early Literacy Skills

Oyetunde, 2002; Dahl, 1981). The public primary school system has more or less collapsed in the sense that only a small percentage of pupils who go through it succeed in learning to read.

The specific problems being investigated in this study include pupils' lack of reading skill, letter recognition skills. Learning Disabilities (LD) specialists have an especially important role to play in designing suitable beginning reading programmes, indicating objectives, contents, lessons and activities, instruments and assessment techniques, as well as an instructional methodology that clearly shows the specific techniques for developing specific beginning reading skills in the education of pupils at the beginning reading stage.

However, according to a report by UNESCO (2003), 84 percent of pupils entering school in Nigeria cannot recognize letters of the alphabet by name. Socio-economic factors play a critical role in this lack of reading foundation, highlighting the particular need for vulnerable pupils to receive alphabet-letter recognition instruction. In their landmark research, ADEA (2001) determined that there were significant differences in the amount and quality of pre-literacy activities and level of vocabulary among various groups of pupils entering school. Most importantly, these school readiness differences were strongly correlated with variance in socio-economic status.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study was to:

1. Find out the level of Primary One pupils' print awareness letter recognition skills before treatment.
2. Examine the extent to which the concentrated Language Encounter (CLE) method of teaching reading will help Primary One pupils develop letter recognition skills.

Research Question: The research question was: What will be primary one pupils' reading level in letter recognition skill?

Hypothesis

This hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

There is no significant mean difference in letter recognition skills achievement scores of pupils exposed to CLE and those not exposed to it.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design adopted for this study was the quasi experimental design. Specifically, the study used the pre-test-post-test experimental design in

which intact groups were assigned to the experimental or control groups. The choice of this design was informed by the fact that intact groups involved in order to avoid disrupting the school system.

The two intact groups were Class One, comprising Classes 1A and 1B, representing two arms. Treatment was applied to Class 1A which was the experimental group, while no treatment was applied to Class 1B which was the control group. The pre-test scores were used to assess their competence in the skills before treatment, while the post-test scores were used to compare the effects of treatment. Treatment for internal validity was controlled by the use of a control group in this design. Other potential threats to validity in this design before treatment were controlled by ensuring that each teacher and pupil involved in this study met certain requirements. This was necessary in order to strengthen the quality of the research (Awotunde & Ugodulunwa, 2004).

Population and Sample

The population of this study was Bette-speaking Primary One Pupils who were beginning readers in public primary schools in Obudu Local Government Area. Most of the pupils were not only from impoverished print environments, but also had neither nursery education background nor formal education of any kind and were just being admitted into Primary One. All of the pupils in the study sample were six years old. The sample of the study comprised of 35 pupils served as the experimental group and another 35 pupils in control group. Thus, there was a sample of 70 pupils for the study

Cluster sampling technique. Cluster sampling is a sampling technique which is used when "natural" but relatively homogeneous groupings are evident in a statistical population. In this study, the total population was divided into two groups (or clusters) and a simple sample of the groups was selected. According to Osuola (1993), cluster sampling is a method of sampling technique which could be based on geographical area like the Local Government Areas.

Instruments for Data Collection

The Letter Knowledge Test (LKT) which was used by the researcher was a standardized instrument, used in several prior studies in English. A total of 26 small letters of the alphabet and another 26 capital letters, making a total of 52 letters, were prepared on flash cards. The Letter recognition test (LRT), instrument was scored over 52 points. A score range of 0-20 points was scored low, 21-40 was scored moderate and 41-52 was scored as high. Each letter of the capital and small letters read by the pupil correctly attracted "1" point, and each letter read incorrectly attracted "0" point.

In this study, content validity of the instrument were determined. The instruments were all subjected to five experts' judgment. The instruments for pre-test, and post-test, including such treatment instruments as CLE starter

Effect of Concentrated Language Encounter on Early Literacy Skills

books, structured activities and the list of 100 high frequency words, were given one by one to five experts in the field of special education, reading and CLE methodology for scrutiny and validation. This is to confirm the suitability of the test items for the target population.

The instruments were tested for internal consistency using the Cronbach alpha method after they had been tried out during the pilot study. This measured the homogeneity of all the test items, ensuring that each of them measured the same common characteristics as the others (Kaplan & Saccuzo, 2005). The Cronbach Alpha method was used to ensure the reliability of the instruments. The coefficient of stability obtained for the instrument was established as Letter recognition skills (LRS) .705. Instruments with higher stability, consistency, and reliability coefficients are generally preferred by researchers worldwide for greater homogeneity of the items.

Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher presented a letter of introduction signed by the researcher's supervisor to the head teacher of the primary school used for the study for permission and cooperation to carry out the study. In addition, they kept a weekly record of the progress of the performance for both experimental and control groups. Post-experimental tests were also conducted for both experimental and control groups, after the application of the CLE method as treatment for the experimental group.

The pupils were given some tasks to perform orally in order to determine their knowledge of letters. The pupils were required to (a) identify the small letters and (b) identify the capital letters. In both (a) and (b) the teacher held up one letter card at a time such that they were not presented in specific alphabetical order but presented randomly. The pupils were asked to disclose the name of the letter one at a time. If the pupil disclosed the wrong letter, the researcher put it on the table at the left hand side while those words that the child was able to read were put on the right hand side.

In evaluating the pupil, the research assistant recorded both the small and capital letters that the pupils got either correctly or incorrectly. The control group received no treatment but was taught different content by the regular class teacher when the experimental group was receiving treatment from the research assistants.

The post-test was a repetition of the pre-test that was carried out before treatment, in order to determine the skill competence of the pupils. This was repeated in order to assess the impact of the treatment on the pupils in relation to the six skills.

Data Analysis

The data from Research Question One was answered using percentages presented in bar graphs. The hypothesis was tested using independent t-test

and column graphs. The aim was to find out if the CLE method which the pupils were exposed. Using qualitative and quantitative techniques for analysis of the data strengthened the analysis (Key, 2007).

RESULTS

Research Question One

What will be the Primary One pupils' reading level in letter recognition skills?

The performance of the pupils on letter recognition of upper and lowercase alphabets was also poor. The mean score for the experimental group was 0.08 points (0.16%) and that of the control group was also 0.08 points (0.16%) out of 52 points representing (100%).

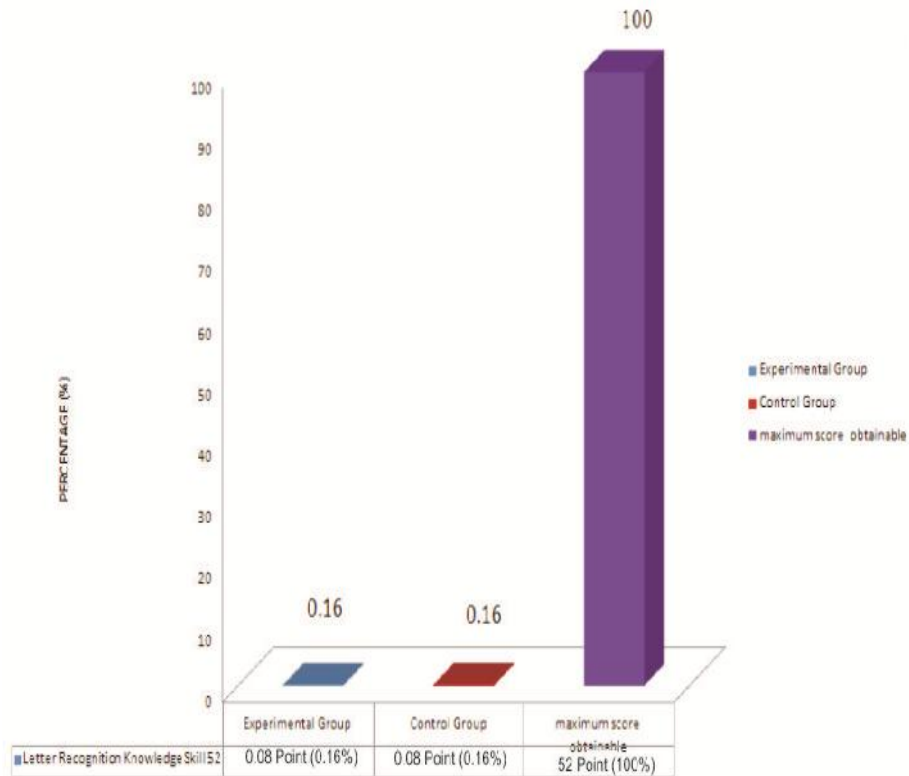


Figure 1: Pretest experimental group and pretest control group in letter knowledge recognition skill.

Effect of Concentrated Language Encounter on Early Literacy Skills

Hypothesis One

There is no significant mean difference in letter recognition skills achievement scores of pupils exposed to CLE and those not exposed to it.

The result revealed that for degree of freedom of 68 and level of significance at 0.05 with P. value of 0.000, the calculated t-test statistics is given at 53.79 which is greater than the P value of 0.05 level. Therefore null Hypothesis was rejected. The result shows that Primary One pupils who received CLE treatment in the experimental group in literacy have significantly higher mean scores in the acquisition of letter recognition skills than those in the control group who were not exposed to the treatment in it.

Table 1: Results of the independent sample of t--test analysis for letter recognition skills for experimental and control groups.

Group	N	X	Sd	Df	t-cal	P-value
Experimental Group	35	46.88	4.30	68	53.79	0.000
Control Group	35	4.74	1.72			

DISCUSSION

The results collected in respect of this study are discussed based on the one research question and hypothesis postulated for this study. Specifically the research question sought to determine the level of Primary One pupils from public Primary schools on. The hypothesis sought to determine the effect of using the Concentrated Language Encounter (CLE) method in public Primary schools in developing Letter Knowledge skill.

Reading levels of primary one pupils before exposure to treatment using concentrated language encounter. In answering the research question on reading levels of Primary One pupils before treatment using CLE, the pupils in the experimental and control groups were tested on their ability to perform letter knowledge skills. Generally their performance on the skill before intervention showed that they were non- readers. But after the intervention majority of the pupils have letter knowledge. In agreement with the findings of this study on letter knowledge skill, Chard and Osborn (2002) stressed that those pupils who begin school and are able to quickly and accurately identify and articulate the letters of the alphabet, have an advantage in learning to read. Similarly, findings from the research work of Oyetunde & Muodumogu,

(1999) and Umolu, (1998) also supported the importance of developing letter knowledge skill as relationships between speech and prints are learned. Levels of primary one pupils' development of letter knowledge skill after exposure to treatment using concentrated language encounter shows that the CLE method of teaching reading was effective. The implication here is that the CLE method was effective in the development of letter recognition skills, without necessarily embarking on separate alphabet recognition instruction. The findings also demonstrated the effectiveness of CLE beginning reading instruction, which includes a variety of alphabet knowledge activities in which pupils learn to identify and learn lower and upper case letters through games, songs and other activities. It also helps pupils to be able to name letters quickly and to develop a sensible sequence of letter introduction that can be adjusted to the needs of individual pupils. These activities have the potential to equip pupils with a firm grasp of letter names and visual shapes as well as a direct interest in how letters work in print to convey information. As pupils are exposed to many literacy activities in the CLE classroom, they begin to recognize and discriminate letters. (Stone, 2003.)

SUMMARY

The objective of this study was to develop beginning reading skills among Primary One pupils, using the Concentrated Language Encounter method and to evaluate its effectiveness in among primary school pupils. The general findings from the pre-tests results showed that the Primary One pupils had not developed the beginning reading skills that would prepare them to begin to read. The pupils' mean score in letter knowledge for both experimental and control groups was 3%. The results from the hypothesis also revealed that the CLE method is suitable for the development of beginning reading skills among beginning readers in particular and the teaching of reading in general. This is because the primary one pupils showed significant gains in the development of letter knowledge skills (LKT).

Primary One pupils who received treatment in the experimental group in literacy have higher mean scores in acquisition of letter knowledge skills than their counterparts in the control group who were not exposed to treatment.

CONCLUSION

The study yielded positive outcomes or results. The effectiveness of CLE method during treatment was confirmed by post-test performance of the group on the skills. The pupils responded positively to the treatment letter

Effect of Concentrated Language Encounter on Early Literacy Skills

recognition and their attitude towards reading changed positively, as shown by their enthusiastic participation in classroom reading instructional activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made.

1. The use of Concentrated Language Encounter method of teaching reading was found to be effective in development of beginning reading skills in Primary One pupils in rural public schools in Cross Rivers State. There was significant progress in the extent to which the Primary One pupils in the rural Primary schools who had not been exposed to any form of formal education acquired beginning reading skills of letter recognition. With this discovery, curriculum planners should consider the development of a separate method and content for teaching reading. Reading should be included as a separate subject from the English language in the school timetables where it becomes mandatory for Primary school teachers to deliberately teach reading in order to successfully develop beginning reading skills for effective reading right from Primary one.
2. Concentrated Language Encounter method should be considered by the curriculum department in the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) in Cross River State as a strategy for early intervention in primary schools in order to enhance and prevent reading failure in the State.

Contribution to Knowledge

1. The Concentrated Language Encounter method was found to have been very effective in developing beginning reading skills in primary school pupils. The findings from this study will be very useful to researchers interested in developing beginning reading skills, through the production of primers that can be used in training Primary school pupils to acquire beginning reading skills.
2. Nigerian Primary school pupils in the rural areas are more disadvantaged in terms of preparatory instruction before the commencement of Primary One, either due to the economic status of the parents or to the prevalent poverty level of rural communities. The acquisition of beginning reading skills, can be adequately supported by Government policies through the Federal and State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) with the aggressive provision of requisite physical infrastructures in Nigerian primary

schools. Such improvements in infrastructure, especially in the rural areas, would enhance the attainment of some of the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria.

REFERENCES

- Adams, M. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- ADEA (2001). Personal development and production in special education. *Education Today* 2 (2): 14 - 16.
- Bradley, R. & Stahl, G. (2001). Sight word reading in pre-readers: Use of logographic vs. alphabetic access routes. *Journal of Reading Behaviour* 22 (2): 149-166.
- Carroll, J.M. (2004). Letter knowledge precipitates phoneme segmentation, but not phoneme invariance. *Journal of Research in Reading* 27(3): 212-225.
- Chard, D.J., and J. Osborn (2002). Phonemics and word recognition instruction in early reading programmes: Guidelines for accessibility. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice* 14(2): 107-117.
- Dahl, S. (1981). Oral language and its relationship to success in reading. In V. Froese & S.B. Straw (Eds.). *Research in the language arts: Language and schooling*. Baltimore, MA: University Park Press.
- Ford, K. (2005). Fostering literacy development in English language learners. Retrieved March 6, 2006 from <http://www.colorincolorado.org/articles/kford-aft.php>
- Garcia, G.E. (2000). Bilingual pupils' reading. In M. Kamil, P.D. Mosenthal, P.D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds). *Handbook of Reading Research, Volume III*. Hillsdale, NJ, USA: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Gunning, M.J. (2000). *Early treatment in natural environments: Methods and Procedures*. Pacific Groove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing.
- Hart, B. and T. R. Risley (1995). *Meaningful differences in everyday parenting and intellectual development in young American pupils*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.
- Juel, G.H. (2001). *Teaching reading in the 21st century* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Lyon, G.R. (2003). The critical need for evidence-based comprehensive and effective early pupilhood programmes. Testimony to the US. Senate Committee on health, education, labour and pensions hearings on re-authorizing head start: Preparing pupils to succeed in school and in life. Washington, DC.
- Mann, V.A. and J.G. Fog (2003). Phonological awareness, speech development, and letter knowledge in pre-school pupils. *Annals of Dyslexia* 53: 149-173.

Effect of Concentrated Language Encounter on Early Literacy Skills

- National Centre to Improve the Tools of Educators (2004). Learning to read, reading to learn. Retrieved March 6, 2006 from <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/333.html>
- Osuola, E. (1993). Introduction to research methodology. Benin City: Ihrpju Press Ltd.
- Oyetunde, T. O. (2002). Second language reading: Insight from Nigerian primary school. *The Reading* 55 (8): 748-755.
- Oyetunde, T.O. and C. A. Muodumogu (1999). Effective English teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools: Some basic considerations and strategies. Jos: LECAPS.
- Rosenberg, M. (2006). Sound and letter time: Building phonemic awareness and alphabet recognition through purposeful play. Haifa: The Gordon Teachers College.
- Ruby, J. (2004). Fostering multilayered literacy through literature circles. *TESOL Journal* 12(3): 47-48.
- Stahl, R.J. (2001). Teach a pupil to read: Make your own book. Retrieved Aug. 3, 2005 from <http://www.succeedtoread.com/makeabook.html>
- Umolu, J. J. (1985a). A High frequency word list for Nigerian Children. *Nigeria Educational Forum* 8(1): 1-5.
- UNESCO (2003). Education in a multilingual world: UNESCO education position paper. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.
- Walker, R., S. Rattavich and J. W. Oller (1992). Teaching all the pupils to read. Buckingham: Open University Press.