Effects of Concentrated Language Encounter Method in Developing Comprehension Skills in Primary School Pupils in Cross River State, Nigeria

Emmanuel Uminya Ikwen
Department of Special Education, Faculty of Education,
University of Calabar, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The paper examined the effects of concentrated language encounter method in developing comprehension skills in primary School Pupils in Cross River State. The purpose of the study was to find out the effects of primary one pupils' reading level, English comprehension skill. It also examined the extent to which the CLE method of teaching reading will help to develop English comprehension skills of primary one pupils. One research question and one hypothesis were posed for investigation. The study utilised pre-test-post-test quasi-experimental designs (ex-post facto). Thirty-five (70) primary one pupils participated in the study. The instrument used was the comprehension test (CT) that was developed by the researcher. A story which was different from the conventional CLE stories was used during the pre-test and post-test. ten comprehension questions were developed by the researcher on the story, incorporating a combination of literal, inferential and main idea questions. Results indicated that the general reading/ability of the pupils with reading problem needs was poor and at frustrating level but the experimental group had significantly higher mean scores in acquisition of comprehension skills after intervention using concentrated language encounter method. Based on this finding, the researcher made some recommendations for the improvement of reading ability of primary school pupils with reading problems in public school settings.

INTRODUCTION

It is imperative to ensure that pupils are adequately prepared before they are expected to acquire the reading process. Reading is a fundamental language skill and there are other supportive, preparatory skills that need

to be mastered first, before a pupil can master the skill. These fundamental skills constitute reading readiness skills that pupils must imbibe before learning to read (Oyetunde & Mudumogu, 1997; Andzayi & Umolu, 2004). This supports the caution by Umolu & Oyetunde (1997) that if we, as teachers, go ahead and try to teach pupils to read before they have acquired reading readiness, our efforts are likely to fail.

One of the skills pupils need to master before they can read books is reading comprehension (see Zhang & Alex 2005; Oyetunde 2002; Evitt, 2001). Reading comprehension is often discussed in terms of being a process involving the integration of reading skills, vocabulary knowledge prior knowledge of the topic considered, and relevant strategies to make sense of a text and understand it (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005; Pressley & Block, 2002). Research indicates that comprehension involves more than 30 cognitive and metacognitive processes, which include clarifying meaning, summarising, drawing inferences, predicting, and so on (Pressley & Block 2002). Developing these processes requires specific learned procedures that foster active, competent, self-regulated and intentional reading (Trabasso & Bouchard, 2002).

A wide-range of instructional activities can be considered to be relevant to reading comprehension. For example, in a research synthesis, Mastropeiri, Seruggs, Bakken, and Whedon (1996) divided the training activities into sub-groups, including basic skills approaches such as vocabulary training, reinforcement and self-questioning approaches. For pre-readers, the learning of reading comprehension requires a strategy where lesson plans progressively develop and reinforce reading comprehension skills. Comprehension skills are systematically taught. Listening comprehension skills are also built by having pupils prepare to hear a story, reading them the story, and then following up with questions to strengthen their reading comprehension skills. Most importantly, hints about listening strategy are given so that they can improve. Before even reading they story, there is an interactive exercise called 'background', where the vocabulary and ideas relevant to the story are presented.

The teacher may also provide a worksheet for reinforcement. Then the story is made available in several versions. For instance, the story is read aloud with the text and pictures visible. Later, the story may be read with the text highlighted, so the pupils' eyes follow the text. After reading the story, there is an interactive exercise to build reading comprehension skill and to provide a reading comprehension strategy (Time4learning, 2006).

However, for the pre-reader, the emphasis is on listening comprehension (see Beard, 1990; Andzayi, 2001; 2004). This indicates the level at which pupils can understand texts read to, and talked about with them, thus suggesting their current capacity for reading attainment (Andzayi, 2001; 2004). The teacher is the one that reads the text aloud and asks related questions on which judgement is made.

According to Ivey (2002), when working with pre-readers to develop comprehension skills, teachers should employ easy-to-read texts and read the texts out aloud. Trabasso and Bouchard (2002) say graphic organizers, listening activities, mental imagery, mnemonic instruction, prior knowledge activation, question answering, text structure and summarisation are all key strategies that enhance the development of pre-reading and beginning reading comprehension skills. Schaler, Joy & Graine (2002) point out that it is not possible to identify a single strategy that should be encouraged to the exclusion of others.

Questioning techniques are also important at this stage. Clark, Deshler, Schumaker, Alley and Warner (1994) trained pre-readers to recognise five common types of 'WH' questions: (a) Who, (b) What, (c) Where, (d) When and (e) Why; stressing that questioning should be carried out in tandem with clarification activity. This is closely followed by activities in which questions are asked to ensure that the question words are well understand.

Texts structure/spoken narrative activities can be used to promote comprehension. The teacher leads a pre-reading discussion of the story topic; followed by the teacher reading the story aloud, inserting various questions throughout the story. After reading the story, the teacher leads a discussion of the main points and a reading of the story. The pupils then relate the story theme to a standard format, in order to link the story, people and situations, using one of the two generic questions: (a) 'main character should (or should not) have ….. and (b) we should (should not) have ….'

Finally, the pupils are encouraged to apply the story's lesson to real life experiences with two questions: (a) to whom would this theme apply? and (b) when would it apply?.

Expository text training includes alerting pupils to passages that provide (a) descriptions (characteristics, trait, properties, functions), (b) temporal sequencing of events, (c) explanations (concept, terminology) and (d) definitions – examples, and problem-solving-solution-effect structures.

In this spoken narrative, teachers use an interactive approach to develop pupils' ability to use narrative to express themselves, with clarity, taking account of pupils' listening needs. In order to do this, the pupil tells a story from a picture sequence (at the appropriate level of difficulty) or narrates the sequence of a structured activity. The teacher writes down the narrative and, then, analyses it in order to identify the main reading points in it. This task gives the teacher the opportunity to help develop pupils' story-telling skills.

Predicting can also be developed when a short story is read by the teacher while the pupils are asked to provide the ending. Subsequently, one pupil will be asked to tell a story; the teacher predicts what comes next, another pupil says what happens then, tells, and so on.

Guessing missing information is another activity that can serve to promote inference. Story puzzles – short stories which have some important information left implicit can be read to the pupils. The pupils are then asked to infer the implicit information from the text. The pupils are encouraged to guess the implicit information, based on the clues and their pre-existing knowledge (Yuill and Joscelyne, 1998).

To attain success in beginning reading instruction, teachers need to be familiar with foundational reading skills for beginning readers and the necessary strategies for teaching beginning reading (learning to read) and comprehension skills (reading to learn). This calls for a well-designed, beginning reading instructional programme to equip teachers with the various reading objectives, contents, lessons, activities, strategies and assessment techniques to help them develop reading skills in pupils. Also, teachers need to understand the nature of the reading process because instructional activities are usually influenced by the teacher's concept of reading (Oyetunde, 2002; Ikwen, 2013).

CLE techniques are based on the development of a reading programme that is effective with the full range of pupils, including those from homes where there is little or no literate activity and/or where the first language or dialect is different from the language of instruction (Weaver, 2006). These have been proven to be very effective in large scale Rotary CLE projects undertaken in Thailand, Australia, Bangladesh, South, Africa, Brazil, and Turkey (see Rotary International, 1984; Walker Rattanavich and Oller, 1992; Rattanavich, 2003). In other studies conducted by Rattanavich 2003; Andzayi, Nengel, Deshe and Pyelshak (2003), the findings revealed that beginning readers were able to read after being exposed to CLE instructional activities.

Statement of the problem

Most Nigerian public primary school pupils are not learning to read. 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. Studies carried out in Nigeria in the field of reading have concentrated mainly on urban schools and on the remediation of reading failure among older learners who have failed to read after spending some years in school. The emphasis has been on factors such as motivation, and treatment strategies (Andzayi & Nengel, 2005; Andzayi, Deshi, Nengel, Pyelshak, 2003; Andzayi, 2001; Umolu, 1998; 1999; Umolu & Oyetunde, 1997). Not much has been done on developing beginning reading skills of younger learners in primary one, who are at the beginning stage of learning to read, especially in rural schools. These researchers have used such strategies and methods as literary Awareness Programe (LAP), Language Experience Approach (LEA), News on the Board (NOB), Whole Language Approaches, in combination to develop reading skills of

learners or to develop training programmes for parents and teachers. However, none of the studies listed above has clearly shown how such approaches can be used to develop each skill or concept.

The specific problem being investigated in this study include pupils' lack of reading skill, comprehension skill, which is compounded by pupils' limited vocabulary acquisition that affects both their receptive and expressive language skills. There are lack of reading instructional programmes that clearly spell out activities, strategies, instruments, contents, and assessment techniques for developing beginning reading skills among lower primary school pupils. Beginning reading instructional activities often tend to be an exercise in reciting passages from books with little or no comprehension (Umolu, 1998). In many so-called comprehension lessons, for example, what goes on is actually a test of reading comprehension. Consequently, most pupils find reading a difficult and frustrating experience, and the very few that manage to read find it a wearisome task. The problem of this study summarised in question form is: what are the effects of concentrated language encounter method in developing comprehension skills in primary school pupils in Cross River State.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to:
1. Find out the level of primary one pupils' comprehension skills before treatment and
2. Examine the extent to which the Concentrated Language Encounter (CLE) method of teaching reading will help primary one pupils develop comprehension skills.

Research question

The research question was: What will be primary one pupil's reading level in comprehension skills?

Hypothesis

This hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance: There is no significant mean difference in comprehension skills achievement scores of pupils exposed to CLE and those not exposed to it.

METHODOLOGY
Research Design

The research design used 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. This design was preferred because of the intact groups in order to avoid disrupting the school system.

The intact groups were class one, comprising classes 1A and 1B, representing two arms. Class 1A which was the experimental group received the treatment while none 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 (Awotunde & Ugodulunwa, 2004). 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 & Ugoduluma, 2004). Best and Kahn (2006) view the design as one that is strong because the use of the control group in this study went a long way in controlling for sources of internal validity.

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. Majority of the pupils were from impoverished print environments, had no nursery education background and no formal education of any kind and were just being admitted into primary one. There are 65 public schools with a total of 2848 Primary One pupils in Obudu Local Government Area. 57 out of these 65 primary schools are in the rural areas with a population of 1,946 pupils. All the pupils in the study sample were six years old. The sample of study comprised of 35 pupils who served as the experimental group and another 35 pupils in the control group. Thus, there was a sample of 70 pupils for the study.

Cluster sampling techniques was used for this study. This is a sampling technique used when 'natural' but relatively homogenous 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. The researcher selected one school randomly using the 'hat and draw# method. This is to say the names of the 57 public rural primary schools in Obudu Local Government Area were written on 57 pieces of papers, folded very well and shuffled together into a basket. The researcher invited one pupil to pick one piece of paper from

the basket. The name of the school picked by the pupil was adopted and used for the choice of both experimental and control groups.

Instruments for Data Collection

The Comprehension Test (CT) was developed by the researcher. A story which was different from the conventional CLE stories was used during the pre- and post-tests. There were a total of 10 questions which were developed by the researcher on the story, incorporating a combination of liberal, inferential, and main idea questions. The pupils were asked the questions after the researcher had read the passages to them one by one and they were asked to answer the questions asked orally. If the pupil answered the question incorrectly or wrongly, the researcher would put the card containing the question on the table at the left hand side, while those questions that the pupils were able to answer orally correctly were put on the right hand side. Correct answers were scored 'I' while incorrect answers were scored 'O'. A range of 0-4 points was considered 'low', 5-7 points was considered 'moderate' and 8-10 points was considered as 'high'. This test determined the extent to which the pupils answered questions correctly based on the test story. The purpose was to find out the pupils' ability to make meaning out of the oral comprehension passages read to them.

The content validity of the instruments was determined and was subjected to five experts' judgement in the field of special education, reading, and CLE methodology to confirm the suitability of the test items for the target population. The internal consistency of the instruments was tested using the Cronbach alpha method after they had been tried 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 & Saccuzu, 2005). The Cronbach Alpha method was used to ensure the reliability of the instruments. The coefficient of stability obtained for the instrument was established for the comprehension skills (CS).806.

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. This was followed by the training of two research assistants for the experimental (CLE) class only. In addition, there was a weekly record of the progress of the performance for both experimental and control groups. Pre-and post-experimental tests were also conducted for both experimental and control groups before and after the application of the CLE method as treatment for the experimental group. The pupils were asked some

questions orally to test their understanding of the story read to them. For example, the pupils were required to (a) name the animal that did not have wings in the story but wanted to attend a party high up (b) name the animals that had wings (c) give the tortoise is new name, (d) name what the birds provided to the animals for party, etc.

In evaluating the pupils, the research assistants recorded both correct and incorrect responses. 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 pre-test that was administered before commencement of the treatment was repeated during the post-test 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 two groups.

Data Analysis

The data from Research Question One were answered using percentages presented in bar graphs. The hypothesis was tested using independent – samples t-test and column graphs. The aim was to find out effect of CLE method which the pupils were exposed to. Using quantitative and qualitative techniques for analysis of the data strengthened the analysis (Key, 2007).
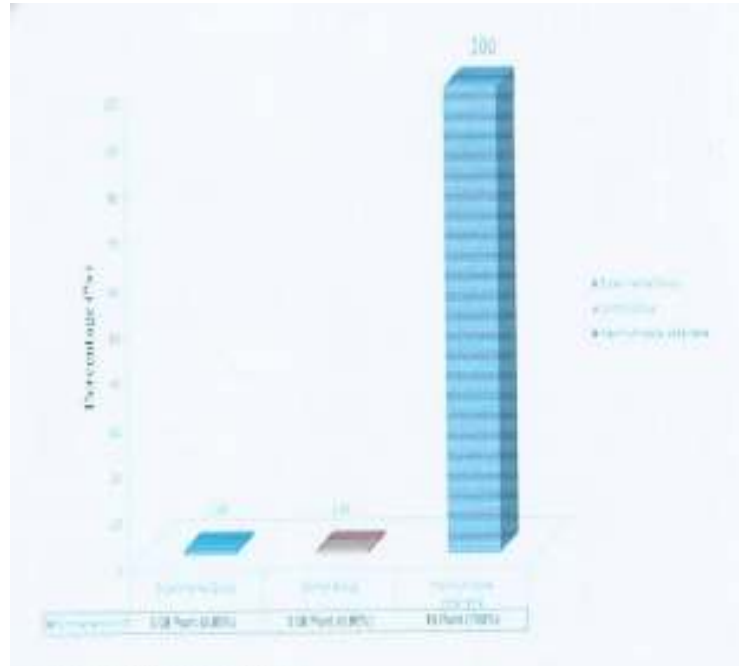
RESULTS

Research Question One

What will be primary One pupils' reading level in comprehension skills? The performance of the pupils in comprehension skill was poor. The pre-test mean score for the experimental group was 3 points (0.86%) and that of the control group was also 3 points (0.86%) out of 10 points representing 100%.

Hypothesis One:
There is no significant difference in comprehension 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 .05 with P.value of 0.000, the calculated t-test statistics is given at 10.14 which is greater than the P-Value of 0.05 level. Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected, the result showed that primary one pupils who received CLE treatment in the experimental group in literacy have significantly higher mean scores in acquisition of comprehension skills

than the primary One pupils in the control group who were not exposed to CLE and those not exposed to it..

Figure 1: Comprehension Skill.

Table 1: Results of the Independent sample of t-test Analysis for Comprehension Skills for Experimental and Control Groups.

Group	N	X	Sd	df	t-cal	P-value
Experimental Group	35	8.40	1.33			
				68	10.14	0.000
Control Group	35	5.03	1.44			

DISCUSSION

The results collected in respect of this study were discussed based on the one research question and one hypothesis postulated for this study. Specifically, the research question sought to determine the reading level of primary one pupils from public primary schools in comprehension skills. The hypothesis sought to determine the effect of using the concentrated Language Encounter (CLE) method in public primary schools to develop comprehension skills of the pupils.

In answering the research question on reading level of primary one pupils before treatment, using CLE method, the pupils in the experimental and control groups were tested on their ability to understand passages read from story books to them. Generally, their performance before the intervention showed that they were all non-readers. For instance, the group mean score of the pupils on Comprehension Test was 3(0.86%) for both the experimental and control groups-respectively. Thus, they were all non-readers because according to Umolu's (1985) guidelines for identification of reading problems among Nigerian children, any pupil who reads or performs within frustration level (low:0-4) during assessment is considered a non-reader. The ability of a pupil to answer correctly oral comprehension questions based on simple stories read to them shows the level of preparedness of the pupil which is crucial in beginning to learn to read meaningfully

The effectiveness of the CLE method in the development of comprehension skills had been demonstrated by the performance of the pupils throughout the treatment period and on the post-test as shown in table 1. This result showed that CLE activities developed comprehension skills. These activities included presenting vocabulary and ideas relevant to the stories before reading the stories, reading the stories aloud to the pupils with the text pictures visible, reading along with the pupils so that the pupils' eyes followed the text and providing vocabulary help and giving pupils hints about listening strategy.

This result supported other findings from a study on the impact of the CLE Literacy Intervention in schools in South Africa by Condy and Donald (2005) where learners were shown to have benefited from the CLE programmes in terms of comprehension skills, among others. CLE permitted teachers and pupils to build meaning by working together in literature discussion groups by discussing key points and negotiating meaning through conversation. Pupils were encouraged to construct meaning when they conversed in the presence of the teacher and as they responded to starter (story) books through drama or role-playing. Teachers and pupils have been shown to share common reading experiences through the use of the CLE (Lin, 2001). In the CLE classrooms, pupils turned stories into scripts, rehearsed them and presented them as puppet shows, plays, and so on. Thus, classrooms

become stimulated learning environments with the goal of constructing meaning. The pupils predicted, selected, confirmed, and self-corrected as they made meaning out of print, the goal was comprehension (Wagner, 1999).

By stressing such thinking skills as sequencing, predicting, and relating cause and effect, interpreting illustrations and pictures as well as emphasizing the concept or value of a story book during CLE reading instruction, pupils' comprehension skills were developed (Palinscar & Brown, 1995). Similarly, Holubec (2006) equated CLE method with Vygotsky's theories about dialogue and scaffolding, by applying them to reading comprehension instruction for pupils identified as poor readers who had had impoverished experiences with reading for meaning in school and needed comprehension strategies through dialogue.

CONCLUSION

The study provided positive outcomes. The effectiveness of CLE method during treatment was confirmed by higher mean scores on post-test performance of the experimental group on the skills. The pupils responded positively to the treatment on comprehension and their attitude towards reading changed positively as shown by their enthusiastic participation in classroom reading instructional activities.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study:

1.   Concentrated Language Encounter method of teaching reading was found to be effective in development of beginning reading skills in Primary One Pupils in the rural public schools in Cross River State. There was significant progress in the extent to which primary one pupils in the rural primary schools who had not been exposed to any form of formal education acquired beginning reading skills of comprehension. With this discovery, curriculum planners should consider the development of a separate method and content of teaching reading. Reading should be included as a separate subject from English Language in the school time table 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.   The curriculum department in the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) in Cross River State should consider Concentrated Language Encounter (CLE) method as a strategy for early intervention in schools in order to enhance and prevent reading failure in the state.

Contribution to knowledge

1.   The Concentrated Language Encounter method was found to be 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 respect 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 National and State Universal Basic Education Board with the aggressive provision of requisite physical infrastructures in Nigerian Primary Schools. Such improvement in infrastructure, especially in the rural areas, would enhance the attainment of some of the millennium Development Goals in Nigeria.

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