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The Effectiveness of a Strategy Based on the Language Experience
Approach in Developing the Reading Comprehension Skills and Vocabulary of
Preparatory Students

A Thesis
Submitted for the PH.D. degree in Education
(Curricula and Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language)

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Abstract


The present study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of a strategy based on the Language Experience Approach in developing the reading comprehension skills and vocabulary of second year preparatory stage students.

Two second year preparatory classes were randomly selected from Taba Preparatory School for Girls, in the academic year 2008-2009. One class was taught through a strategy based on the Language Experience Approach to represent the experimental group and the other class received regular instruction to represent the control group. Two pre/post tests, a reading comprehension test and a vocabulary one, were given to both groups before and after the treatment.

The results provided support for the hypotheses of the study and showed evidence that there were statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the experimental group students and the control group students on the reading comprehension and vocabulary post-tests in favor of the experimental group. And, it showed improvement in the experimental group students' performance on the reading comprehension and vocabulary pre-post tests in favor of the post-tests. Besides, there was a positive correlation, statistically significant at 0.01 level between the scores of the experimental group on the reading comprehension posttest and their scores on the vocabulary posttest.

It was concluded that the strategy based on the Language Experience Approach proved to be effective in improving second year preparatory stage students' reading comprehension skills and vocabulary.
# Table of Contents

## Chapter one: Introduction and Problem

- Introduction .......................................................... 1–6
- Context of the problem ........................................... 6-10
- Statement of the problem ........................................ 11
- Aim of the study .................................................. 12
- The study hypotheses .............................................. 12-13
- Variables of the study ............................................ 13
- Delimitations of the study ....................................... 13
- Significance of the study ........................................ 14
- Definition of terms ............................................... 14-16

## Chapter two: Theoretical background

* Section one:  

1- The Language Experience Approach (LEA)

- Definitions and foundations of LEA ................. 17-25
- Assumptions and principles of LEA ................. 25-28
- Features of LEA ................................................ 28-29
- Variations of LEA ............................................. 29-31
- The stages of LEA ............................................ 31-36
- Language experience activities ....................... 36-40
- Advantages of LEA .......................................... 41-42
- Section Two:

  Reading comprehension
  - Definitions of reading comprehension.......................... 44-47
  - Importance of reading.............................................. 47-49
  - Models of reading .................................................. 50-53
  - Taxonomies of reading skills
  - Conclusions......................................................... 58-59
  - Commentary .......................................................... 59

- Section Three:

  Vocabulary learning
  - Importance of vocabulary................................. 60-62
  - Categories of vocabulary................................. 62-64
  - The aspects of a vocabulary item that the teacher should consider.................................................. 64-69
  - Vocabulary teaching techniques ......................... 69-73
  - Steps for teaching new words............................. 73-74
  - The relationship between reading and vocabulary .............. 74-76
  - Conclusions......................................................... 76-77
  - Commentary........................................................ 77
  - General Conclusions for chapter two...................... 78-79
  - Commentary........................................................ 78-79
Chapter Three: Review of related Studies

- Studies that adopted the LEA to develop reading comprehension skills and vocabulary................................................. 80-92
- Conclusions................................................................................. 93
- Commentary.................................................................................. 93-94
- Studies that investigated the relationship between reading comprehension and vocabulary.............................................. 95-113
- Conclusions................................................................................. 113
- Commentary.................................................................................. 113-114

Chapter Four: Method

- Design of the study................................................................. 115
- Subjects of the study............................................................... 115
- Tools of the study................................................................. 116
  a. The reading comprehension skills checklist ................. 116-118
  b. The vocabulary skills checklist .................................... 119-120
  c. The reading comprehension skills test ...................... 120-124
  d. The vocabulary skills test ............................................. 124-128
- The strategy based on the Language Experience Approach ... 129-137

Chapter Five: Statistical Analysis and Results

- Data analysis, results and effect size........................................... 138-153
Chapter Six: Discussion of the results, conclusions and recommendations

- Discussion of the study results ........................................ 154-158
- Conclusions ................................................................. 158-160
- Recommendations ....................................................... 160
- Suggestions for further research ................................. 161
- Bibliography ............................................................... 162-177

Appendices:

Appendix (a) ................................................................. 178-185
Appendix (b) ................................................................. 186-189
Appendix (c) ................................................................. 190-192
Appendix (d) ................................................................. 193-204
Appendix (e) ................................................................. 205-309
Summary ................................................................. 310-318
List of Tables

Table | Page
--- | ---
Table (1): Reading comprehension sub-skill score in pre-post-test | 122
Table (2): Vocabulary skills pre-post test specification | 128
Table (3): T-test results of the pre-test comparing the control and experimental groups mean scores in overall reading comprehension | 138
Table (4): T-test results of the pre-test comparing the control and experimental groups mean scores in overall vocabulary | 139
Table (5): T-test results of the reading comprehension post-test comparing the overall experimental and control groups mean scores | 140
Table (6): The referential framework for identifying the effect size of t-values | 140
Table (7): T-test results of the reading comprehension post-test comparing the experimental and control groups in literal comprehension with its sub-skills | 142
Table (8): T-test results of the overall vocabulary post-test comparing the control and experimental groups mean scores | 144
Table (9): T-test results of the vocabulary post-test comparing the experimental and the control group in the vocabulary sub-skills ………………………………………… 145

Table (10): T-test results comparing the mean scores of the experimental group on the reading comprehension pre-post test …………………………………………………… 146

Table (11): T-test results comparing the pre-post test mean scores of the experimental group in literal comprehension with its sub-skills and in inferential comprehension with its sub-skills …………………………………… 148

Table (12): T-test results comparing the mean scores of the experimental group on the vocabulary pre/post test…… 149

Table (13): T-test results comparing the mean scores of the experimental group on the vocabulary pre/post test in each vocabulary sub-skill ………………………………… 151

Table (14): The result of Pearson Correlation Coefficient (R) between the scores of the experimental group students on the reading comprehension posttest and their scores on the vocabulary posttest………………………………... 152
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figures</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Figure (1):</strong> the mean scores of the control and experimental groups in overall reading comprehension post-test</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Figure (2):</strong> The mean scores of the control and experimental groups in overall literal comprehension and its sub-skills</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Figure (3):</strong> The mean scores of the control and experimental groups in overall inferential comprehension and its sub-skills</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Figure (4):</strong> The mean scores of the control and experimental groups in the overall vocabulary skills</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Figure (5):</strong> The mean scores of the experimental group on the reading comprehension pre-post test</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Figure (6):</strong> The experimental group's mean scores on the overall vocabulary pre/post test</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE
Introduction and Problem

Introduction

English is the principal international language of diplomacy, trade and tourism. It has a dominant position in international media, in science and in modern technology. Consequently, a high percentage of world publications in science, technology and commerce are published in English. This rapid increase in the production of reading materials requires a greatly improved standard of reading proficiency in English to cope with this vast output of information. In this way, reading effectively in English becomes vital in order to compete on the global front.

Reading English as a foreign language is also very important for several reasons. First, it is critical to success in some academic majors in Egyptian universities. Second, it is a useful source for information that might be missed in classes. Third, it can improve native language reading. Fourth, it can accelerate foreign language learning and improve other language skills. Finally, it is a major means of learning both vocabulary and spelling (Cohen, 1990).

Reading is one of the most important skills in English and other languages, as all experiences and information can be obtained through reading. Reading is also especially important for students, as it is a means of enlarging their information and helping them achieve progress in all subjects. The first and foremost job of school is to teach children to read. Teaching reading should enable almost every student to be able to read fluently, to reach high levels of comprehension ability and to enjoy and learn from reading. Most students who fail to learn to read are destined to fall farther and farther behind in school and are effectively prevented from capitalizing the power of education to improve and enrich their lives. In summary, access to further education, high-skilled jobs, and a chance to participate fully as informed citizens depend in large part on school success, which itself is highly correlated with the ability to read (Hong, 2000).
Reading is now seen as an active search for meaning, a flexible set of interactions instead of mechanical translation from written to oral code. The good reader is the reader who uses many strategies depending on their purposes and the purpose of the material (Nuttal, 1996).

Reading comprehension is acquiring information from context and combining disparate elements into a new whole. It is the process of using one’s existing knowledge (Schemata) to interpret text in order to construct meaning (Day&Bamford, 2000; Blachowicz, 2001; Chia, 2001, and Weedman, 2003).

Maria (1990:14) defines reading comprehension as the holistic process of constructing meaning from written texts through the interaction of: (1) the knowledge the reader brings to the text, (2) the reader’s interpretation of the language that the writer used in constructing the text, (3) the situation in which the text is read.

Reading comprehension is an active process that involves complex interacting variables. One of these variables is the person’s culture which is conditioned by age, sex, race, religion, nationality, and occupation (Brantmeier, 2003).

Several models of reading were proposed to account for the reading process. The most famous models are bottom-up, top-down, and interactive models. In the bottom-up theory, students focus on the smallest units, sounds and words, which are the basic building blocks. In top-down theory, the reader focuses on general concepts, ideas or meanings, and works down to the smaller units of word-recognition. Interactive theory combines the two approaches, students need both for successful reading. Readers need to recognize words and to bring meaning to print (Khalaf, 2002). Thus, today there is a general agreement that reading is an interactive process in the sense that it involves processing of bottom-up and top-down factors at the same time.

Reading is considered a skill that can be developed through teaching and practice. It is a complex skill consisting of many sub-skills, and there are many taxonomies of reading skills. Some of these taxonomies listed skills without categorizing them, while others categorized them into literal comprehension,