

TIRF-British Council Research Mentoring Awards 2026

Researcher

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Title of Project

Effects of Language Experience Approach on Upper-Primary Pupils' Reading Comprehension Achievement in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria

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TIRF Research Topic Investigated

Teaching Second and Foreign Languages to Young Learners

Bio

Winnifred John is a doctoral student in Arts Education at the University of Jos, Nigeria, and teaches in an orphanage in Jos. Her research examines the effects of the Language Experience Approach on upper-primary pupils' reading comprehension in Jos North, Plateau State. She is passionate about improving English language teaching outcomes in multilingual Nigerian classrooms.

Project Summary

Reading comprehension remains one of the most persistent problems facing Nigerian primary education, and Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, is no exception. This study proposes to examine the effects of the Language Experience Approach (LEA) on the reading comprehension achievement of upper primary school pupils in the area, addressing TIRF's research topic on Teaching Second and Foreign Languages to Young Learners.

The guiding questions are:

1. Does LEA produce a measurable improvement in pupils' reading comprehension achievement compared with the conventional methods currently used in their classrooms?
2. Does this improvement hold consistently across different comprehension levels – literal, inferential, and critical?

The idea behind LEA is simple but powerful. Pupils talk about something they already know, the teacher writes it down in their own words, and that text becomes their first reading material. Because the words and structures are already familiar, pupils are not facing both the language and the content at the same time. Recent work by Traynelis Yurek and Strong (2024) revisits Stauffer's original approach and shows it still holds up well against current literacy science, precisely because it grounds comprehension in what learners already know rather than unfamiliar text.

This issue is currently an urgent matter in Nigeria. Humble, Dixon, Gittins, and Counihan (2024), studying government primary schools in northern Nigeria, found that large numbers of Grade 3 pupils could barely decode, let alone comprehend, texts in English. Closer to home, David, Duguryil, Dapin, and Pius (2024) found similar comprehension struggles among primary pupils in nearby Mangu LGA, Plateau State. And while Milaham (2020) already showed LEA works well with junior secondary pupils in Jos North, no study has yet tested it with upper primary pupils – the stage where comprehension habits are first being formed.

Given how linguistically diverse Jos North is, with many pupils encountering English alongside Hausa and other home languages, testing an approach that builds directly on pupils' own experience and vocabulary could give teachers a genuinely practical, low-cost tool for improving reading outcomes at this critical stage.