



Lessons from LAC Reads: *Amazonía Lee* in the Peruvian Amazon

This brief is one in a series of briefs uncovering lessons learned from four evaluations of promising reading interventions funded by USAID as part of the Latin America and the Caribbean Reads (LAC Reads) project. The evaluations were conducted by Mathematica.

Background

Amazonía Lee was designed to reduce gaps in the reading achievement of students in the Peruvian Amazon. It focused on children in grades 1 through 3 and used a balanced approach to reading instruction that incorporates best practices from the National Reading Panel. USAID partnered with the two Regional Education Directorates as well as with technical assistance provider Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia to implement the program in the two Amazonian regions of San Martín and Ucayali. These regions were selected because they had historically marked gaps in students' reading achievement compared to the national average.

The evaluation focused on the impact of *Amazonía Lee*'s school and community capacity-building activities, which include:

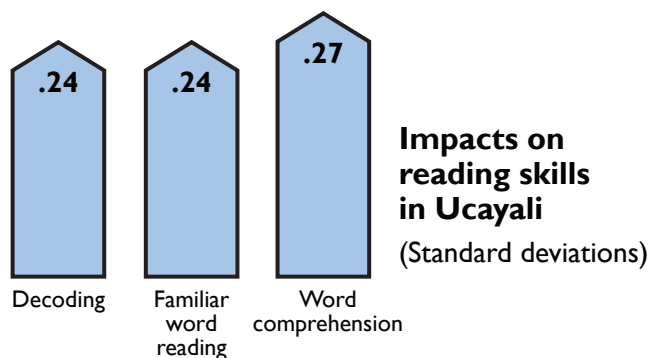
- Teacher training on *Amazonía Lee*'s balanced approach, which blends deliberate instruction in foundational reading skills with Peru's national communicative textual approach
- Teacher coaching and study groups
- Culturally relevant materials to support reading instruction and reading for pleasure
- School leadership training
- Community engagement reading activities including book fairs, oral storytelling, and family reading workshops

Results

After nearly two years, based on second grade reading assessments, survey results, and qualitative findings from a randomized controlled trial, evaluators found that:

***Amazonía Lee* led to more professional development in reading instruction and availability of reading materials.**

- The intervention increased teachers' access to training on reading instruction best practices, individualized coaching, and more culturally relevant books and materials.
- In both regions, we found a few impacts on teachers' instructional practices such as classroom activities to promote students' vocabulary development.



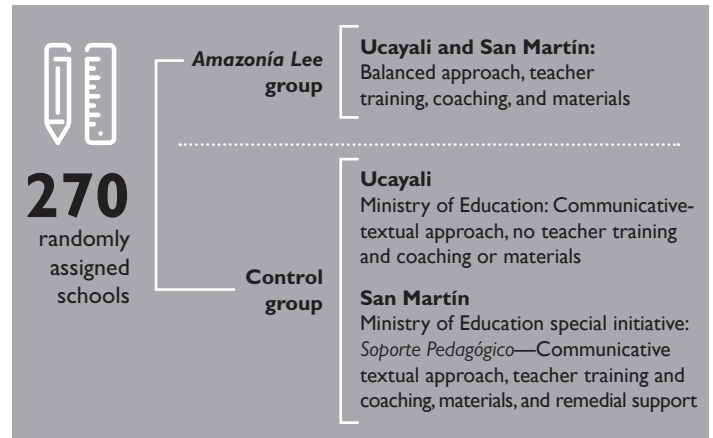
***Amazonía Lee* had positive impacts on students' reading skills in Ucayali but not in San Martín.**

- In Ucayali, *Amazonía Lee* had positive impacts on students' decoding, familiar word reading, and reading comprehension. *Amazonía Lee* students correctly read an average of 17 invented or pseudo-words in one minute, whereas students in the control group read an average of 13 invented words, a difference of almost 4 words (equivalent to 0.24 standard deviations). *Amazonía Lee* students correctly read an average of 7 out of 10 familiar words, whereas students in the control group read an average of 6 words, a difference of 1 word (equivalent to 0.24 standard deviations). *Amazonía Lee* students correctly answered one more reading comprehension question than control students (equivalent to 0.27 standard deviations).

- In San Martín, where most of the control schools were receiving services from *Soporte Pedagógico*, *Amazonía Lee* did not show significant impacts—reading outcomes of students in the *Amazonía Lee* schools were similar to those of students in the control group schools.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- **Teacher training and coaching using *Amazonía Lee*'s balanced approach to reading instruction can improve children's reading outcomes.** Policymakers should prioritize offering in-service teacher training on reading instruction to continue making progress in raising students' reading outcomes.
- **The impacts of reading programs may differ depending on whether they are compared to business as usual or to similar education programs.** In the evaluation of *Amazonía Lee*, it was informative to see that the program produced impacts when compared to the Ministry of Education's standard curriculum in Ucayali, but it did not improve literacy outcomes when compared to *Soporte Pedagógico* in San Martín. Donors should take into account other ongoing programs with similar objectives when deciding whether to fund evaluations that test the efficacy of two approaches to improve literacy, or to test the efficacy of a new program that fills a service gap. Both learning goals could be valuable depending on the context.
- **Teachers and students can benefit from education interventions focused on improving reading instruction, whether implemented nationally or by regional governments with adequate technical assistance.** Policymakers should examine the costs of implementing education programs through national or local providers for an equitable and efficient allocation of resources to schools.
- **Coordinating efforts with local and national governments is critical to reach the schools that most need in-service teacher training opportunities to improve children's early grade reading.** Policymakers and regional education officials should work together to have a common understanding of the regional context and local needs to determine what type of interventions can produce the most benefits and for whom, and make informed programmatic and budgetary decisions.



Evaluation Design for *Amazonía Lee*

A two-arm randomized controlled trial was implemented to examine impact on teaching practices and student literacy skills (2014–2017). The evaluation randomly assigned a total of 270 schools to one of two groups in two regions. The treatment group in both regions received *Amazonía Lee*'s balanced approach to teacher training and coaching, and tailored materials. The control group in San Martín received the Ministry of Education's *Soporte Pedagógico* communicative textual approach to teacher training and coaching, and supporting materials, as well as remedial tutoring. In Ucayali, control schools received the usual services provided by the Ministry of Education (communicative textual approach) without teacher training, coaching, or additional materials.

As implemented, the evaluation followed a cohort of students who were enrolled in first grade in 2015 and measured the effects on reading outcomes in second grade, after 1.5 school years of exposure to the program. It was originally designed to follow students from first through third grade and assess the impact of the full three-year dosage of the program. However, the design changed due to delays in rollout following an initial round of baseline data collection and the random assignment of schools, which took place in 2014, as well as a need to accelerate the delivery date for the evaluation findings because USAID/Peru was phasing out support to basic education in Peru by 2018.