

# Oral Language Supports Writing Improvement

ALLISON PECK, PH.D. & KAROL A. MOORE, PH.D.

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## OVERVIEW

Examines the persistent challenges in writing education in the United States, where a significant percentage of students perform below proficiency levels. This study explores the potential of oral language development as a solution, emphasizing its importance as a precursor to reading acquisition.

The study underscores the need for teachers to incorporate structured oral language practice in their lessons to enhance students' writing skills and expand their vocabulary and background knowledge. It also highlights the potential benefits for various student populations, including Emergent Bilingual students, and suggests that professional development courses can help teachers integrate these practices into their classrooms effectively.



According to the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), scores in writing are continually grim for students in the United States. In 2011, a staggering 72% of fourth graders performed below proficiency (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). In addition, 74% of students in grade 8 and 73% of students in grade 12 performed at the basic level, indicating limited mastery of the knowledge and skills required for proficient writing in these grades.

Writing is the highest developmental skill in the acquisition of literacy and a skill that is not easy to teach in the classroom. One possible solution to improving writing outcomes for students is oral language development. Oral language has been established as a prerequisite to reading acquisition (Lawrence & Snow, 2010). It has been studied as an important method to ensure that students cultivate high levels of comprehension (Kim, et al., 2015), but less is known about the link between oral language and writing ability. Research findings support the fact that improving oral language directly contributes to improvements in written composition (Arfé et al., 2016; Connelly et al., 2012). Establishing a link between teachers' daily use of an oral language strategy/procedure in the classroom and improvements in writing builds a much-needed bridge from research into practical classroom application.

## INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF A STRUCTURED ORAL LANGUAGE ROUTINE ON WRITING ABILITY

Neuhaus Chief Academic Officer, Allison Peck, Ph.D., examined the daily classroom use of an oral language routine that included naming, describing, listening to a story, answering simple and complex questions, and retelling of the story to examine its direct impact on students' writing ability. Participants included 42 English-speaking students in grade 3 across two elementary schools in a large urban district in Texas. The control group consisted of 21 students who received 'business-as-usual' instruction, the regular daily classroom instruction.

The treatment group also contained 21 students who received a structured oral language curriculum daily for 5-10 minutes over a period of three months. Both groups of participants were given the Test of Written Language 4th edition (TOWL-4) as a pretest. Only teachers of the target group received training for the oral language curriculum routine. Fidelity to the implementation of the routine was monitored for approximately three months. Upon completion of the study, the TOWL-4 was administered to the students again as a posttest.

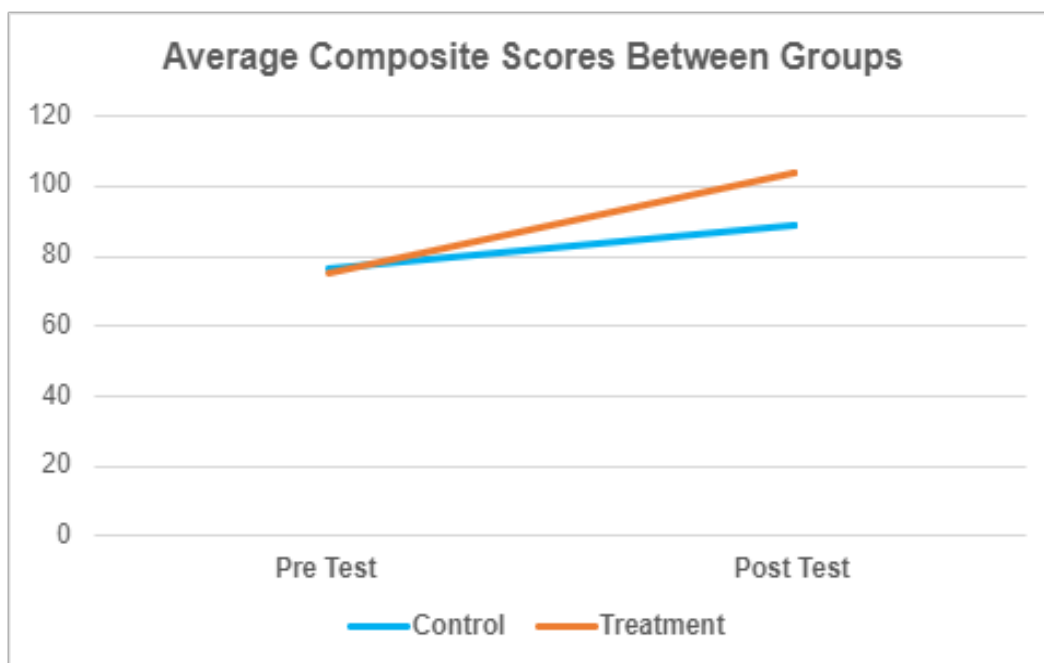
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## THE RESULTS

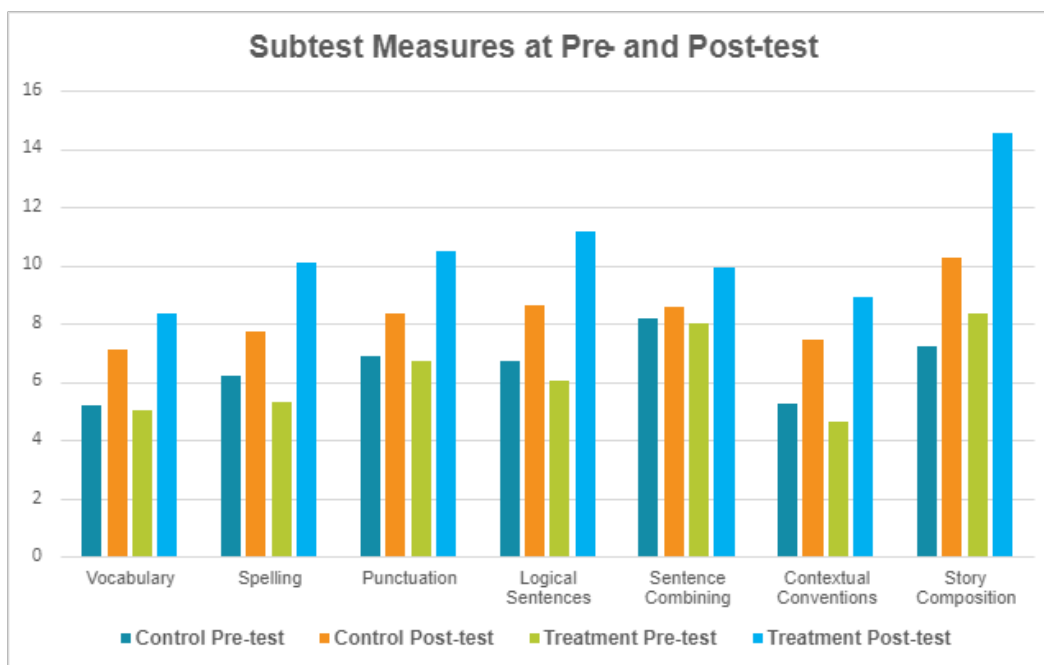
Results indicated that the use of daily structured oral language in the classroom yielded higher results for writing ability, with the biggest student gains in spelling, writing logical sentences, and story composition. The results indicated that though both groups grew in their writing abilities, the treatment group increased their writing abilities more than the control group. The composite scores of the treatment group increased 28.48 points on average compared to an increase of 12.14 points in the control group, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.**



In addition, pre-and post-test scores were examined across both groups to determine the impact of this instruction across specific components such as vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, logical sentences, sentence combining, contextual conventions, and story composition. Students in the treatment group showed the greatest increase across all variables following the implementation of structured oral language instruction delivered consistently over three months, as seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.**



These results indicate the students who were exposed to this daily structured oral language curriculum were able to achieve higher writing scores at the conclusion of the study. Implications for this study highlight a need for increasing teachers' awareness of the importance of utilizing structured oral language practice through organized and planned lessons and how this practice can expand students' vocabulary and background knowledge in ways that contribute directly to writing. As research points to the benefit of oral language development for Emergent Bilingual students, this has the potential to improve outcomes for a variety of students.

## LITERACY SOLUTIONS THAT PERFORM AND TRANSFORM

Neuhaus' Oral Language and Listening Composition Professional Development course and the accompanying curriculum provide an opportunity for teachers to gain this knowledge and embed it into their classroom environment. Materials include weekly units with a daily lesson plan, as well as a blank lesson plan for creating content-specific units.



## REFERENCES

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Neuhaus Education Center is a nationally recognized provider of research-based literacy solutions dedicated to promoting reading success for all. By laying the groundwork for sustainable change, Neuhaus equips teachers to be diagnostic and prescriptive in recognizing students' literacy needs and how best to utilize the resources made available to them by their district.

