

THE EFFECTS OF GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

MASTER of EDUCATION

By

Jessica DePugh

William Paterson University of New Jersey

Wayne, NJ

2023

WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

THE EFFECTS OF GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

by

Jessica DePugh

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

William Paterson University of New Jersey

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

MAY 2024

College/School: College of Education

Thesis Supervisor:

Dr. Michelle Gonzalez, Ph. D.

Department: Educational Leadership and
Professional Studies

Chairperson:

Dr. Carrie Hong, Ph. D

Copyright © 2023 by *Jessica DePugh*

All Rights Reserved.

ABSTRACT

Students lack grammar instruction in school and are unprepared for college and future careers. According to the 2011 Nation's Report Card, only twenty-seven percent of eighth and twelfth graders scored at or above proficient levels in writing. When students graduate high school, they are not prepared for college nor their future careers (Bullard & Anderson, 2014). The purpose of this study was to examine how explicit grammar instruction affects students' quality of writing.

As a fifth-grade teacher, I have noticed a lack of grammar instruction and have noticed that students continue to struggle with writing complete and coherent sentences. The study was conducted for four weeks in a fifth-grade classroom. The participants were six fifth-graders who struggled with writing. Three data sources were used: teacher observation notes, student writing samples, and pre-and post-assessment data.

The study findings suggest that students benefit from explicit grammar instruction. Students are more motivated and successful in a small group setting. Grammar instruction helps students improve narrative writing. It is recommended that teachers explicitly model and teach grammar instruction daily to help improve students' quality of writing.

DEDICATION

To my family for your continued support and encouragement throughout this process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iv
DEDICATION	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER I	1
CHAPTER II	8
CHAPTER III	22
CHAPTER IV	31
CHAPTER V	47
REFERENCES	55
APPENDIX	58

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Title	Page
1	Student 5's Complete Sentence Practice	32
2	Student 4's Frequently Confused Words Sketches	33
3	Student 3's Independent Homophone Practice	35
4	Student 1's Identifying Correct Dialogue and Punctuation Practice	37
5	Student 6's Inserting Quotation Marks and Commas Practice	37
6	Student 5's Inserting Quotation Marks and Commas Practice	38
7	Student 3's Narrative Writing	39
8	Student 4's Narrative Writing Pre-Dialogue Lesson	40
9	Student 4's Narrative Writing Post-Dialogue Lesson	40
10	Student 1's Post-Narrative Writing	41
11	Student 5's Narrative Writing Pre-Study	42
12	Student 5's Narrative Writing Post-Study	42
13	Student 6's Post Narrative Writing	43
14	Grammar Assessment Pre-and Post- Scores Bar Graph	44
15	Narrative Writing Samples Pre- and Post-Mean Scores Bar Graph	45

CHAPTER 1

Statement of the Problem

Introduction

Students lack grammar instruction in school and are unprepared for college and future careers. According to the 2011 Nation's Report Card, only twenty-seven percent of eighth and twelfth graders scored at or above proficient levels in writing. When students graduate high school, they are not prepared for college nor their future careers (Bullard & Anderson, 2014). Even though students are graduating and receiving a high school diploma, they are still unprepared for college level classes (Snow & Moje, 2010). Furthermore, although 85% of students receive their diplomas, colleges must provide remedial reading and writing classes for an alarmingly high percentage of these students (Snow & Moje, 2010).

Similarly, these students are not equipped with the skills needed to obtain future careers. Bullard and Anderson (2014) share that writing is required for two-thirds of salaried workers and those who cannot write clearly or correctly will not be hired. National and state assessments indicate that student test scores are declining (The Nation's Report Card, 2023). Schools are not properly preparing students with skills they need to be successful according to these assessments. However, teaching students grammar instruction from an early age and consistently throughout their schooling could positively impact their writing and help better prepare them for their futures.

Beginning in kindergarten, the New Jersey Common Core State Standards require students to be able to produce clear and coherent writing. Another expectation is that students are able to "demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage

when writing or speaking” (Department of Education, 2016). Moreover, Bullard and Anderson (2014) share, many school districts have been de-emphasizing grammar instruction and its importance in the K-12 classrooms. Additionally, teachers share that if they do teach grammar, they only teach occasionally and do not feel that it is the most important part of literacy instruction (Smith, 2022). Many teachers feel unprepared to teach grammar and do not have designated time in their schedules to teach it. However, they share that they would like to be able to teach grammar as they see fit for their students, and express the desire to have the skills and guidance necessary to teach grammar effectively (Smith, 2022).

According to the NJ School Performance Report (2023), 63.3% of students in my school district scored in the proficient category on English Language Arts state assessments for the 2021-2022 school year. Moreover, in my district, there is a lack of formal grammar instruction and resources to support teachers. My school district follows Common Core State Standards, yet we do not have grammar instruction built into our schedules and are expected to teach it when we can. Additionally, teachers are expected to teach grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, yet we do not have a program designated to these skills. Since we do not have a grammar program, teachers either create lessons from scratch or pull supplemental materials from outside resources. Teachers are teaching based on their intuition of what they feel their students need more support in when it comes to grammar. I have noticed that students struggle to apply conventions of English grammar and usage in their writing. Additionally, their writing is not always clear because of their lack of knowledge in this area. In fifth grade, students still do not know when to capitalize, how to punctuate, or how to write clear, complete, sentences.

Our English Language Learner population continues to grow and all students in the classroom, regardless of their backgrounds, are expected to write clearly and coherently based on

Common Core State Standards and state assessments. Students are not being taught grammar skills that they need in order to be successful both inside and outside of school. Grammar is an aspect that is used beyond school and students need to be able to express their ideas in a manner that can be understood by others. With this study, I would like to investigate the effects grammar instruction has on students' quality of writing and see if the results show if it is worth making time for in the classroom.

Research Questions

Based on the problem identified above, the lack of grammar instruction in schools and students being unprepared for college and future careers, the primary question is identified. The primary research question is:

How does differentiated grammar instruction affect English Language learners' and at-risk native English speakers' quality of writing?

Another related question is: does differentiated grammar instruction generalize to student writing?

Definition of Terms

This section gives a definition of terms that will be used throughout this research study. Furthermore, this study will be designed to answer the research question: How does differentiated grammar instruction affect English Language learners' and at-risk native English speakers' quality of writing? For the purpose of this study these terms are defined as follows. *Differentiated grammar instruction*: in this study, differentiated grammar instruction refers to teaching students different grammar concepts and skills based on their individual needs. This

may also include different levels of support from the teacher, or the use of specific structures or organizers.

Small group instruction: in this study, small group instruction refers to explicitly teaching a group of 5-6 fifth grade students who need to work on a specific skill or concept.

Generalize: in this study, generalize means to take a skill or concept learned in isolation and to apply it to one's writing.

ELLs: in this study, ELLs refer to English Language Learners who are students that do not speak English as their first language.

Native English speakers: in this study, native English speakers refers to students who speak English as their first language.

At risk students: in this study, at risk students refers to students who are performing below grade level expectations in English Language Arts and are on the watch list for referral to special education services.

Grammar instruction: in this study, grammar instruction refers to teaching students specific grammar skills and concepts that they can apply to their own writing.

Theoretical Rationale

This section presents the theoretical framework selected based upon the research question. The research question is how does differentiated grammar instruction affect English Language learners' and at-risk native English speakers' quality of writing? This question was used to identify the theoretical framework. This framework includes the theory: *Reading and writing relations and their development* (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000).

Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2000) suggest that reading and writing are connected because they require similar knowledge, contexts, and cognitive processes. In education, the majority of English Language Arts instruction time is spent focused on reading. However, there is not equivalent time and energy being spent on writing instruction. In most cases, writing instruction is delayed until students can already read and understand the processes that go along with it (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). The theory that reading and writing are connected supports the idea that teaching writing to students beginning at a young age is just as equally as important as teaching reading.

Furthermore, it is essential that students are learning grammar and sentence structure from an early age, so that they can be successful in both reading and writing. In order to be able to read, students must first learn letters and the sounds that they represent, as well as the sounds different letter combinations make to form words. Similarly, writers need to learn about letters and their sounds in order to spell correctly. Additionally, readers and writers must develop phonological awareness in order to be able to understand and manipulate words and language in reading and writing. (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). Grammar instruction can be incorporated into reading and writing and can help assist students in bridging connections between skills used in both subjects. In reading, students learn what composes sentences and can replicate that knowledge into their own writing.

Emphasizing the importance of teaching reading and writing to the same degree at an early age can help students make stronger connections between the two subjects. For instance, Shanahan (1984) found that as readers became more proficient, they were able to acquire more advanced vocabulary and story structure and were able to apply it to their writing (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). When students are explicitly taught vocabulary, spelling patterns, sentence

structure, paragraph structure, and other grammar skills, they can apply their skills to different areas of reading and writing. In order to be successful beyond school, students must be able to identify and apply grammar skills to their reading and writing. Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2000) state that readers and writers must learn to recognize and to create syntactic ordering of words and need to know how to apply punctuation in order to be successful. Moreover, these skills are not just naturally learned, they must be explicitly taught and must be taught in a way that is meaningful and helpful to students.

Additionally, Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2000) share that the knowledge a student has in reading or writing can transfer to the other subject and can support students in the learning process. It is essential that students are learning to read and write at the beginning of their schooling careers and are learning all the building blocks that help them to become successful readers and writers. Therefore, teaching grammar to students is important so that they cannot only be fluent in writing, but can also transfer their skills and knowledge to reading more complex texts.

Educational Significance

The purpose of this study is to examine the research question how does grammar instruction affect student quality of writing? This question is extremely significant, because it is important to learn about how to help K-12 students become more proficient writers in order to be prepared for college and to be successful in life beyond school. Teachers will be able to learn from this study if explicit grammar instruction is worth including in daily lesson plans. They will learn about differentiated approaches to teaching grammar in small group settings, as well as how this type of instruction affects different groups of students and their quality of writing.

Teachers will learn if and or how students generalize concepts taught in small group instruction to their own writing. Additionally, teachers need to be able to express to their districts if there is a need for specific grammar programs to assist in explicit grammar instruction to help their students improve as readers and writers.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Overview

This chapter reviews the literature that is relevant to the primary research question identified in this study. How does differentiated grammar instruction affect English Language learners' and at-risk native English speakers' quality of writing? Additionally, this study also examines related questions and observations: Does grammar instruction generalize to student writing? This review of the literature examines research studies that looked at relationships between grammar and other literacy skills, implicit and explicit grammar instruction, and teacher preparedness.

Grammar Relationships

Grammar relationships focus on how grammar can impact students' skills in reading, writing, and oral language. This section shares how there are positive relationships and correlations between grammar, vocabulary, and writing attainment. Additionally, it states how students with stronger grammar knowledge and vocabulary have stronger reading comprehension.

Myhil et al. (2018) conducted a study to investigate if the intervention for less proficient writers, using grammatical metalinguistic knowledge to support individual writing needs helps improve their writing skills. Participants for this study were two hundred forty-three students ages 12 and 13 who were identified as less proficient writers based on national test scores for writing in England. These tests determined that students in this group wrote narratives with

limited sentence punctuation, limited sentence variety, overuse of long, complex sentences, and very plot-driven writing. A mixed methods approach was used with a quasi-experimental design to assess pre- and post-test writing samples.

Students in the intervention group received instruction for four weeks. Teachers used materials that made meaningful connections between a focus of grammar instruction and its purpose in a sample of writing. Additionally, students were given authentic examples of text that showed grammatical choices other writers made. The data collected in the post-tests indicated that students in the intervention group made stronger improvements in the areas of sentence structure and punctuation. The researchers suggest that future studies could explore how linguistically aware teaching can translate and apply to improvement in more metalinguistically aware writers.

In the next study, Babayiğit and Shapiro (2020) focused on examining the direct and indirect roles of vocabulary knowledge and grammatical skills in second-language learners' listening and reading comprehension. Researchers also wanted to investigate if there are patterns that are comparable to those of EL1 learners. Two hundred eight students ages 9 and 10 were chosen from seven primary schools in Birmingham, UK. All of the students were receiving English instruction based on the national curriculum and were classified into EL1 or EAL (English as additional language) groups based on information they provided on a background questionnaire. This information was then used to determine two groups: 134 learners with English as an additional language (EAL) and 74 learners with English as their first language (EL1).

Researchers used a quantitative method with descriptive statistics to compare the two groups. Students were tested in a one-on-one, quiet setting throughout three sessions. They

were evaluated on home language background (questionnaire), nonverbal reasoning, word recognition, receptive grammar, receptive vocabulary, reading and listening comprehension. The results showed that the EL1 group showed a significant advantage in all areas except word recognition, where the groups performed equally. Furthermore, the results highlighted the important role of vocabulary and grammar in relation to EAL learners' text comprehension. Additionally, their findings showed the correlation between weaknesses in vocabulary and grammar with EAL learners' underperformance on listening and reading comprehension measures. Some implications for this study include the fact that there was a tendency for a 'ceiling effect' in EL1 learners' grammar scores, so relations between their grammar and comprehension should be cautiously evaluated.

In the next study, Batalha (2019) focused on the role of grammar, by investigating relations between language awareness and reading comprehension in a classroom context. For this study, students completed a pre- and post-test in which they had to read four texts: two narrative and two expository then answer a total of forty short-answered questions assessing their ability to identify the antecedents of the mentioned pronouns. A quasi-experimental design was used with pre- and post-tests and a teaching intervention in the classroom. Convenience sampling was used to select the 91 L1 Portuguese speakers that participated. There were three groups of participants: thirty-eight 4th grade students, twenty-seven 6th grade students and twenty-four 8th grade students. All students took the pre-test in stage one. Stage two was the teaching intervention for 4th-grade students. The students were divided into two groups: an experimental group with 20 students and a control group with 18 students. In stage three-post-test, all 4th graders were tested again.

The experimental group participated in an intervention that focused on developing students' language awareness about the formal properties of pronouns and their use in texts. They used discovery-learning to assist students in discovering patterns about language. Students received intervention for approximately six months and then completed the post-test. The results of the study showed positive effects in the experimental group in comparison to the control group. Similarly, they conclude that language awareness can be developed in the classroom and that higher levels of language awareness can assist with structures in reading. The researcher shares that awareness and explicit knowledge about language positively relate to reading skills. Implications for future research may include looking at students of different ages who are in different stages of linguistic development.

The overall theme of this study shared the positive effects grammar instruction has on student learning. Additionally, it shared how grammatical knowledge can impact not only student writing but reading and language awareness as well. Differentiated instruction and small group interventions are also beneficial to students. Teaching grammar should be embedded into reading and writing and students should be taught to make connections. These connections can make students stronger readers and writers.

In this study, Erni et al. (2019), wanted to determine if a correlation existed between students' reading habits, knowledge of grammar, creative thinking, and academic writing. Sixty-nine students from the English Department and Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Sciences at Bengkulu University participated. The researchers used an applied survey method with the correlation technique to determine relationships between three independent and one dependent variable. The independent variables were reading habits, knowledge of grammar, and creative thinking. The dependent variable was achievement in academic writing. Additionally,

descriptive analysis was used to establish the average, standard deviation, frequency, distribution, mode, and median. It was also used to create histograms to portray scores for all four categories. The researchers used inferential analysis to aim results for hypothesis testing with generalization.

The results of this study indicated that there was a very strong, significant correlation between reading habits, grammatical knowledge, and creative thinking and students' academic success in writing. Moreover, reading habits had a positive relationship on the outcomes of student writing. When students had strong reading habits, their academic writing was also stronger. Similarly, students' knowledge of grammar had a positive relationship with learning academic writing. Results concluded that if students' knowledge of grammar improved then so would their writing. Creative thinking also had a positive relationship with learning academic writing. Furthermore, researchers hypothesized the improvement in reading habits, grammar knowledge, and creative thinking would all positively affect academic writing.

In the next study, Hu et al. (2022) wanted to investigate the roles of grammar knowledge and vocabulary in the reading comprehension of EFL (English as a foreign language) elementary school learners. One thousand one hundred forty-nine sixth graders with restricted experience of EFL grammar instruction in Taipei City and New Taipei City participated in this study. Additionally, they had received three years of communicative language teaching where they were taught sentence patterns of the English language embedded in speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities. They also attended three 40-minute English classes each week. Students completed standardized EFL competence tests for vocabulary size, grammar forms and meanings, and reading comprehension.

The results from the study showed that both vocabulary and grammar knowledge played significant roles in EFL reading comprehension. Vocabulary had a much more significant effect than grammar knowledge did. Even though the correlation between grammar knowledge and reading comprehension was lower, grammar knowledge still exerted a significant effect on EFL reading comprehension. Researchers also found that grammar knowledge predicted vocabulary knowledge which supported previous research findings that syntactic knowledge enhanced vocabulary acquisition. They suggested that curriculum designers should consider integrating grammar knowledge with scaffolding vocabulary teaching methods in the class. Additionally, the researchers concluded that teachers should consider using visual and audio-input-enhancement techniques to help students notice linguistic features and word order, and help students construct sentence patterns through communication practice. Future researchers should consider investigating the interaction of vocabulary and grammar in depth and studying students at different developmental stages, across different grade levels.

Implicit and Explicit Instruction

Implicit and explicit instruction focuses on two approaches to teaching grammar and the effects on student performance. Explicit grammar instruction uses direct instruction to teach students specific grammar skills. On the other hand, implicit or embedded grammar instruction is taught by interweaving grammar instruction into reading and writing. These studies discuss how both types of grammar instruction had positive outcomes on student performance.

Altun and Dinçer (2020) looked closely at the role of implicit and explicit teaching in terms of grammar and writing skills for intermediate learners. The focus of this study was to see if there was any difference between the effect of implicit and explicit grammar teaching on

students' pre and post-test grammar scores. Additionally, this study also focused on whether there was any difference between the effect of implicit and explicit grammar teaching on students' pre- and post-writing scores, as well as students' grammar mistakes in their writing. Forty Turkish intermediate university students between the ages of eighteen and twenty were chosen to participate based on their English levels. The chosen participants were divided into two groups; one group received explicit instruction on predetermined grammar topics, while the other group received implicit instruction.

The researchers conducted the study over the course of six weeks and used a quantitative method using pre-and post-tests to see students' development in grammar and writing. Two raters evaluated the writing scores of both groups and also calculated the number of grammar mistakes in students' writing. There was not a significant difference between the two groups on their pretest scores. However, the post-test scores indicate a significant difference between groups after receiving either explicit or implicit instruction. Both groups had gone up in scores, yet the group that received explicit instruction had higher scores than the implicit group.

Some implications for future research include extending the time of the study and increasing the number of writing activities and the number of participants. Since the participants in the group were adults, they may have been used to a more explicit approach and therefore were more successful. They also suggest getting input and ideas from the students in order to apply a mixed-method study. The researchers conclude that both methods assisted students in increasing their scores on the post-test, but the explicit instruction was more effective. Additionally, they share that when students acquire structure either explicitly or implicitly, they are more likely to use that structure in their own writing.

In the next study, Collins and Norris (2017) investigated the effect of embedded grammar instruction versus discrete grammar instruction. The focus of this study was to see if embedded grammar instruction (EBI) will result in greater grammatical complexity than traditional discrete grammar instruction (DGI) as measured by sentence combining skills. It also aimed to investigate if EBI will result in greater gains in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation than traditional DGI as measured in a written narrative. The researchers wanted to see if incorporating grammar instruction in the context of reading and writing would help to improve students' writing skills.

This study took place in six upper elementary and middle school classrooms in rural schools in southern Louisiana. These schools had some of the lowest performance scores in the state for the previous year's state and national assessments. Three hundred twenty students in grades 3-8 were chosen and the majority of students were African American. All of the students completed the Sentence Combining and Contextual Conventions subtests for Test of Written Language, Third Edition at the beginning of the study and again after six weeks of instruction. Quantitative methods were used to compare the test score data and to determine if grammar taught in a meaningful context would have a positive effect on student skills and writing. Twenty-four teachers agreed to participate and administered either EGI or DGI to their students for six weeks. Researchers provided twenty-four lesson plans, including reading passages and worksheets for both groups. The same skills were taught in both groups based on state English-Language Arts standards.

Students participating in the DGI group received worksheets, were provided with definitions of grammar elements by the teacher, provided with examples, and then required to complete worksheets independently. They would then share answers with the whole class and

would receive feedback from the teacher. On the other hand, students in the EGI group were taught targeted skills within the context of expository texts that covered topics such as Walt Disney, Groundhog Day, and blues music. Additionally, they would take a text paragraph by paragraph and would analyze the same text for a week. The teacher provided visual grammar cards to assist students with learning grammatical concepts.

The results of the study supported that there are advantages for learning complex grammar within context. Students in the EGI group were able to compose sentences with higher accuracy and complexity than students in the DGI group. Moreover, the researchers share that students are more successful when there are enriched oral language interactions versus independent worksheets. Implications for future research include looking at a wider range of students from different backgrounds, as well as from different states. They also suggest analyzing qualitative information regarding teachers' perspectives on the process. Lastly, looking at how students' level of engagement and motivation may affect results.

In the next study McCormack-Colbert et al. (2018) focused on gaining a further understanding of how explicit grammar teaching in context can benefit students with persistent literacy difficulties (i.e. dyslexia). Researchers wanted to transform the approach to supporting students through teaching related activities. In addition, this study included students in year 9 (sophomore year) in a secondary school setting in Wales. The first cycle of this research focused on nine participants: five learners identified as needing additional literacy support and qualified for intervention based on school criteria, one specialist, two teachers, and one lead researcher. A mixed-methods approach was used. The data collection tools used included standardized test data, teacher assessment data, semi-structured interviews, archival records, documentary data and one lesson observation. Intervention was implemented for five months.

Overall, the feedback shared by learners was positive. Prior to, and at the end of the intervention, students completed a computerized standardized literacy test. The group score analysis from the Progress Test in English showed that learners' percentage of correct answers on the grammar and punctuation subtest increased. Students and teacher also gave feedback on what they felt could be changed to help improve the effectiveness of the intervention. Students shared that they benefited from a smaller group setting that moved at a slower pace. They also shared that the use of mentor texts and Thesaurus helped support their understanding of how grammatical choices worked. They were encouraged to make connections between semantic and grammatical structures to improve their writing. The teacher also shared that the focus on grammar helped students improve their writing skills and that an additional emphasis on reading comprehension and spelling could help them even more in the future. Researchers plan to consider the teacher's suggestions and to add a comprehension element to cycle II. They would also like to investigate a larger population of students to see if the effects are the same.

Teacher Preparedness

Teacher preparedness focuses on teachers' feelings towards teaching grammar and programs that are available to use for grammar instruction. Teachers feel that grammar is important to teach, yet they do not feel that they are properly equipped and supported to teach it. However, there are specific programs that can be implemented to assist teachers with grammar instruction in the classroom.

In this study Smith (2022), focused on gathering background information on teachers and how well they were prepared to teach grammar instruction to their students. The main question he was trying to investigate was how well are Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

(TESOL) programs preparing candidates to teach grammar related meaning? Eighty-six primary and secondary teachers of English Language Learners in a U.S. metropolitan area were surveyed about teaching grammar and nine of these teachers participated in a focus group as well. Smith chose to complete this exploratory study using an emic stance which had him gather information from ‘insider’ perspectives rather than observing from the outside. Additionally, his survey gathered information on teachers’ backgrounds, grammar teaching practices, and motivations and constraints that affected teaching decisions.

Furthermore, Smith discovered that the majority of participants favored explicit grammar instruction, but felt that it was more practical to embed it into literacy instruction. They also indicated that if they taught grammar, they only taught it occasionally and did not feel that it was the most important part of literacy instruction. In addition, Smith concluded that without support, differentiated tools, and an overarching framework, teachers did not teach grammar systematically and connect form and meaning for literacy development. Evidence suggests that if teachers teach grammar in context without connecting form and meaning, then they can end up confusing students. An overall theme of the focus group was that teachers wanted to be free to teach grammar if they saw a need for it and wanted to have the skills and guidance necessary to teach effectively.

Petersen et al. (2020) conducted a study that investigated the effects of multitiered oral narrative language intervention on oral language, reading comprehension, and writing. The researchers used a quasi-experimental control group study with assignment at the classroom level. Twenty-eight second-grade students from two classrooms at an elementary school participated; one classroom was randomly assigned to the treatment group and the other to the control group. Both groups completed the same assessments before and immediately following

eight weeks of intervention. Additionally, both groups received two hours of reading instruction each day based on the reading curriculum adopted by the school district. However, students in the treatment group participated in two 30-minute large-group Story Champs sessions every week for three weeks, which replaced 30 minutes of the standard two-hour reading curriculum. Story Champs is a multitiered narrative intervention curriculum that has been shown to improve diverse preschool students' oral narrative skills and language comprehension when multiple tiers of intervention were delivered. The researchers hypothesized that students receiving the intervention of Story Champs, along with oral narrative activities focused on story grammar, language complexity, and inferential word learning would show significant improvements in their oral narrative skills, reading comprehension, and writing.

After three weeks of intervention, the treatment group was tested again and results showed that they had not made significant progress. Researchers decided to add an additional 15-minute small group Story Champs session each week for the remaining five weeks. At the end of eight weeks, all students were tested again and their results were compared to their pre-assessment scores. The results indicated that compared to students in the control group, students who received intervention had significantly higher gain scores. Moreover, results showed that the oral narrative language intervention potentially impacted reading comprehension and students' writing abilities. Future research could be done using the entirety of the Story Champs intervention program and using it with multiple schools across a range of different grades.

Summary of the Literature Review

Some of these studies had similar findings such as students who were placed in intervention groups for grammar instruction outperformed students in control groups on post assessments. Myhil et al. (2018) found that less proficient writers placed in the intervention

group made stronger improvements in the areas of sentence structure and punctuation on their post-assessments. Petersen et al. (2020) also found that their treatment group or group that received intervention made more progress in their post-test scores than the control group did. Additionally, some of these studies had similar findings in that grammar knowledge can affect student abilities in reading, writing, and oral language skills. For instance, Babayiğit and Shapiro (2020) found a correlation between students' lack of grammar and vocabulary knowledge and English language learners' underperformance in reading and listening comprehension. Similarly, Erni et al. (2019) found a positive correlation between students' knowledge of grammar and academic writing success.

Some of these studies had opposing findings. Altun and Dınçer (2020) found that explicit instruction positively affected students more than implicit instruction. Whereas, Collins and Norris (2017) found that embedded grammar instruction was more beneficial to students than teaching grammar in isolation. Altun and Dınçer (2020) suggest that the explicit group may have performed better than the implicit group due to short instructional time. For instance, the time frame was not long enough to implicitly teach skills to the one group. Additionally, they hypothesize that the age of the participants also may have affected their results. Their participants were ages 18-22 and were adults who are typically more accustomed to explicit teaching. Collins and Norris' findings are supported by the theoretical framework that reading and writing should be taught together because they require similar knowledge, contexts, and processes which strengthen their understanding (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). Therefore, embedding grammar instruction can benefit students in multiple subject areas.

The studies conducted by Smith (2020), Petersen et al. (2020), and Collins and Norris (2017) took place in the United States. Whereas, Erni et al. (2019), McCormack-Colbert et al.

(2018), Batalha (2019), Hu et al. (2022), Altun and Dınçer (2020), Babayiğit and Shapiro (2020), and Myhil et al. (2018) were conducted in other countries such as England, Wales, Indonesia, and Taiwan. These results can generalize to the United States because teachers can apply similar teaching instruction, programs, and strategies with their students. Additionally, the majority of these studies were conducted using English language learners. There are many English language learners in the United States as well.

Chapter III

Research Design

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research design for the study. Professors share that students are underprepared for college writing courses and that students are frustrated by low grades due to a lack of grammatical knowledge (Bullard & Anderson, 2014). Based on the problem that students lack grammar instruction in school and are unprepared for college and future careers the primary research question in this study is identified. This research question is: how does differentiated grammar instruction affect English Language learners' and at-risk native English speakers' quality of writing? Additionally, this study also examines a related question: does differentiated grammar instruction generalize to student writing? This chapter will describe the research design including the research setting, participants, methods, and data collection and analysis procedures.

In this study, I will use a mixed-methods design that includes both quantitative and qualitative data. My approach for mixed-methods will be integrated research, which combines both qualitative and quantitative methods equally. According to Efron and Ravid (2020), integrated research uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the same question. The methods are equally used and are used throughout the research process. Mixed methods allow teachers to collect data in multiple forms and to use their findings to help drive future instruction. A mixed methods approach is most appropriate for this study because I will collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative data focuses more on statistics that are found within a study. Additionally, quantitative data is used to assess how much or how many (Efron & Ravid, 2020). I will use quantitative data to see if there is a change from pre- to post-test scores and pre- and post-rubric scores on student writing samples.

In addition, I will use qualitative methods. These questions are very specific and target who or what is the focus of the study. Furthermore, qualitative questions can be used to target specific groups or individuals (Efron & Ravid, 2020). I will focus on my targeted group which consists of English Language learners and at-risk native English speakers. I will make copies of their writing samples and date them to keep track of their progress throughout the intervention. I will use these samples to show if students have mastered specific skills or have not mastered specific skills.

Research Setting

This section presents the setting for this research study. This study is designed to answer the research question how does differentiated grammar instruction affect English Language learners' and at-risk native English speakers' quality of writing? In addition, this study also examines a related question: does differentiated grammar instruction generalize to student writing? The location of the research setting is in a suburban New Jersey public, elementary school. The population consists of "69% White, 13% Asian, 12% Hispanic, 3% African American, 2% two or more races, and 1% other race" (Census Reporter, 2023). The socio-economic status is mostly medium to high income with a small percentage of people living in poverty (about 5%) according to the Census Reporter. Additionally, "83% of households speak

English only, 10% speak Spanish, 4% speak Indo-European, and 3% speak Asian/Islander” (Census Reporter, 2023).

According to the Census Reporter (2023), “the school district has an educational attainment rate of 95.3% of students becoming high school graduates or higher, as well as 68.4% of students obtaining a Bachelor’s degree or higher”. The district has 4,322 students in grades preschool-12th with a teacher ratio of 14-1 (Niche, 2023). There is one high school, one middle school, and four elementary schools.

The school where the study is taking place has 499 students grades preschool-5th. There is a student-to-teacher ratio of 12-1. Additionally, 6% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. The majority of students speak English and a small percentage speak Spanish and other languages (Niche, 2023). Students can participate in a wide range of activities including sports and afterschool clubs.

The classroom consists of twenty-four fifth-grade students. There are ten girls and fourteen boys. There are no students with individual education plans (IEPs) and all students are in the classroom for the entire day except one student who receives basic skills instruction for language arts three times a week for thirty minutes and another student who receives it twice a week for thirty minutes. I have five students who are English Language learners and the rest of my class are native English speakers. I also have three new students to the school/district and one of these students is attending school for the first time (they have been homeschooled).

Research Participants

This section indicates who the participants are and background information on the participant-observer. This is my eighth year teaching elementary school-aged children. I have

taught second grade for one year, kindergarten for five years, and this is my second year teaching fifth grade. Throughout my years of teaching, I have noticed a lack of grammar instruction and have noticed that students continue to struggle with writing complete and coherent sentences. Teaching at the fifth-grade level, there is a higher expectation for students to be able to write in a clear manner that can convey meaning to others. However, students have not been explicitly taught grammatical skills that they are expected to use.

Six fifth-grade students will participate in this study. These students were selected based on pre-assessment scores on their ability to identify and correct grammatical errors and a writing sample that was graded using a three-point rubric. A copy of the grammar pre-assessment and writing rubric can be found in the appendix. Two participants are English Language learners and four students are native English speakers.

Classroom and Intervention Procedures

All students in the classroom will receive whole group instruction on targeted grammar skills including homophones, writing complete sentences, identifying parts of sentences, identifying parts of speech, and utilizing punctuation and conjunctions. I will introduce the skill, students will view examples of the skill, and then will practice applying the skills together. Students will then work on applying the targeted skill independently by completing worksheets on the skill. Students selected for the study will participate in small group mini-lessons twice a week as well. We will focus on the targeted skill together by completing examples and practicing writing our own sentences using the skill. Students will also be expected to apply these skills to their individual writing pieces.

Data Sources

Throughout the study, data will be collected from different sources to answer the research question. The data sources used for this research will include teacher observations, student writing samples, as well as assessment data.

Teacher Observation Notes

I will keep detailed notes about students' performances during small group lessons. These small group lessons will occur twice a week and I will keep track of who is grasping certain concepts and who is still struggling. I will also note which students are able to generalize these skills to their own writing and which ones are not.

Student Writing Samples

After practicing the targeted skill together, students will be asked to write their own example sentences applying the skill. For instance, after practicing homophones together, students will be asked to write their own sentences using their, they're, and there to demonstrate their understanding. Students will write multiple sentences using different homophones, complete sentences, conjunctions, and punctuation to show that they can apply the targeted skills. I will also ask students to look at their current narrative writing pieces and to apply the skill to their writing independently. I will make copies of students' writing samples from each small group lesson. I will use these writing samples to see which students can apply grammar skills and concepts to their independent writing and which students cannot.

Assessment Data

I will use students' pre-and post-assessments to compare if students performed differently after differentiated small-group instruction. Students will complete the pre-assessment prior to instruction and immediately following the conclusion of the four-week intervention. A copy of

the pre- and post-assessment can be found in the appendix. This assessment asks students to read ten sentences and to correct grammatical errors and mechanics including inserting missing punctuation, capitalizing letters, and correcting word usage. Students are assessed using a four-point rubric. In order to score a 4: advanced, a student must identify all mistakes. In order to score a 3: proficient, a student must identify at least 80% of mistakes. In order to score a 2: partially proficient, a student must identify at least 60% of mistakes. In order to score a 1: below proficient, a student must identify less than 60% of mistakes.

Data Analysis Procedures

This section discusses the data analysis procedures for this study. The data collection will be used to determine how differentiated grammar instruction affects English Language learners' and at-risk native English speakers' quality of writing. Additionally, it will be used to determine if differentiated grammar instruction generalizes to student writing.

During each small group mini-lesson, I will take detailed observational notes about students' ability to understand and apply specific grammar skills to their writing. This group will meet twice a week for fifteen to twenty minutes. I will track which students are grasping concepts and can apply them independently and which students are still struggling. I will analyze these notes and use them to drive further instruction for future small-group lessons. I will break the data into parts and note which areas students have mastered and which areas they continue to struggle with. For instance, when focusing on homophones, I will use my notes to identify which students can insert appropriate homophones when given definitions, which students can insert appropriate homophones when not given definitions, and must utilize just the context of the sentence, which students can write their own sentences using homophones

correctly, and which students can apply homophones accurately to their narrative pieces. By breaking my data into different parts, this will allow me to look for patterns and trends and to see which areas students need more assistance in.

Student writing samples will be collected and copied after each small group lesson in order to track changes in students' grammar application. These samples will be used to determine which concepts students are grasping and which ones they are not. Additionally, they will be used to determine which students are able to apply concepts taught in small group lessons to their own writing. Similarly to the mini-lessons, I will break my data into parts. I will create different sections for homophones, punctuation, conjunctions, and complete sentences. I will take detailed notes on students' usage of each skill and will track how many times they accurately use and misuse a targeted skill. I will look for patterns and trends and will use this information to create future small-group lessons.

Assessment data will be used to determine if students' pre- and post-test scores changed after receiving four weeks of small-group, differentiated instruction. Students will complete a pre-assessment that requires them to correct all grammatical errors in a piece of writing and will be graded using a four-point rubric. After four weeks of intervention, students will complete the same assessment and I will note changes and graph both students' pre- and post-assessment scores using a bar graph. Additionally, students will complete a pre-assessment writing and will be graded using a writing rubric. A copy of the writing rubric can be found in the appendix. The writing rubric addresses four main components: ideas and content, conventions, grammar, and word choice. Students can achieve meeting, approaching, or novice for each of these categories. Students will complete a post-assessment writing and will be graded using the same rubric.

Similarly, I will use the data to create a bar graph and to compare students' pre- and post-assessment scores.

Moreover, I will create a bar graph in order to visually compare students' pre- and post-assessment scores. For students' pre- and post-test scores, I will chart their individual scores of 1, 2, 3, or 4 for both pre- and post-assessment results. For students' pre- and post-assessment writing, I will chart students' mean scores. This will help to illustrate students' overall growth in writing.

Validity and Reliability

This section presents the validity and reliability of this study. This study was designed to answer the research question: how does differentiated grammar instruction affect English Language learners' and at-risk native English speakers' quality of writing? Additionally, this study also examines a related question: does differentiated grammar instruction generalize to student writing? The data in this study is reliable because multiple data sources are used to collect and measure the effects of instruction (Efron & Ravid, 2020). The research setting is natural and takes place in their usual classroom using standard routines. Instruction is provided by me, who is their typical classroom teacher.

The data collected for this study is also valid. Validity is ensured through triangulation research and data audit (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Multiple data points will be collected and evaluated to find common themes. Student work samples and writing samples will be collected and scored using a rubric. Additionally, observational notes taken during small group mini-lessons will be collected throughout the study. Data audit will also be utilized and copies of original documents, and other artifacts will be provided in the appendix.

Limitations

This section discusses the ways in which this study is limited. The study was designed to answer the research question: how does differentiated grammar instruction affect English Language learners' and at-risk native English speakers' quality of writing? Additionally, this study also examines a related question: does differentiated grammar instruction generalize to student writing? Time is a major limitation of this study. This study is being conducted over the course of three weeks which is not a lot of time for instruction and for students to be able to grasp concepts and apply them accurately and consistently. Another limitation is that this study is being conducted during the month of November when the normal school weeks are disrupted. Students have shortened school weeks and instruction due to teacher's convention, parent-teacher conferences, and Thanksgiving break. In addition to having days off, students also have shortened school days which could disrupt their regular routines. Another limitation is that this study focuses on a small group of just six students, so the sampling size is small. Furthermore, generalizing this intervention in other settings could be a limitation.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This chapter provides the findings that were based on the analysis of data that was collected and described in the previous chapter. Data was gathered using a variety of sources such as teacher observation notes, student writing samples, and assessment data from students' pre- and post-assessments. Students in the targeted group received daily whole-class grammar lessons, as well as two small group lessons each week for the course of this four-week study. The research of this study was conducted to answer the question: how does differentiated grammar instruction affect English Language learners' and at-risk native English speakers' quality of writing? Additionally, this study also examines a related question: does differentiated grammar instruction generalize to student writing? Some examples of small group mini-lessons provided focused on homophones, complete sentences, capitalization, and punctuation. Students were taught using the gradual release of responsibility approach: I do, we do, you do.

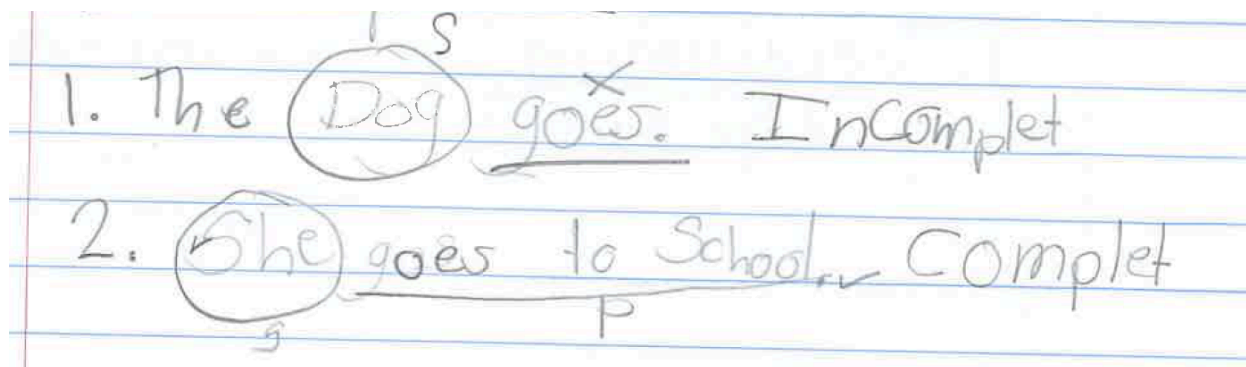
The data was analyzed using triangulation to collect multiple data points from different sources (Efron & Ravid, 2020). I took my observation notes and broke them down into parts to track which grammar skills students mastered and which ones they continue to struggle with. Additionally, data from pre- and post-assessments were compiled and translated into bar graphs to visually display content and help identify patterns and trends. The results of the data sources in this four-week study developed into three themes: application of grammar skills with assistance, application of grammar skills independently, and transfer of grammar skills to own writing.

Application of Grammar Skills with Assistance

One theme that has emerged from this study is that students can accurately apply grammar skills with assistance from the teacher and peers, as well as when they are given examples and definitions that they can reference. Over the course of this four-week study, students were able to grow their confidence in grammar knowledge and apply skills that they learned in the small group setting. Figure 1 shows how student 5 was able to accurately label parts of a sentence including subject and predicate to determine if the sentence was complete or incomplete. He accurately identified in sentence one that the dog was the subject and that goes does not represent the predicate, because it does not fully tell about the dog. In the second sentence, he was able to identify she as the subject and goes to school as the predicate to determine that it was a complete sentence.

Figure 1

Student 5's Complete Sentence Practice

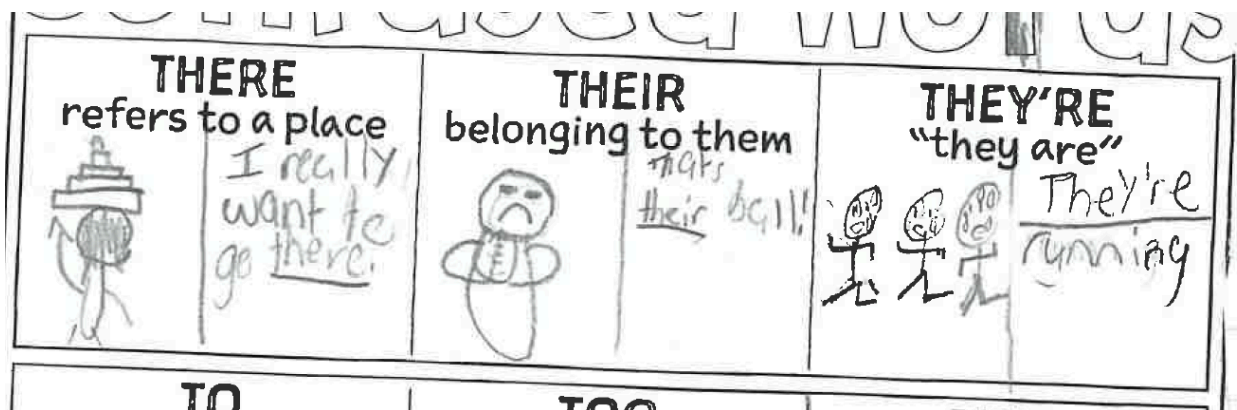


Similarly, students were successful when they were provided with definitions and examples that they could reference. Students wrote down definitions and drew pictures in their notebooks to help them apply the correct form of the word in the context of the sentences. Figure 2 shows student 4's illustrations and example sentences for each form of the homophone.

He was able to accurately draw a picture for there, their, and they're and use each version appropriately in his example sentences.

Figure 2

Student 4's Frequently Confused Words Sketches



When provided with examples and definitions that students could reference, five out of six students were able to accurately apply the correct form of the word to the sentence. In my observational notes, from 11-7-23, I noted, "When given definitions for each homophone, students 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 were able to accurately apply the correct homophone in order to complete the sentence. Student 4 was able to complete most sentences when given the definitions". When students were unsure, they were able to reference their notes for help. I also encouraged students to look in their notes if they were stuck on which word to choose.

Moreover, students were successful in the small group setting and could accurately identify if sentences were complete or incomplete and could explain why. In my observational notes on 11-15-23, I stated, "When identifying complete and incomplete sentences together, all students were able to identify the subject and predicate in each complete sentence. When provided an incomplete sentence, all students were able to identify what was missing i.e. subject,

predicate, capital letter, or punctuation”. Students completed this activity chorally and were confident in their answers. They were also able to share ways to fix the sentence in order for it to be deemed complete.

Overall, students were attentive and motivated in the small group setting and were able to accurately apply the targeted grammar skills with the assistance of teacher and peer support. Students also benefitted from having access to definitions and examples in their notebooks to assist them with their decision-making. If students were unsure, then I guided them to use their notes and to reference previous examples we had completed. Additionally, students felt very comfortable and confident in the small group setting. All students freely shared their ideas and reasoning as to why they chose the homophone that they did and why a sentence was complete or incomplete. When students feel supported and comfortable, they are more confident in applying their grammatical skills.

Application of Grammar Skills Independently

Another theme that emerged was the application of grammar skills independently. Results from this study show that students were not as successful in applying skills independently as they were in the small group setting with additional assistance. Figure 3 shows student 3’s independent homophone practice. The definitions of each homophone were provided at the top of the page and he needed to fill in the appropriate version to complete the sentence. He was able to correctly identify the homophones for numbers one and three, but not for number two.

Figure 3

Student 3's Independent Homophone Practice

[there] "in that place" Look over <u>there</u> .	[their] shows ownership <u>Their</u> house is nearby.	[they're] "they are" <u>They're</u> walking home.	
[to] "toward" Fly me <u>to</u> the moon.	[too] "also," excess May I come <u>too</u> ?	[two] the number 2 We own <u>two</u> dogs.	
[your] ownership <u>your</u> book	[you're] "you are" <u>You're</u> funny.	[its] ownership <u>its</u> injured paw	[it's] "it is" <u>It's</u> hot.
[then] time, result <u>then</u> I laughed.	[than] compare older <u>than</u> me	[effect] noun the sun's <u>effects</u>	[affect] verb The sun <u>affects</u> it.

Directions: Complete the sentences with the correct words. Each word above is used only once.

1. The shelf was too high for my little brother to reach.
2. If I don't wear sunscreen, then I will get a very bad sunburn.
3. I want to buy that bike, but it's too expensive.

The first skill we practiced was applying the correct use of homophones to complete sentences. I noted, on 11-7-23, "When given definitions for each word and support from peers, all students were able to accurately apply their knowledge to complete the missing word in each sentence." However, when students were asked to create their own sentences using appropriate homophones, several students struggled. For instance, "Students 1, 2, and 4 had some difficulty creating sentences independently. Student 1 also had a difficult time identifying answers in other students' sample sentences. Student 3 had a difficult time creating own sentences independently without additional support."

We completed whole class (11-14-23) and small group (11-15-23) lessons and activities on complete and incomplete sentences. We first identified the parts of a sentence and what is needed to make complete sentences: capital letters, subject, predicate, and end punctuation. We

then practiced identifying if sentences were complete or incomplete and explained our reasoning. In our small group lesson on 11-15-23, I noted “Student 3 had a difficult time creating his own examples, but was able to identify other peers’ examples as complete or incomplete. He was also able to explain why sentences were incomplete”. On the other hand, “Students 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 were all able to write their own examples of complete and incomplete sentences. They were able to identify other peers’ examples as complete or incomplete. They were able to explain why sentences were incomplete”. The next day we extended this lesson to name types of incomplete sentences such as fragments and run-on sentences.

Similarly, when we practiced punctuating dialogue using commas, quotation marks, and end punctuation, 4/5 students were able to accurately identify the correct sentence when given a choice of three. *Student 2 was absent for a week and missed this instruction. For instance, on 11-28-23, I noted student 6’s explanation of why he chose the sentence that he did; “The first one is not correct because there should not be a period. It should be a comma. The third one is not correct because the whole thing should not be in quotations”. Student 3 was also able to describe his reasoning for his choices, “There needs to be a comma since they are about to speak” (Notes from 11-28-23). However, there were some instances where students struggled to select the correct choice and expressed some confusion.

Furthermore, on 11-29-23, “Students 1, 4, and 5 shared that they were confused about number two because they thought the singer was saying the whole thing and did not recognize the difference between first and third person”. Figure 4 shows student 1’s identifying correct dialogue and punctuation practice. She originally selected the third choice because she thought that the speaker was saying the whole sentence. She did not realize that if the whole text was being spoken then it would say “My favorite singer announced *she* is having a concert on May

1". After discussing the choices together students better understood why choice two was the correct choice.

Figure 4

Student 1's Identifying Correct Dialogue and Punctuation Practice

2. My favorite singer announced. "I'm having a concert on May 1."
 My favorite singer announced, "I'm having a concert on May 1."
 "My favorite singer announced I'm having a concert on May 1."

On 11-30-23, students completed an activity independently in which they needed to insert the commas and quotation marks in the correct spots. Student 2 was absent this week and missed this part of the instruction. Student 3 was not present for this activity because he needed to attend basic skills. Student 6 is the only one who correctly applied all missing commas and quotations. Figure 5 shows student 6's ability to correctly insert quotation marks and commas. He was able to identify the correct parts of the sentence that showed grandpa speaking and insert the quotation marks appropriately. In addition, he knew to place the comma after first and tucked inside the quotation marks because grandpa paused in speaking. He also knew to insert a comma after grandpa to indicate that he was about to speak again.

Figure 5

Student 6's Inserting Quotation Marks and Commas Practice

-
3. "First, explained my grandpa, we will need to clean up the garage."
-

However, the rest of the students had a difficult time applying quotation marks and commas in the correct places. For instance, Figure 6 shows that student 5 had a difficult time

knowing where to place commas. He forgot to place a comma after believe to show the end of the dialogue. Additionally, he forgot to insert a comma after mom to introduce the dialogue.

Figure 6

Student 5's Inserting Quotation Marks and Commas Practice

6. "I cannot believe" said mom that you didn't remember my birthday."

Overall, students were able to apply some of their knowledge to independent practice, but still required additional support in some areas. They were more successful on independent activities that showed different examples and gave them choices to choose from than they were on activities that required them to make corrections on their own. Additionally, students could identify the skill like if a sentence was complete or incomplete; if it was a fragment or a run-on sentence.

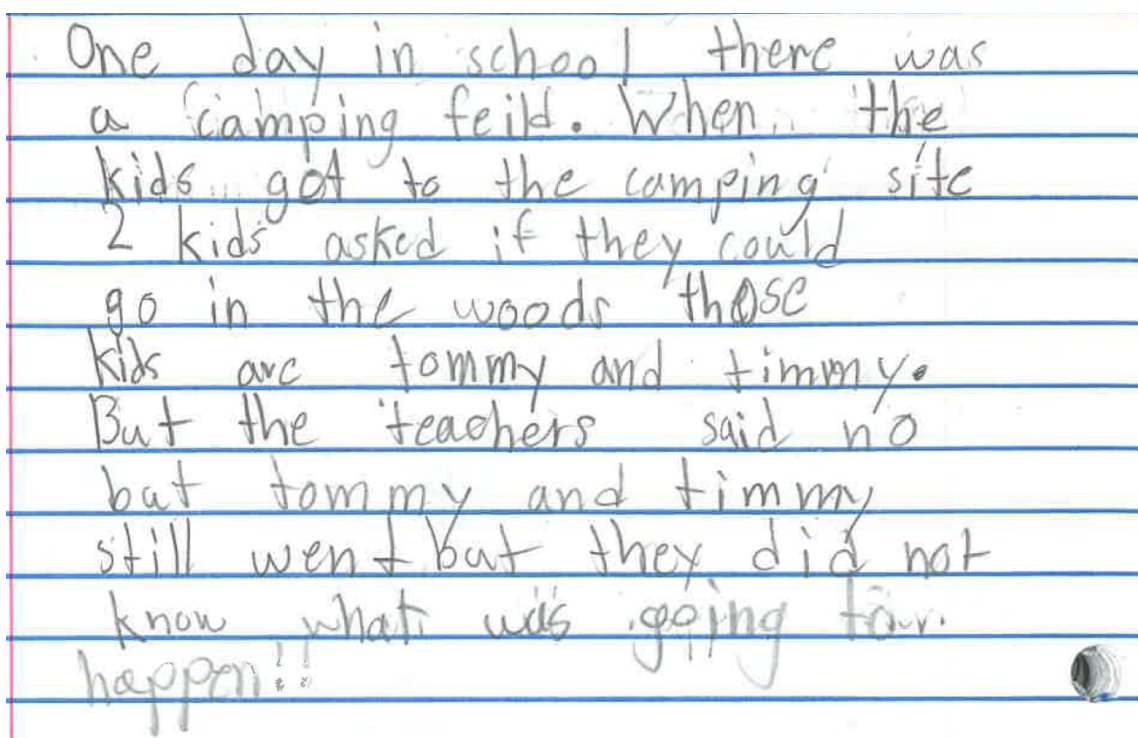
Transfer of Grammar Skills to Narrative Writing

A third theme that emerged was students' ability to transfer the grammar skills that they learned in whole group and small group lessons and apply them to their narrative stories. Students were taught the skills via whole class instruction where we named the skill, defined the skill, and saw many examples utilizing the skill. Additionally, students in the target group received two additional mini-lessons on the skills each week. After each lesson, students worked on their narrative stories. Students were able to apply some of the grammar skills that were taught but did not apply them consistently throughout their writing. It did appear that as the weeks went on, the students were able to apply more and more grammar skills accurately.

When reviewing students' narrative writing during week two of the study, students were able to apply some grammatical skills. Figure 7 shows that Student 3 is continuing to work on forming complete sentences. He starts all of his sentences with capital letters and ends all of his sentences with punctuation. However, he is missing capital letters in his characters' names and has several run-on sentences.

Figure 7

Student 3's Narrative Writing



As the weeks went on and students practiced already learned skills and were introduced to new ones, they did apply them more often in their narrative stories. For instance, after learning how to utilize dialogue in writing students started to include more of it in their narratives. Figure 8 shows student 4's narrative writing before learning about dialogue. His writing consists of telling what is going on in the story with no character speech. However,

Figure 9 shows student 4's narrative writing after learning about dialogue. He was able to take what he learned in whole class and small group lessons and apply speech to his writing.

Figure 8

Student 4's Narrative Writing Pre-Dialogue Lesson

Narrative story 11/16/20

Crack!!! The ball went deep to right field....
 Ohta here 4-4 with 4 homers. Jaffer
 is having a incredible game. (2 innings later)
 it is the ninth inning and base is loaded
 with two outs. CRACK!!! The ball went
 deep to left field

Figure 9

Student 4's Narrative Writing Post-Dialogue Lesson

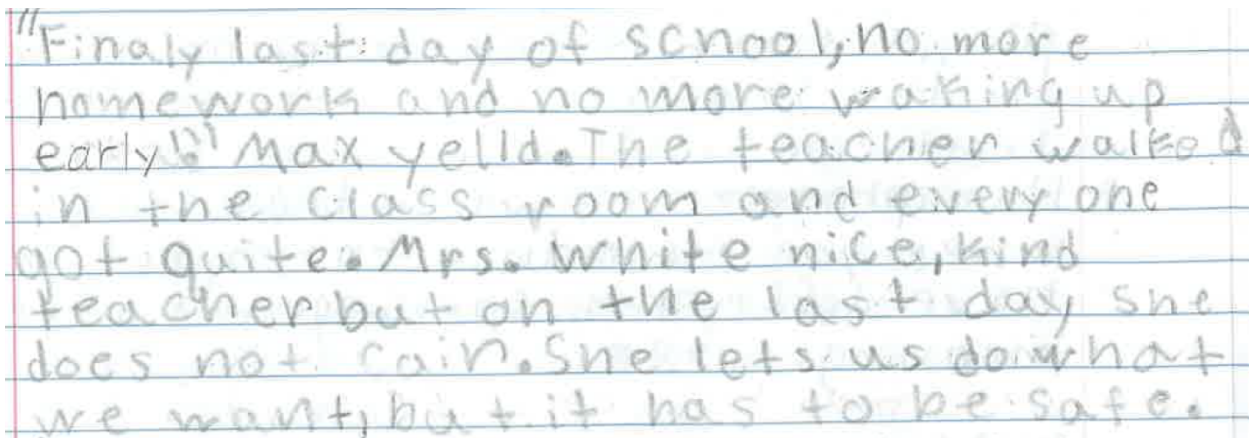
Beep... Beep... Beep,
 "He's awake!!" said mom,
 As my eyes open I see a lot of
 people.
 "What happened?" I said

Another example is how student 1 was able to apply grammatical skills to her narrative writing. Figure 10 shows that she could write in complete sentences, she began each sentence

with a capital letter and ended it with ending punctuation. In addition, she was able to correctly apply quotation marks to her dialogue but still needs assistance with applying commas. She also selects the correct form of to.

Figure 10

Student 1's Post-Narrative Writing



"Finally last day of school, no more homework and no more waking up early!" Max yelled. The teacher walked in the class room and everyone got quiet. Mrs. White nice, kind teacher but on the last day she does not say. She lets us do what we want, but it has to be safe.

Similarly, student 5 showed growth in his writing post-intervention. Figure 11 shows his writing before this study was conducted. He knew to insert quotation marks when a character was speaking and that dialogue started on its own line. However, he did not know how to connect the speaker with the dialogue and how to separate the narrative description that came after the dialogue. Figure 12 shows his narrative at the end of the study. He was able to apply his knowledge of dialogue by inserting quotation marks and some commas in the correct locations. He also knew to start dialogue on its own line and to connect it with the speaker.

Figure 11*Student 5's Narrative Pre-Study*

It was 6:43 am I just got woken up by the voice of my mom saying
 "Andrew, come on wake up!" It was moving day but harder because insted of moving neighborhood, I was moving to

Figure 12*Student 5's Narrative Writing Post-Study*

A couple of days passed, there was nothing he can do about it. He was leaving to the airport in 2 hours so he packed all his entire room and called his best friend Alex.

"hey bro," said Anthony.

"I heard the bad news," said Alex

"Yeh, I am moving to Florida," responded Anthony.

"Thats a bumer, I was going to invite you to kalahari this weekend,"

On the other hand, student 6 is still very inconsistent with his grammar application.

Figure 13 shows his post-narrative writing. He did not begin all sentences with a capital letter,

many sentences are either run-ons or fragments, and he does not accurately apply homophones.

He does accurately apply quotation marks and commas to some of his dialogue but not all.

Figure 13

Student 6's Post-Narrative Writing

two days before Halloween. honey waredid the candy go? dad
 sed. in respos mom sed. dont even think about takeing some. when it came
 to sweets dad is a total addict. dad sed. I thout it was on the
 entry way table. it is. its not but dont just take my word for it
 look for your self. hey waredid the candy go, Jane did you take the
 candy basket? Isint it stil on the entry way table? no its not
 do you know what it is? no mom. *** one day before halloween.

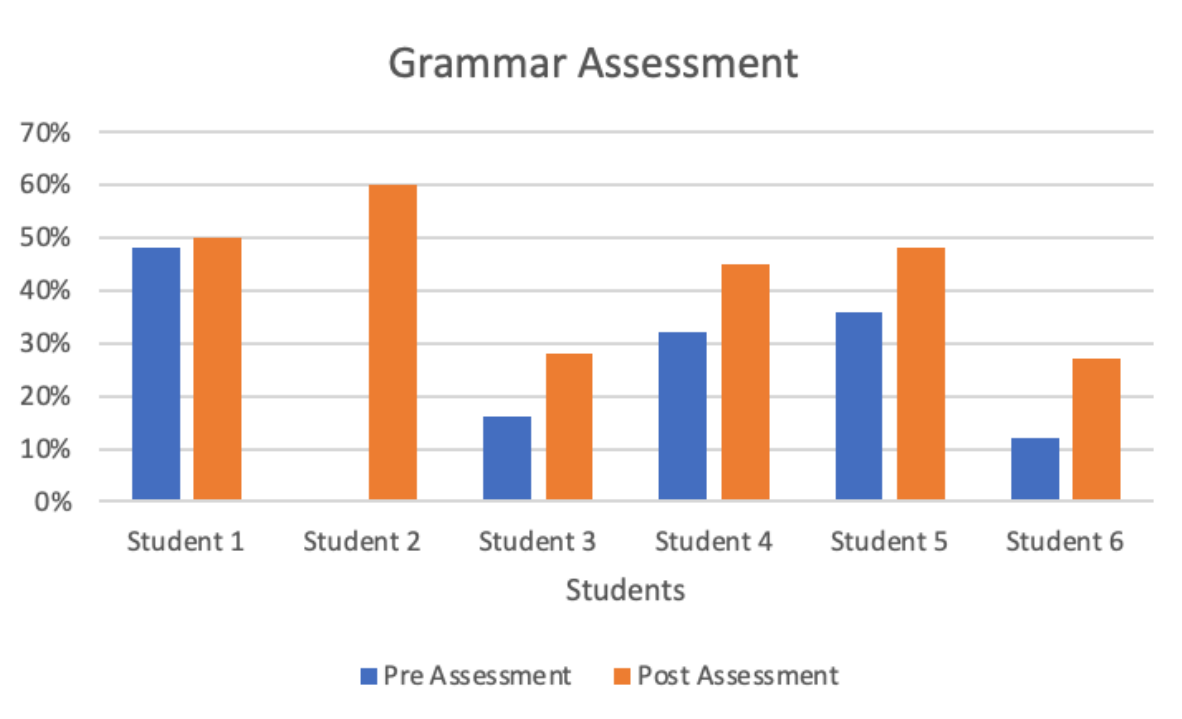
Furthermore, students completed a pre- and post-assessment on grammar and mechanics. The students were asked to identify and correct all grammatical errors that they found and were scored using a 4-point rubric. A copy of this rubric can be found in the appendix. On the pre-assessment, all students scored a 1 (Below Proficient) which meant that they identified less than 60% of the mistakes. Similarly, on the post-assessment, all students scored in the Below Proficient category again. However, all students improved the percentage of mistakes they found.

Figure 14 shows the results of students' pre- and post-assessment scores on the grammar assessment. The blue bars indicate the percentage of correct answers students scored on the pre-assessment. The orange bars indicate the percentage of correct answers students scored on the

post-assessment. The graph indicates that all students scored higher on the post-assessment and were able to identify and correct more grammatical errors after receiving explicit grammar instruction.

Figure 14

Grammar Assessment Pre- and Post-Scores Bar Graph

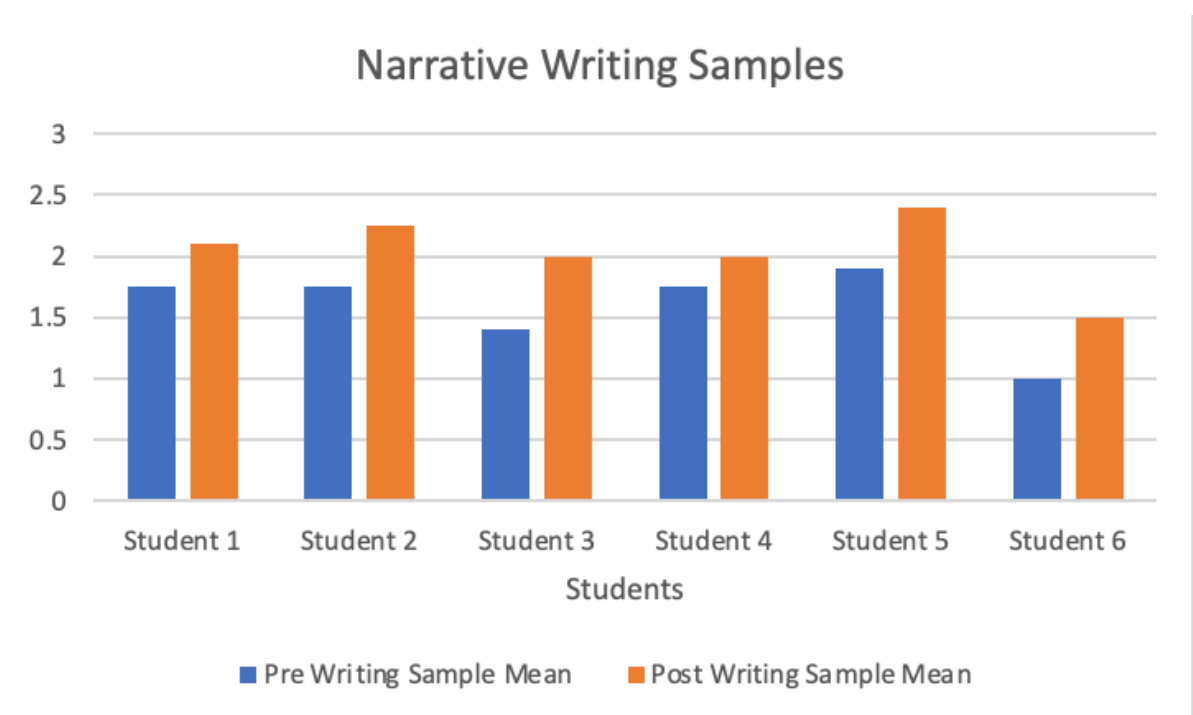


Similarly, student writing samples were used as another pre- and post-assessment tool to determine student growth. Students were scored based on four categories: ideas and content, conventions, grammar, and word choice. They received a score of 1-3 in each category and their mean score was used. Students also received half points if they were between descriptors. A copy of the rubric can be found in the appendix. Figure 15 shows the mean scores that students received on their pre- and post-narrative writing samples. The blue bars indicate the mean scores for their pre-narrative samples. The orange bars indicate the mean scores for their

post-narrative samples. The graph shows that all students scored a higher mean score and showed growth on their grammatical knowledge and writing skills in their post-narrative samples than they did on their pre-narrative samples.

Figure 15

Narrative Writing Samples Pre- and Post-Mean Scores Bar Graph



Summary

The findings outlined in this chapter illustrate students' ability to apply grammatical concepts and how it affected the quality of their writing. Students benefited from having small group lessons that reinforced the grammar skills taught during whole class lessons. They were able to accurately identify and apply grammar skills when they could use the support of their teacher, peers, and notes with examples. Students were also able to identify grammar skills independently and could apply them in isolation most of the time. In addition, when students

wrote their narratives independently, they were able to apply some of the grammar skills that they learned but did not apply them consistently throughout their writing and may still need some additional practice with specific concepts. Moreover, both post-assessments: grammar and narrative writing indicate that students benefited from instruction and made growth in their grammatical knowledge and application.

Chapter V

Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine how differentiated grammar instruction affects English Language learners' and at-risk native English speakers' quality of writing. Additionally, this study also examined if differentiated grammar instruction generalizes to student writing. From the data analysis, it is concluded that (1) students benefit from explicit grammar instruction. (2) Students are more motivated and are more successful in the small group setting with additional support. (3) Grammar instruction leads to stronger narrative writing. There is evidence in the current study and other existing research that supports these three conclusions.

Conclusion I

Students benefit from explicit grammar instruction.

Discussion

The data analysis of the findings of the four-week study showed that struggling writers were able to take skills that were explicitly taught to them and apply them. Students were given definitions and examples of each grammar skill. They then followed teacher models and applied the skill in isolation. For instance, when learning about quotation marks and commas in dialogue, students were taught the skill, how to apply it, and then practiced inserting quotation marks and commas into dialogue. By identifying the names of grammar skills and seeing how to apply them in context, students were able to apply them independently.

Furthermore, explicitly teaching grammar skills to students also made them more aware of these skills in their reading. Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2000) highlighted the importance of

connecting reading and writing and teaching both to students beginning at an early age. This is similar to what I found in my study as well. For instance, when students were explicitly taught grammar skills such as applying commas, capitals, and quotations to dialogue, it made them more aware of these elements in their reading. Students were able to look for and identify these skills in their reading and observe how each time a character spoke, their words began on a new line, each time dialogue was introduced or finished there was a comma, and each time someone started and finished speaking there were quotation marks.

My findings relate to a study done by Altun and Dınçer (2020) which looked closely at the role of implicit and explicit teaching in terms of grammar and writing skills for intermediate learners. Their goal was to see if there was any difference between the effect of implicit and explicit grammar teaching on students' pre- and post-writing scores, as well as students' grammar mistakes in their writing. They found that students who were explicitly taught grammar skills outperformed students who were not on their post-scores. Similarly, I noticed that explicitly teaching my students grammar skills in a small group setting helped students better understand the skill and how to apply it in context. I think that students being able to name and apply the skill was beneficial to their understanding.

Another study done by Batalha (2019) focused on the role of grammar by investigating the relations between language awareness and reading comprehension in a classroom context. The overall theme of this study shared the positive effects grammar instruction has on student learning. Similarly, this study aligns with my study since my students became more aware of grammar concepts in other subjects such as reading after receiving explicit grammar instruction. The instruction allowed students to be able to recognize and name skills in the context of our whole class read-aloud and their independent reading books. Additionally, Batalha (2019) shared

how grammatical knowledge can impact not only student writing but reading and language awareness as well.

Conclusion II

Students are more motivated and more successful in the small group setting with additional support.

Discussion

The data found from the four-week study showed that struggling writers could apply grammar skills more accurately in the small group setting than during individual writing time. In the small group setting, students were more confident and willing to share their ideas and examples than they were in the whole group setting. Additionally, students were able to accurately apply grammar skills with the support from teacher modeling, extensive examples, and through the use of gradual release of responsibility. Students also received support from one another and were able to share their reasoning behind their decision-making for how they applied specific concepts. The small group allowed students to have more personal conversations about the skills and helped them feel supported. If students were unsure, then they were able to ask questions and view additional examples as needed.

Batalha's (2019) study also found that differentiated instruction and small-group interventions were beneficial to students. The findings in my study support that since students met in a smaller group, of only six, and had more time to practice the skills together, they were more successful in learning and applying the skills. Students were excited to come to small group lessons and were motivated to try their best. Similar to other studies, students benefited from a smaller group setting that moved at a slower pace (McCormack et al., 2018).

Furthermore, in this study, students were able to freely ask questions and guide the discussion. If they required more practice with particular skills, then they could practice more examples or could share their examples with others and receive feedback.

Moreover, a study conducted by Wheldall et al. (2019) shared similar positive effects of the small group setting. The study focused on improving at-risk students' literacy skills through small-group intervention. By providing small group instruction, students were able to receive more targeted instruction, that was set at a better pace for them versus instruction provided in the whole class setting (Wheldall et al., 2019). Similar to my study, we were able to modify the pace of the instruction, go back and review old concepts, or add additional concepts to our instruction if and when students were ready for them. This provided flexibility and helped ensure that all students in the small group felt confident with the skills before having to apply them independently in their writing. In both studies, small group intervention helped students grow in the targeted areas.

Furthermore, in my study, the small group setting helped students feel more confident and allowed them to learn concepts at their own pace. The slower pace allowed students to master concepts and to continue practicing ones they had not yet mastered. Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2000) share that readers and writers must learn to recognize and to create syntactic ordering of words and need to know how to apply punctuation in order to be successful. This relates to my study because students were able to learn grammar concepts like writing in complete sentences, homophones, and punctuation in a setting that was most beneficial to them.

Conclusion III

Grammar instruction leads to stronger narrative writing.

Discussion

The data found from the four-week study of targeted small-group grammar instruction showed that students improved the quality of their writing after being explicitly taught grammar skills. Before instruction, students completed a pre-assessment on identifying and correcting grammatical errors. Similarly, they completed a narrative writing sample that also served as a pre-assessment. The data found in chapter four indicated that students' post-assessment scores improved on both the grammar assessment and on their narrative writing. Students were able to take the concepts that they learned during whole class and small group instruction and apply them to the grammar assessment. Explicit instruction of grammar skills made students more aware of these errors and how to fix them in writing.

A study done by McCormack-Colbert et al. (2018) focused on gaining a further understanding of how explicit grammar teaching in context can benefit students with persistent literacy difficulties (i.e. dyslexia). The teacher also shared that the focus on grammar helped students improve their writing skills. The group score analysis from the Progress Test in English showed that learners' percentage of correct answers on the grammar and punctuation subtest increased. Similar to this study, all students in the targeted group improved on their post-assessment scores and were able to identify more grammatical errors and correct them using the knowledge that they learned during the four weeks of instruction. Additionally, students' post-narrative scores also improved and students were able to accurately apply skills that they learned to their own writing which consequently improved the quality of their writing.

Myhil et al. (2018) conducted a study to investigate if the intervention for less proficient writers, using grammatical metalinguistic knowledge to support individual writing needs helps improve their writing skills. Students who received intervention made greater gains in their post-writing in the areas of sentence structure and punctuation. This relates to the results of my study as well. All students in the targeted group were able to take the skills that they learned and apply them to their post-narrative writing. Students still made errors and their grammar was not perfect, but the four weeks of intervention helped students improve their knowledge of grammatical concepts and helped them improve the quality of their writing as a result.

Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2000) share that the knowledge a student has in reading and writing can transfer to the other subject and can support students in the learning process. This relates to my study because as students gained more grammatical knowledge, they not only applied it to their writing, but they started to identify examples in their reading as well. Once students made this connection, they started using their independent reading books as models for their narrative writing. Moreover, this connection helped to further their understanding and to support students in the writing process.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings of the study of how explicit grammar instruction affects English Language learners' and at-risk native English speakers' quality of writing there are several recommendations for future research. The goal of this study was to see how students were able to improve their quality of writing and if they could transfer their skills to their own writing. Future studies could focus on tracking students' writing progress in other subjects such as math, reading, science, and social studies. Since this study was so short and there were several

interrupted weeks of instruction, it was difficult to track students' writing progress in the other subject areas. It would be beneficial to see if students can transfer their knowledge through various subjects. Another suggestion for a future study could focus on different types of writing such as story writing, essay writing, and short responses. This study focused on students' ability to apply grammar knowledge to strictly narrative writing. However, it would be beneficial to observe if and how students apply grammatical concepts to various types of writing. A final recommendation for future studies could focus on student motivation and how that affects students' quality of writing. In this study, students showed interest and motivation when working in a small group setting. They were actively engaged and worked hard to apply grammatical concepts in isolation. However, it would be interesting to monitor how students' motivation may have changed when they went from working with the teacher and peers to working by themselves. How could teachers increase student motivation when they are working independently? It would be beneficial to investigate how to keep students motivated during independent writing and how their motivation affects their ability to apply grammar skills they learned in their writing.

Recommendations for Teachers

The results of this study identified recommendations for teachers to help students improve the quality of their writing through explicit grammar instruction. The first recommendation is that grammar should be explicitly taught every day like all other subjects. It was evident in this study that students were lacking basic grammar skills such as capital letters, punctuation, and sentence structure. These results indicate that students are not being taught the foundational skills that they need. Additionally, with the more frequent use of computers and

autocorrect, students are not aware of mistakes that they are making nor know how to correct them. Explicitly teaching grammar lessons will help students be able to recognize and apply skills accurately and independently. Another recommendation for teachers would be to model examples repeatedly in small group lessons and then encourage students to try together. When students viewed examples and felt supported, they were more motivated and confident to apply the skills and share their ideas within the small group setting. The continuous practice and modeling gave students an abundant amount of examples that they could use to reference when practicing skills independently.

References

- Altun, L., & Dınçer, R. (2020). A comparison of implicit and explicit teaching in terms of grammar and writing skills of intermediate learners. *Bartın Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 9(1), 96-105. <https://doi.org/10.14686/buefad.601184>
- Babayiğit, S., & Shapiro, L. (2020). Component skills that underpin listening comprehension and reading comprehension in learners with English as first and additional language. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 43(1), 78–97. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12291>
- Batalha, J. (2019). From grammar to reading: A study on referential dependencies. *Bellaterra: Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 12(2), 60–77. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.811>
- Bullard, S., & Anderson, N. (2014). “I’ll take commas for \$200”: An instructional intervention using games to help students master grammar skills. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 69(1), 5-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695813518778>
- Census Reporter. U.S. Census Bureau (2021). *American Community Survey 5-year estimates*. <https://censusreporter.org>
- Collins, G., & Norris, J. (2017). Written language performance following embedded grammar instruction. *Reading Horizons (Online)*, 56(3), 16-30. https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3418&context=reading_horizons&httpsredir=1
- Department of Education. (2016). New Jersey student learning standards. <https://www.nj.gov/education/standards/ela/Index.shtml>
- Efron, S.E., & Ravid, R. (2020). *Action research in education*. The Guilford Press.
- Erni, S., Emzir, E., & Sabarti, A. (2019). Reading habits, grammatical knowledge, creative

- thinking, and attainment in academic writing: evidence from Bengkulu University, Indonesia. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 10(3), 176–192.
- Fitzgerald, J., & Shanahan, T. (2000). Reading and writing relations and their development. *Educational Psychologist*, 35(1), 39-50.
https://doi.org/10.1207/S15326985EP3501_5
- Hu, T., Sung, Y.-T., Liang, H.-H., Chang, T.-J., & Chou, Y.-T. (2022). Relative roles of grammar knowledge and vocabulary in the reading comprehension of EFL elementary-school learners: Direct, mediating, and form/meaning-distinct effects. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 827007. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.827007>
- McCormack-Colbert, A., Ware, J., & Wyn, S. J. (2018). Developing writing skills of learners with persistent literacy difficulties through explicit grammar teaching. *Support for Learning*, 33(2), 165–189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.12200>
- Myhil, D., Jones, S. & Lines, H. (2018). Supporting less proficient writers through linguistically aware teaching. *Language and Education*, 32(4), 333-349.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2018.1438468>
- Niche.com Inc. 2023
<https://www.niche.com>
- NJ School Performance Report. (2023). <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>
- Petersen, D., Mesquita, M. W., Spencer, T. D., & Waldron, J. (2020). Examining the effects of multitiered oral narrative language instruction on reading comprehension and writing: a feasibility study. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 40(4), E25–E39.
<https://doi.org/10.1097/TLD.000000000000227>
- Smith, J. (2022). Grammar teaching practices of ESOL school teachers. *TESOL Journal*, 13(1).

<https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.611>

Snow, C., & Moje, E. (2010). Why is everyone talking about adolescent literacy? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91(6), 66-69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721710091006>

The Nation's Report Card. (2011). *Summary of major findings*. National Assessment of Educational Progress.

https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/writing_2011/summary.aspx#:~:text=Twenty%2Dseven%20percent%20of%20students,the%20Proficient%20level%20in%20writing.

The Nation's Report Card. (2023). *New Jersey summary statements*. National Assessment of Educational Progress.

https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/NJ?cti=PgTab_Findings&chort=1&sub=MAT&sj=NJ&fs=SubjectLabel&st=MN&year=2022R3&sg=Gender%3A%20Male%20vs.%20Female&sgv=Difference&ts=Single%20Year&tss=2022R3&sfj=NP

Wheldall, K., Bell, N., Wheldall, R., Madelaine, A., Reynolds, M., & Arakelian, S. (2019). A small group intervention for older primary school-aged low-progress readers: Further evidence for efficacy. *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 36(2), 35-40. <https://doi.org/10.1017/edp.2019.15>

APPENDIX

Pre- and Post-Assessment-Grammar and Mechanics with Scoring Rubric

Name: _____ Date: _____

Grammar & Mechanics

Directions: Read the following sentences below. There's no need to add or remove words. Add the missing punctuation as appropriate, and correct incorrect grammar (word usage) by marking it out and writing the correct word above.

1. Since the weather outside was frightful monument middle school declared a snow day and the students stayed home from school.
2. The principals message to parents was like music to the students ears he said the extreme weather conditions have caused roads to be closed so please stay home and enjoy the day off.
3. Most of the students were thrilled to have the day off and there parents were happy to everyone knows that snow days equal play days.
4. After james woke up and realized he had the day off he snuggled up with his dog ralph and watched the movie the lord of the rings all afternoon.
5. Kevin enjoyed his day off to he decided to read his book called holes after becoming bored with cartoons and then he took a nap.
6. Sara read the newspaper called the daily colorado news and found an article entitled how to bake the worlds best cookies this inspired her to spend the day baking.

7. Mark didnt want to read or bake on his day off so he chose to do yoga and meditate he was very relaxed by the end of the day.

8. Janet decided to write poetry because she was so inspired by the snow her poem was called snowflakes in in my cornflakes it was a short haiku which is a form of japanese poetry.

9. George decided to go sledding he invited his neighbor shelby to join him but she said no way its way to cold outside so he went by himself.

10. All the students were grateful for the snow day but there parents were even happier because they got to spend time with there children the following day monument middle school was back in session.

Grammar and Mechanics	4 Advanced Identifies all mistakes	3 Proficient Identifies at least 80% of mistakes	2 Partially Proficient Identifies at least 60% of mistakes	1 Below Proficient Identifies <60% of mistakes
-----------------------	---	--	--	--

Writing Rubric for pre- and post- writing samples

Writing Rubric

	Novice	Approaching	Meeting
<u>Ideas and Content:</u>	Answers the prompt, but is missing key facts, details, opinions, or plot. Writing is disorganized and difficult for the reader to follow.	Answers the prompt and includes some correct facts, details, opinions, or plot. Writing is somewhat organized, but could be clearer in sequence.	Answers the prompt and includes correct facts, details, opinions, or plot. Writing is organized in an order that makes sense to the reader and includes transition words appropriate for the text type.
<u>Conventions:</u>	Many mistakes with the use of capital letters, punctuation, indentation, and line spacing. Hand writing is difficult to read. Many spelling mistakes that interfere with the readers' understanding.	Some mistakes with the use of capital letters, punctuation, indentation, and line spacing. Hand writing is readable. Spelling mistakes sometimes interfere with the readers' understanding.	Proper use of capital letters, punctuation, indentation and line spacing. Hand writing is neat and easy to read. Spelling does not interfere with the readers' understanding.
<u>Grammar:</u>	Limited use of proper sentence structure, including subject verb agreement, and detailed specific sentences. Little to no variation in sentence length.	Most sentences include proper sentence structure, including subject verb agreement, and detailed specific sentences. Some variation in sentence length to add rhythm to the reading.	Proper sentence structure, including subject verb agreement, and detailed specific sentences. Sentences also vary in length to add rhythm to the reading.
<u>Word Choice:</u>	Many errors with the use of vocabulary.	Some errors with the use of vocabulary.	Correct use of vocabulary that paints an image of the text in the reader's mind.