

Written Language Outcomes Of Deaf Elementary Students

RESEARCH BRIEF



Article reference: Wolbers, K., Dostal, H., Cihak, D., & Holcomb, L. (2020). Written language outcomes of deaf elementary students engaged in authentic writing. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 25(2), 224-238. <https://doi.org/10.1093/deafed/enz047>

Topic & Purpose

Deaf students often have unique language needs during writing instruction due to their multilingual/multimodal use of languages and/or their experiences of language deprivation. As a result, teachers need a responsive approach to writing instruction that accounts for students' language experiences. The purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to examine how six students' written language skills were impacted by Strategic and Interactive Writing Instruction (SIWI) and (2) to consider the types of support teachers need to identify appropriate written language skills and monitor their progress.

This study was part of a larger project funded by the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) that focused on developing SIWI and determining the feasibility of its implementation. Three differently leveled groups of 3-5th grade students at a residential school for the deaf received SIWI instruction for 1 year. Two students from each group were participants of this study. A multiple-probe single case design with embedded condition was used to analyze students' individual written language skills. Collectively, the teachers set seventeen different written language objectives for their students, and these objectives guided SIWI instruction. Researchers noted that many of the skills were at the letter or word level or were conventions, rather than grammar or syntax skills. The majority of written language objectives that were set showed improvement after implementation of SIWI.

Study Outline

Findings

The median improvement across the seventeen objectives was 157% from baseline to final phase, and the mean improvement was 339%. The study design using an embedded condition allowed researchers to identify some language skills that improved simply through the supported composing process of SIWI, before explicit instruction for the skills was provided. Additionally, it was noted that teachers largely sidestepped setting syntactic clarity and complexity goals in favor of conventions or skills they felt prepared to teach (e.g., subject-verb agreement).

The findings of this study show that composing with students can positively impact targeted and untargeted language skills. Also, teachers expressed a need for assessment resources to help them identify appropriate written language goals for their students. In response, Kilpatrick used a systemic functional grammar approach to map a trajectory of noun phrases, verb phrases, and adverbial phrases in a Written Language Inventory for teachers. [See here](#). The inventory can help teachers analyze students' written language and choose meaningful, phrase-level objectives.

Ideas to Consider

How to cite this summary: Saulsbury, R. (2023). Written language outcomes of deaf elementary students. *Research Brief* of Wolbers, K., Dostal, H., Cihak, D. & Holcomb, L. (2020) in *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*. <https://siwi.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/WrittenLanguage.pdf>