

Hypothesis

Explicit teaching of sentence structure to grade 1 students improves listening comprehension.

Abstract

Many students in junior primary grades have difficulty with comprehension both at listening and reading levels. This study examines listening comprehension in Grade 1 students to see if their syntactic and semantic awareness is related to their ability to comprehend and retell what they have heard.

The hypothesis of this study is that explicit teaching of sentence structure to grade 1 students improves listening comprehension.

Research into the relationship between oral language skills and wider literacy skills is ongoing with links being made between students' levels of syntactic awareness and fluent reading and comprehension performance. Observations of early childhood language show that children may have breadth of vocabulary knowledge, but they may not be able to match a depth of meaning to these words.

The study compared two groups of children, one group as a control and the other as an intervention group. The 16 participants were grade 1 students from 1 of 4 junior class groups at the school. All students attend a primary school in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. None of the students receive support for EMA or ESL. The intervention took place as part of the daily literacy sessions.

Both groups were pre and post tested to measure performance. The teaching sessions were conducted daily over two consecutive weeks. Each session lasted 40 minutes approximately.

The students in the intervention group generally improved their scores from pre to post testing in Record of Oral Language. The group improved in their retell of the story about Jane in their listening comprehension tests. The control group also improved in its performance in this test but not as markedly as the intervention group.

These findings are encouraging for future research into how listening comprehension and reading comprehension correlate. I am also interested in researching the effect of text comprehension level and reading performance.

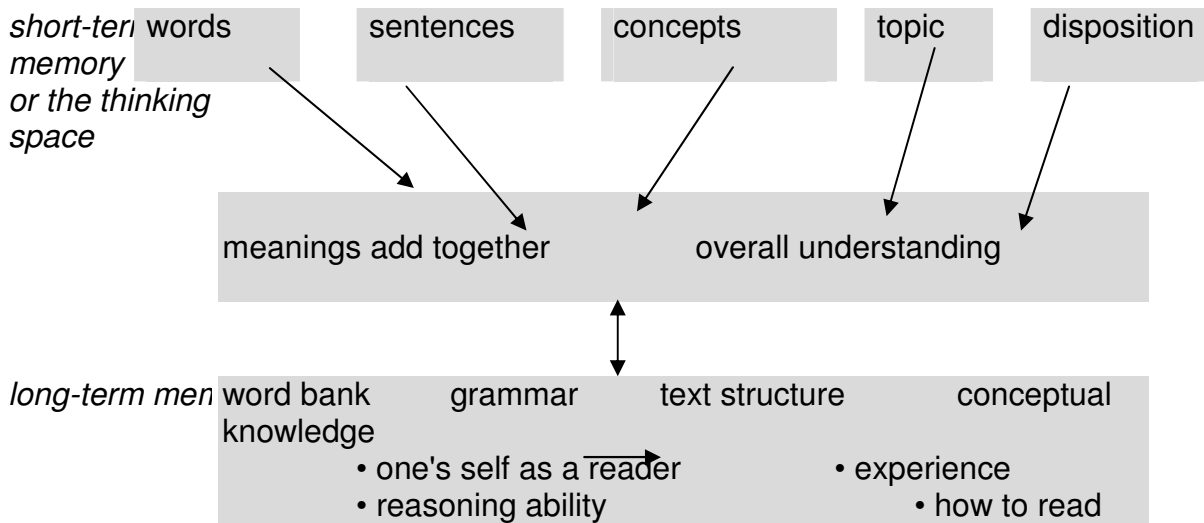
Introduction

Comprehension is an aspect of literacy that many students find difficult even though they may be proficient in skills and ability to enable them to decode text. Students in junior primary grades may have difficulty with comprehension at both listening and reading levels. The influence of oral language knowledge on the development of broader language skills is the subject of ongoing research. (Mokhtari & Thompson, 2006) Finding consensus about this complex relationship between oral and written language still remains unclear even though numerous studies have been conducted. (Ouellette, 2006) Remembering and thinking about what has been heard or read is at the basis of learning, enabling students to learn independently and think critically. Being able to use literal, inferential and evaluative forms of comprehension is necessary to make progress and have autonomy in life. Understanding ideas expressed orally requires knowledge and understanding of a range of language components and skills including vocabulary, syntactic and semantic knowledge, and use of short term auditory and working memory and long term memory.

The integrated 'multiple levels of text processing' (MLOPTP) outlines how we read by processing text at a number of levels. One of the components outlined in MLOTP is oral language. In the broader area of existing knowledge the following levels of oral language knowledge are important to support the reader through literacy activities.

- *Word level*, what words mean, how they are said, sounds in words
- *Sentence level*, how ideas are linked into sentences, grammar
- *Conceptual level*, how ideas are linked into themes
- *Topic/theme level*, how a theme is communicated in a narrative, description
- *Dispositional/ pragmatic level*, attitudes & values of the writer towards ideas in the text (Munro 2006)

This diagram shows how we simultaneously process on multiple levels, using knowledge from all these sources to read. A deficit at any of these levels will create a problem for the reader. However, a deficit at the oral language level would severely hinder the development of literacy skills.



Whenever we read we use all of these levels of processing at once, or simultaneously. The knowledge we gain from each source is integrated in our short-term memory or thinking space. We also use knowledge of structural text features (the conventions of writing) from our long-term memory. Word bank knowledge, knowledge of grammar and text structure, together with past experiences are all stored in our long-term memory and retrieved throughout the process of reading. (Munro, 2006)

Many students in junior primary grades have difficulty with comprehension both at listening and reading levels. This study examines listening comprehension in Grade 1 students who have Record of Oral Language (ROL) scores between 17 and 32 to see if their syntactic and semantic awareness is related to their ability to comprehend and retell what they have heard.

Recent research by Mokhtari & Thompson (2006) found that students' levels of syntactic awareness were significantly related to reading fluency and reading comprehension performance. Lower levels of syntactic awareness corresponded with poorer reading fluency and poor comprehension. They stated that there are implications for research and instruction regarding the contribution of broader language skills to the development of reading fluency and comprehension. (P73) They described broader language processes as word formation (Morphological Awareness) sentence structure (Syntactic or Grammatical Awareness) discourse structure (Textual Awareness) and concurred with other researchers that these influence the reader's understanding of the author's intended purpose. (P76) They also referred to research, (Bentin Deutsch & Liberman, 1990; Demont & Gombert, 1996; Gottardo, Stanovich & Siegel, 1996; Leikin, 2002), investigating the influence of syntactic or grammatical awareness on children's ability to read. This research has shown that the ability to identify and manipulate the syntactic structure of the spoken language is generally related to reading development. Preschool children who later developed reading problems showed a more limited array of syntax in their speech than the control group. (Nation & Snowing, 2002, 2004) Syntactic awareness has also been used as a predictor of word recognition. (Turner, 1989) Mokhtari & Thompson have suggested there is a link between poor comprehension and difficulties with language processing

including an awareness of syntactic or grammatical structure of language, even though decoding skills are often adequate. (P76-77)

Ouellette (2006) wanted to gain a better understanding of skilled reading and how it is associated with oral and written language. He investigated a range of reading skills; decoding, visual word recognition and reading comprehension, in conjunction with the role oral vocabulary. (P554) He chose to use a study of the difference between oral vocabulary breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge to throw light on its role in oral language rather than use oral vocabulary as a control. (P554) Levelt, Roelofs and Meyer (1999), state that vocabulary storage involves lexical representations of stored phonology along with semantic representations of word meaning. (P554) Ouellette makes the distinction between the number of lexical (phonological) entries – vocabulary breadth and their semantic representation – vocabulary depth. He also suggests that observations of early childhood language show that children may store word form in their lexicon, which broadens their vocabulary but they may not be able to match a depth of meaning to these words. (P554-555) In recognising this difference Ouellette believes there will be a better understanding of the role of oral vocabulary in terms of reading skill acquisition. (P555)

Vellutino, Fletcher, Snowling and Scanlon (2004) stated the components of reading are adequate language comprehension and fluent word identification. They linked the written word to the spoken word and the spoken word to the environmental experiences. (P3) The model (Figure 1 P4) of the cognitive processes and different types of knowledge entailed in learning to read shows phonological coding – the ability to use speech codes; semantic and morphological coding – the ability to store information about word meanings; syntactic coding – the ability to store word order rules that organise sentences and pragmatic coding – the ability to store information about conventions governing language facilitate language acquisition. (P4) These firm associations between spoken and written words extends into knowledge of syntactic awareness which allows students to hear when grammatical or meaning conventions of language are in place or alternatively, when these conventions are broken. (P5)

Investigation of listening comprehension ability in Grade 1 students is also linked to these studies as it will examine the importance of the knowledge of oral language skills within the broader picture of literacy skills. Analysis of the students' performance in the ROL, with attention to the type of errors, may help to identify if knowledge of syntax is a factor in their ability to repeat sentences with different levels of complexity. It may also give an insight into the role memory plays in enabling the students to accurately retell stories they have listened to and how knowledge of vocabulary, both breadth and depth, is important to this process. The performance of these students on the testing will give more information about them as a group and the individual differences within the group. It will also be possible to examine the effect of the intervention strategies. A further study could look at a comparison of listening comprehension and reading comprehension skills, ensuring that the text levels are appropriate, not only at a fluent decoding level but also at an age appropriate syntactic level. (Application of Fry's readability procedure or similar to determine a suitable age range.)

This investigation intends to extend the earlier research by examining listening comprehension to see if it is influenced by knowledge of syntax and semantics. It also intends to examine if vocabulary knowledge is linked to students' performance. By examining students' knowledge of oral language at word level (what words mean, how they are said, sounds in words), sentence level (how ideas are linked into sentences, grammar) and conceptual level (how ideas are linked into themes) it will be possible to learn more about its role in broader literacy activities.

Encouraged by other research, I expect to find that students who had ROL scores between 17 and 32, will be able to remember and repeat a greater number of the sentences correctly in their post testing after explicit teaching of sentence structure and opportunities to practise their auditory memory skills. I also hope to find that they will use this knowledge of syntax to enable them to organise the ideas listened to and recall more events from the listening comprehension test.

Hypothesis

Explicit teaching of sentence structure to grade 1 students improves listening comprehension.

Method

Design

This is a naturalistic study conducted in the context of a real classroom. The grade 1 students' performance in listening comprehension was monitored before, during and after teaching a series of lessons on sentence structure. The students were selected for the study on the basis of lower Record of Oral Language scores. The students were matched as closely as possible in age, gender and ROL scores with students from other grade 1 classes in the same school. These children in the control group were pre and post tested using the same tests and testing procedures as with the intervention group. They also continued to receive their daily literacy classes as programmed by their class teachers.

Participants

The participants were grade 1 students from one of 4 junior class groups at the school. The junior classes were multi-age (grade 1 and 2) with approximately 28 students in each group. From a class group of 15 grade 1 students, 8 students with the lowest Record of Oral Language scores were selected. These children were matched to as closely as possible to 8 students from 3 other junior classes at the school. There were 6 boys and 2 girls in each group. The number of boys in the intervention group dictated the number of boys in the control group. All students attend a primary school in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. None of the students receive support for EMA or ESL.

Some relevant background information can be found in Table 1. The Intervention group are the students A to H and the control group are students I to P.

Table 1 Background Information

Students	Gender	Age in Months	Age in Years and months	Other information	Grade	CLaSS Pre Test Text Level Feb 2007
Intervention						
A	M	83	7-1		1	28
B	M	84	6-11		1	19
C	F	74	6-2		1	8
D	M	72	6-0	Very Difficult behaviour	1	14
E	M	78	6-6	Restless/hard to sustain focus	1	13
F	M	76	6-8		1	28
G	F	76	6-8		1	16
H	M	76	6-8		1	28
Control						
I	M	76	6-7	Health Asthma	1	23
J	M	82	6-9	Health Asthma	1	28
K	F	71	6-1	GRREAD repeated reading practice	1	3
L	M	74	6-2		1	8
M	M	74	6-2		1	9
N	M	84	7-0		1	20
O	F	78	6-6	Performance can be inconsistent	1	20
P	M	82	6-10		1	28

Materials

Materials used included the following

- Receptive and expressive language tasks: Record of Oral Language Pre test, Alternative Record of Oral Language Post test
- Vocabulary task: Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test
- Listening comprehension task: Listening Comprehension Test
- Observation during class sessions

Procedure

The tasks were administered to all students in the following order:

ROL, Listening Comprehension Part 1, Peabody Picture Vocabulary, Listening Comprehension Part 2 and finally Peabody Picture Vocabulary was completed. All testing was conducted individually in a quiet space.

The teaching sessions were conducted daily over two consecutive weeks. Each session lasted 40 minutes approximately. I am the class teacher of this group and carried out most the testing and all of teaching. The CLaSS literacy coordinator conducted the ROL post testing.

A short pilot program was conducted with another group of grade 1 students not in the study to trial the initial lesson format.

I had chosen Baker's book, ***Belonging***, to support our current Integrated Studies Unit based on the community. However, they struggled with the process of creating text for this book.

To assist the students with this process of creating text, they were buddied with a grade 2 partner with whom they were able to discuss and record their ideas. Initially the older student was the leader but this role was shared once the lesson format was established.

The daily teaching sessions were based on the shared reading to commence the daily reading session. This was shared with the whole class group and then the intervention group along with their partners completed the follow up on the activities. Their participation, responses and progress were monitored throughout the teaching sessions. The first few sessions were very slow in order to establish the procedure for the following lessons. But the pace was increased once this was established.

Each lesson commenced with a section of the shared big book with the text obscured. The texts were not completely unfamiliar to the group, especially to some of grade 2 students who may have experienced them before. With their partner they created sentences to support the illustrations in the section of the book on display. They recorded these on shared white boards and these ideas were shared within the group. Some of these sentences were selected and repeated by individuals and by the group. The complexity of the sentences was noted and the students were made aware of the increasing difficulty of some of the sentences. The ideas were counted and the students moved across the room to show how many ideas they could identify. Throughout these lessons the student's attention was constantly drawn to what a good listener would be doing to listen. How they would look, what they would be using: eyes, ears and brain. We also

discussed how we would contribute ideas for others to listen to. At the end of the session I revealed the text in the book and the students were able to compare their ideas. We also practised repeating the sentences individually and as a group. We repeated simple and more complex sentences. We discussed which were easiest and why. We also discussed what ideas were contained within the sentences and how they were constructed. We practised a retell of the story. They were able to use picture and syntactic clues to predict the text. We discussed the meaning of vocabulary from the text looking at synonyms and antonyms to help deepen their understanding of the text.

The next day we commenced with the book again reading the text to the last revealed page and then splitting the group to work with on the intervention activity or independent literacy activities. Even though the remainder of the students were not directly involved, they were still tuned into the activity and were also able to practise repeating sentences at other times during the day. They were not included in a large teaching group as I wanted to observe the students in the smaller working group. The structure of the lessons included features of the teaching sessions outlined in Language Disorder Program. (Munro P12-13)

There were four enlarged texts used for shared reading during the two week teaching sessions. They were ***The Phippen Party, The Greedy Goat, The Springtime Rock and Roll*** and ***Duck In Danger.***

Results

Table 2 presents a comparison between pre and post testing results for ROL. The raw score had a range of 17–32 out of a possible 42. The students’ errors were analysed in terms of auditory memory, grammatical knowledge and meaning. The data showed that the students had the greatest difficulty with the complexity of the sentences in level 3 of the test. It was also noted that the group had the greatest difficulty with expressive language where they were using their knowledge of auditory memory and grammar. The students with the lowest scores are also at the younger end of the scale in these two groups with an age less than 74 months. Another observation is that 14 of the 16 students selected are boys. This has obvious implications for text levels with sentence complexity beyond their working memory and hence their text comprehension. The results for the whole group can also be seen in Figure 1 A.

Table 2 Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Record of Oral Language

Record of Oral Language								
	Pre-Test				Post- Test (Alternative ROL)			
Student & Age in Months	Raw Score	Most common reason for errors	ROL Level of most errors	Percent-age	Raw Score	Most common reason for errors	ROL Level of most errors	Percent-age

Intervention								
A 83	30	Auditory Memory	3	71	35	Auditory Memory	3	83
B 84	31	Grammar	3	74	26	Auditory Memory & Meaning	3	62
C 74	17	Auditory Memory	3	40	17	Auditory Memory & Grammar	3	40
D 72	24	Auditory Memory	3	57	31	Auditory Memory	3	74
E 78	24	Auditory Memory	3	57	24	Auditory Memory	3	57
F 76	32	Meaning	3	76	34	Meaning	3	81
G 76	23	Auditory Memory	3	54	31	Auditory Memory & Grammar	3	74
H 76	27	Auditory Memory	3	64	25	Auditory Memory & Grammar	3	64
Average	26			62	28			67
Control								
I 76	29	Auditory Memory	3	69	25	Auditory Memory & Grammar	3	60
J 82	31	Auditory Memory	3	74	32	Auditory Memory & Grammar	3	76
K 71	17	Auditory Memory	3	40	17	Auditory Memory	3	40
L 74	22	Auditory Memory	3	52	18	Auditory Memory	3	43
M 74	24	Auditory Memory	3	57	22	Auditory Memory	3	52
N 84	32	Auditory Memory	3	76	27	Auditory Memory	3	64
O 78	28	Auditory Memory	3	66	21	Auditory Memory	3	50
P 82	29	Grammar	3	69	31	Auditory Memory & Grammar	3	74
Average	27			63	24			57

The test results of some individuals in the intervention group did not increase. (See Figure 1 A) Students C and E had the same score in both tests and the score students B and H reduced in the post testing. Students A, D, F and G showed an increase in the post-test. In the control group

student K stayed the same and there was a decrease in the score of students L M N O. and I Students J and P increased their score in the post-test.

These results may have been influenced by slightly different interpretation of testing procedures, as there were 7 different testers involved in the pre testing. All students were post-tested by the same tester using the Alternate ROL. Another factor influencing the drop in scores may have been the completely unfamiliar nature of this test. Students B and H both showed they had difficulty repeating sentences using the correct grammar. This is also evident in their conversation and their written work.

Figure 1 A Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Record of Oral Language

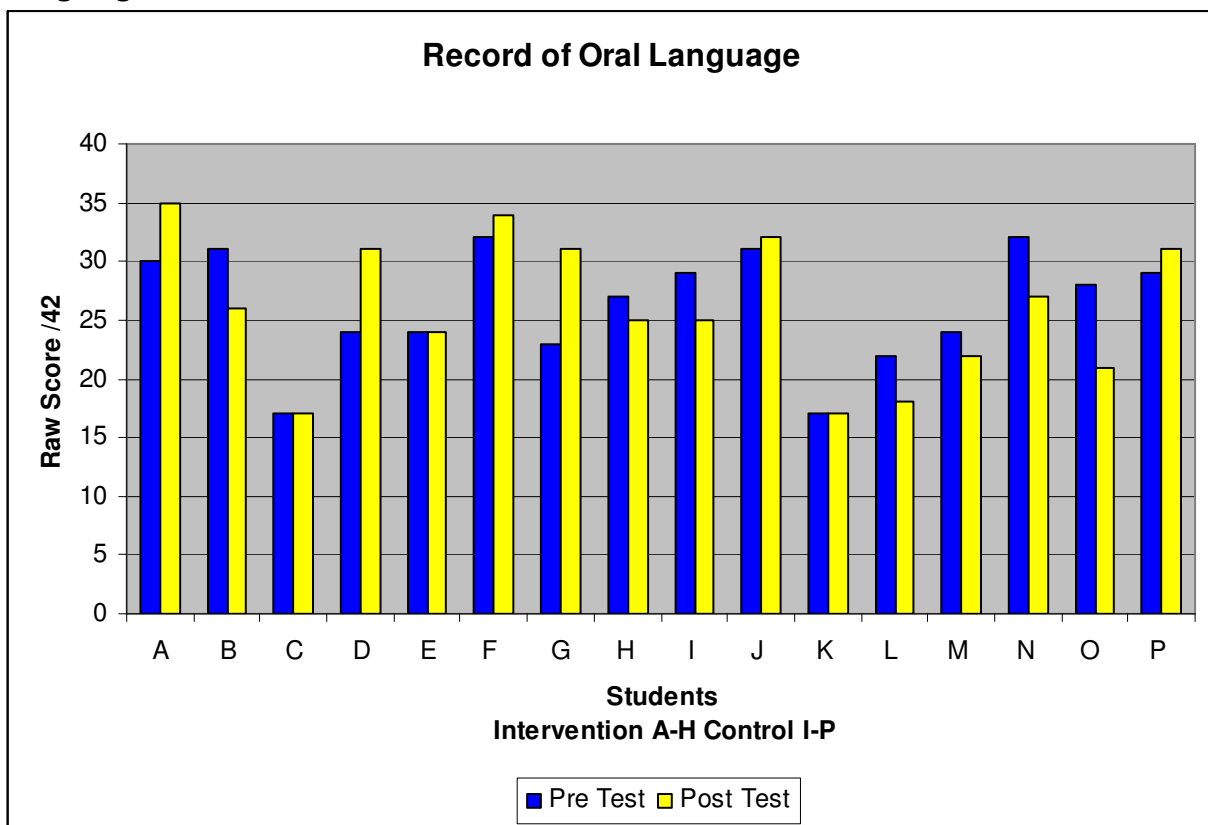
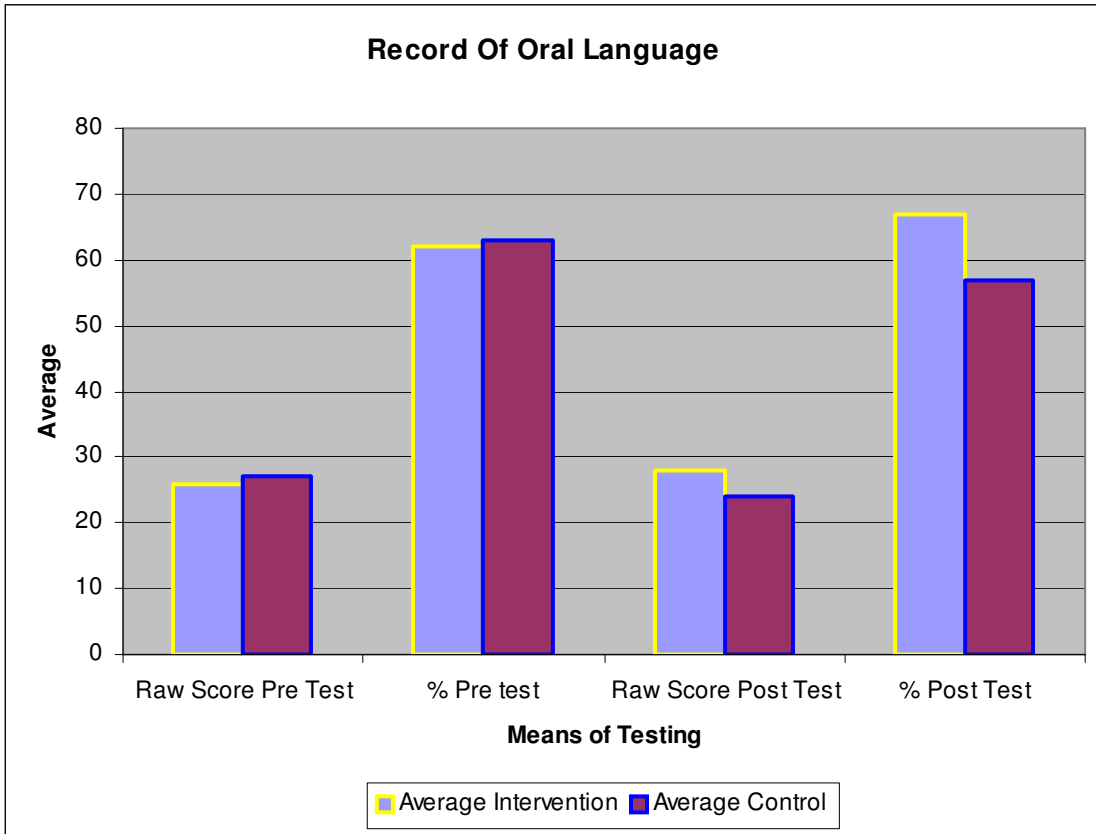


Figure 1 B shows the average results for both groups. As a group the average ROL raw score of the pretest was very similar at 26 for the intervention group and slightly higher at 27 for the control group. The post test results for the group show an average increase of 2 items (5%) in the intervention group and a decrease of 3 items (6%) in the control group. The group trends in the intervention group have support my prediction that that students will be able to remember and repeat a greater number of the sentences correctly in the Record of Oral Language test through the explicit teaching of the intervention group. Table 1 A shows the text level of these students. The students' score generally matched in as much as the higher the ROL score, the higher the text decoding level and the lower the ROL score, the lower the text decoding level. In the control group there were 2 scores that did not follow that pattern. The ROL scores were high but the text decoding scores were very low.

Figure 1B Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Record of Oral



Language (Average Scores)

Table 3 presents a comparison between pre and post testing results for Peabody Picture Vocabulary. The Intervention group had 5 students on an average for age score with 2 below average with moderately low scores and 1 student with an extremely low score. Post-testing showed 5 students remained in the average band, 1 student had moved to an extremely high score and the same 2 students remained moderately low. The control group began with 6 students in the average band and two moderately low. The post-testing results showed 7 were in the average band and 1 student had moved to an extremely low score. The data revealed pre-test results had similar averages raw and standard scores but a slightly higher scores for the control group in the percentile rank, stanine and age equivalent score. This group made common errors on the test. They generally could not identify parts of the body like chin, wrist and ankle. This is another simple example of assuming a level of vocabulary knowledge in spoken and written texts. Even though vocabulary was taught in the intervention program, it was not the area of greatest teaching emphasis. This is reflected in the test results. This test was selected to eliminate low vocabulary as a possible cause in the lower ROL scores.

Table 3 A Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test Revised Forms L and M

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test										
	Pre-Test					Post-Test (Post test scores adjusted by 1 month)				
Student & Age in Months	Raw Score	Standard Score	Percentile Rank	Stanine	Age Equivalent	Raw Score	Standard Score	Percentile Rank	Stanine	Age Equivalent
Intervention										
A 76	69	85	16	3	5-11	67	82	12	3	5-9
B 82	85	106	66	6	7-4	106	128	97	9	7-4
C 71	83	112	79	7	7-2	78	107	68	6	6-8
D 74	48	77	6	1	4-4	70	100	50	5	6-0
E 74	69	92	30	4	5-11	77	101	53	5	6-7
F 84	91	115	84	7	7-11	89	113	81	7	11-0
G 78	55	73	4	2	4-10	60	79	8	2	5-2
H 82	82	105	63	6	7-1	79	101	53	5	9-3
Average	73	96	44	5	5.9	78	101	53	5	7.3
Control										
I 76	77	101	53	5	6-7	83	106	66	6	7-2
J 82	89	119	90	8	7-9	89	108	70	6	7-9
K 71	75	105	63	6	6-5	79	100	50	5	6-9
L 74	60	98	45	5	5-3	72	100	50	5	6-2
M 74	87	116	86	7	7-6	84	113	81	7	7-3
N 84	68	84	14	3	5-10	74	90	25	4	5-10
O 78	53	74	4	2	4-8	49	69	2	1	4-4
P 82	73	92	30	4	6-3	80	100	50	5	6-10
Average	73	99	48	5	6.3	76	98	49	5	6.4

Figure 2 A shows the individual results for the intervention group for both tests against each score of the test as tabled in the test handbook. The pre test results showed Students A, D and G with lower than average scores. The post test results showed a change in Student D with an increase into the average range. Students A and G remained in the moderately low range. These 2 students are both good decoders but may need to work on increasing the depth of their language through synonyms and other strategies to broaden vocabulary. Student B showed a huge increase in his stanine from 6 to 9.

Figure 2 A Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test Revised Forms L and M Intervention Group

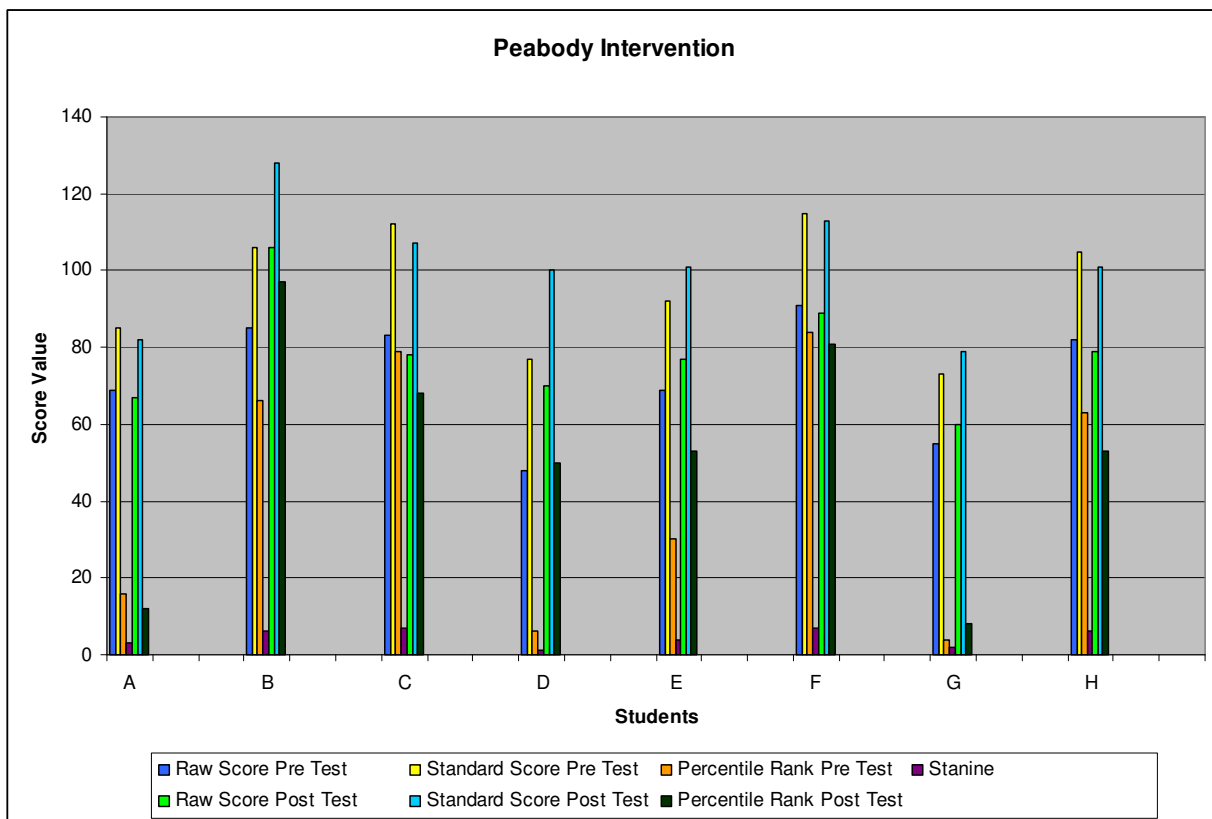
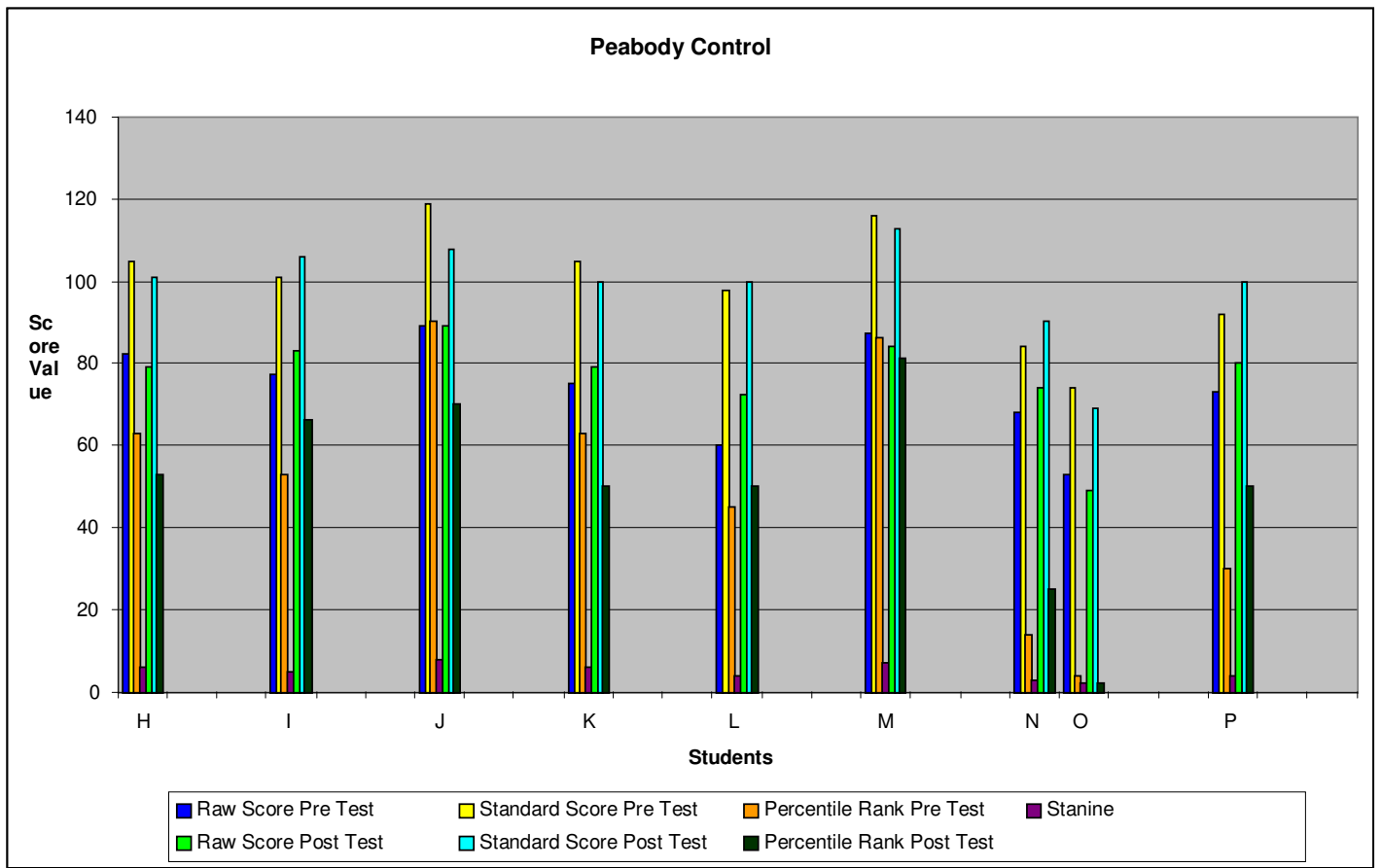


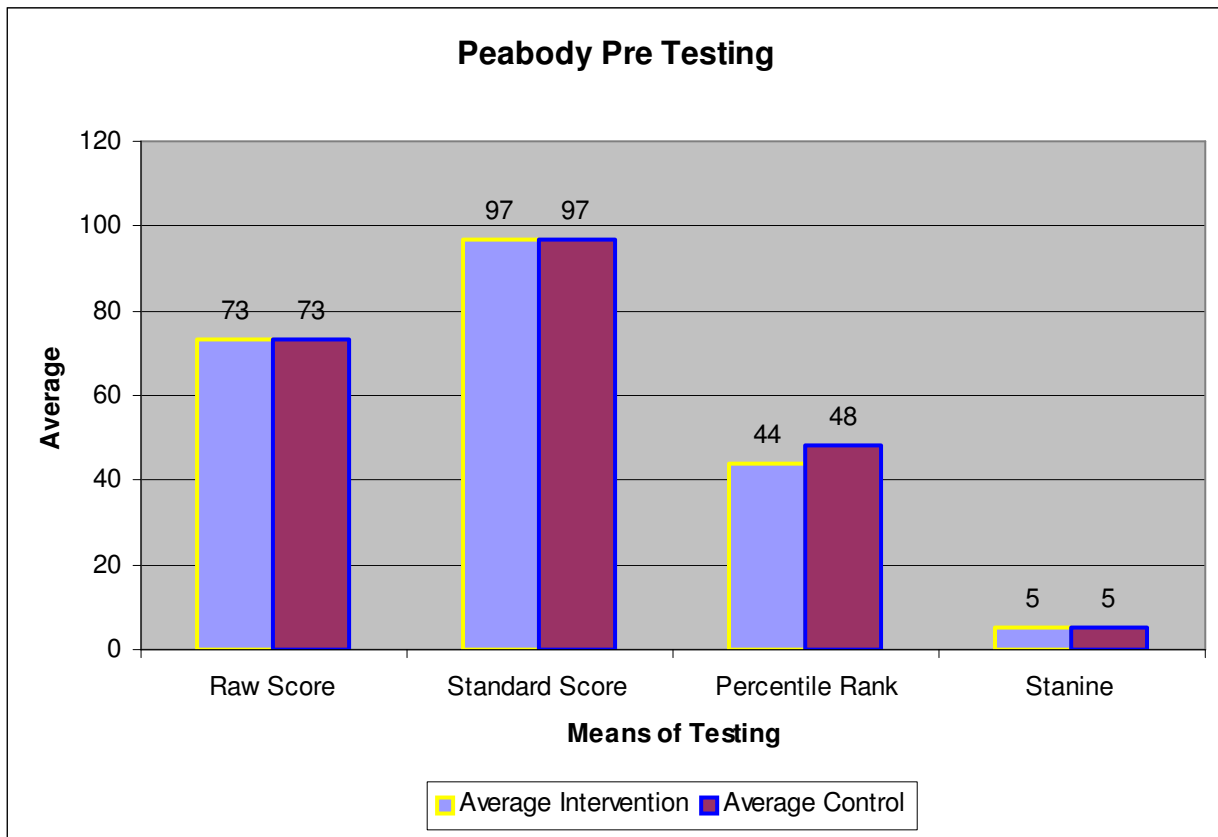
Figure 2 B shows the individual results for the control group for both tests against each score of the test as tabled in the test handbook. Student O dropped her score from moderately low to extremely low. Her teacher has found that her performance can vary greatly from day to day. Her decoding text level was 20 at the commencement of the school year and post ROL was 21. Student N's score was also at the lower end of the average range.

Figure 2 B Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test Revised Forms L and M Control Group



The average pre-test results were similar except higher percentile rank at 48 in the control group compared to 44 in the intervention group. All other results were the same for both groups when the average was calculated. (See Figure 2 C)

Figure 2 C Comparison of Pre-test Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test Revised Forms L and M (Average Scores)



In the post test the intervention group scored slightly higher in all measures of the test. These scores were influenced by an improved performance by Student B and D in the Intervention group. Most students' performance remained similar in both tests. (See Figure 2 D)

Figure 2 D Comparison of Post-test Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test Revised Forms L and M (Average Scores)

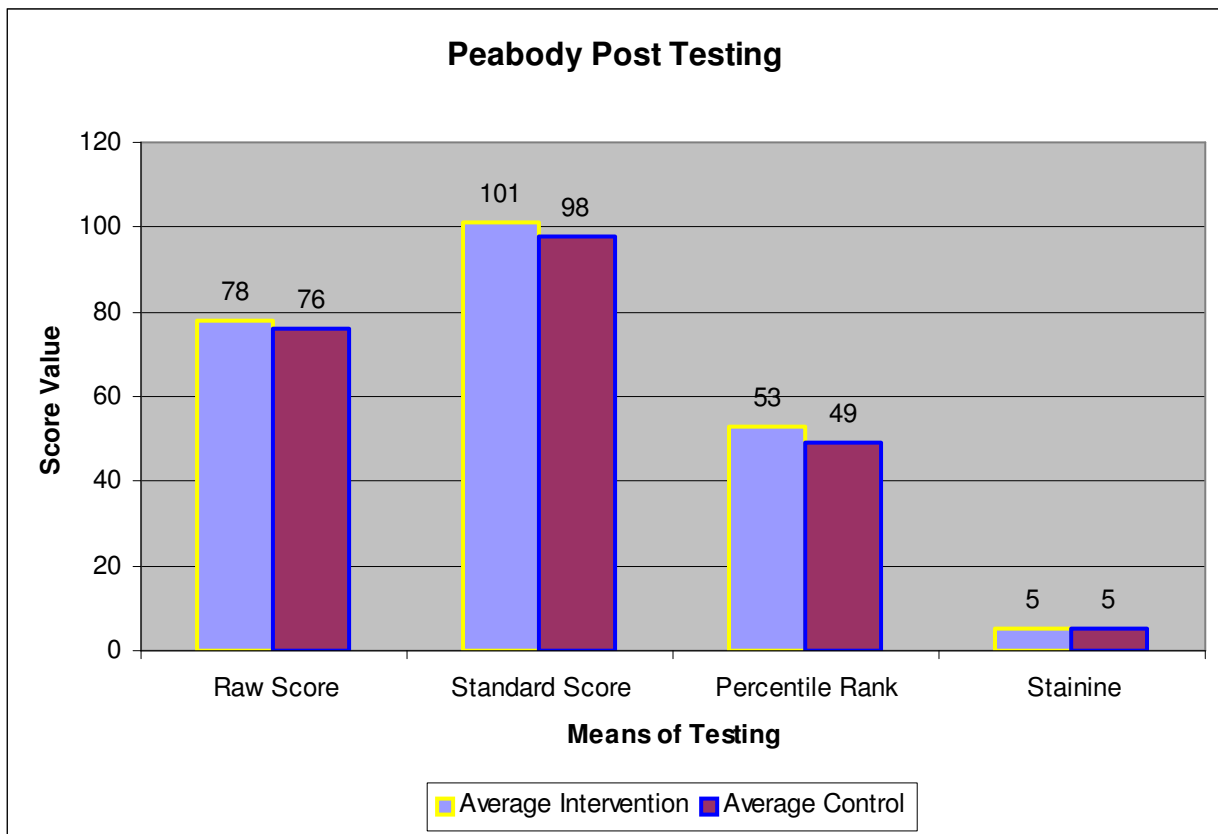


Table 4 presents a comparison between pre and post testing results for Listening Comprehension. The raw score had a range of 4–13 out of a possible 20 in the pre-test and 8 to 14 in the post test for the immediate recall. The students’ recall of the story was recorded both immediately and after 5 minutes had lapsed. Even though the number of items repeated in the 5 minute retell was less, they were often key ideas in the story. It would be interesting to include vocabulary and a range of comprehension questions to gain more information about their comprehension in terms of their oral language and memory.

Table 4 Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Listening Comprehension Test

Listening Comprehension								
Student & Age in Months	Pre-Test				Post- Test			
Intervention								
	Immediate recall	Percentage	5 mins recall	Percentage	Immediate recall	Percentage	5 mins recall	Percentage
A 83	7	35	5	25	14	70	15	75
B 84	9	45	4	20	12	60	9	45
C 74	8	40	4	20	10	50	8	40
D 72	4	20	3	15	9	45	9	45
E 78	4	20	3	15	8	40	8	40
F 76	10	50	4	20	12	60	12	60
G 76	11	55	4	20	11	55	12	60
H 76	8	40	4	20	11	55	9	45
Average	8	38	4	22	11	49	10	51
Control								
I 76	10	50	4	20	11	55	8	40
J 82	13	65	1	5	10	50	10	50
K 71	4	20	1	5	7	35	4	20
L 74	5	25	2	19	7	35	3	15
M 74	8	40	4	20	10	50	8	40
N 84	7	35	3	15	9	45	9	45
O 78	4	20	0	0	6	30	5	25
P 82	5	25	3	15	9	45	9	45
Average	7	35	2	12	7	43	7	31

Many students in Year 1 have difficulty identifying the form of sentences and how they contain ideas and how to organise their thoughts to think about the ideas they have heard or read. This is an essential part of thinking about ideas and making connections to ideas they have already stored in their memory. Sentences contain ideas. These sentences can be written or spoken or thought. There are different ways to say the same ideas by substituting different words with similar meanings. The ideas can be linked together to form longer sentences. These sentences can be harder to think about and confusing for younger children.

Figures 3 A and 3 B show the results for both group in both retells. They include raw score results as well as these scores shown as a percentage. The immediate retell was generally stronger across both groups in the pre-test but in the post-test the increased number of items recalled was similar in both groups in both recalls. Student A's results were inconsistent between the tests. He is able to recall a large number of items on these tests but had a moderately low performance on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test on both occasions. He is also able to show good understanding of vocabulary and comprehension across other literacy activities. His performance is generally good but this inconsistency is worth noting and checking again during literacy activities. Perhaps he does not use the pictures to assist him during reading.

Figure 3 A Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Listening Comprehension Test Immediate Recall

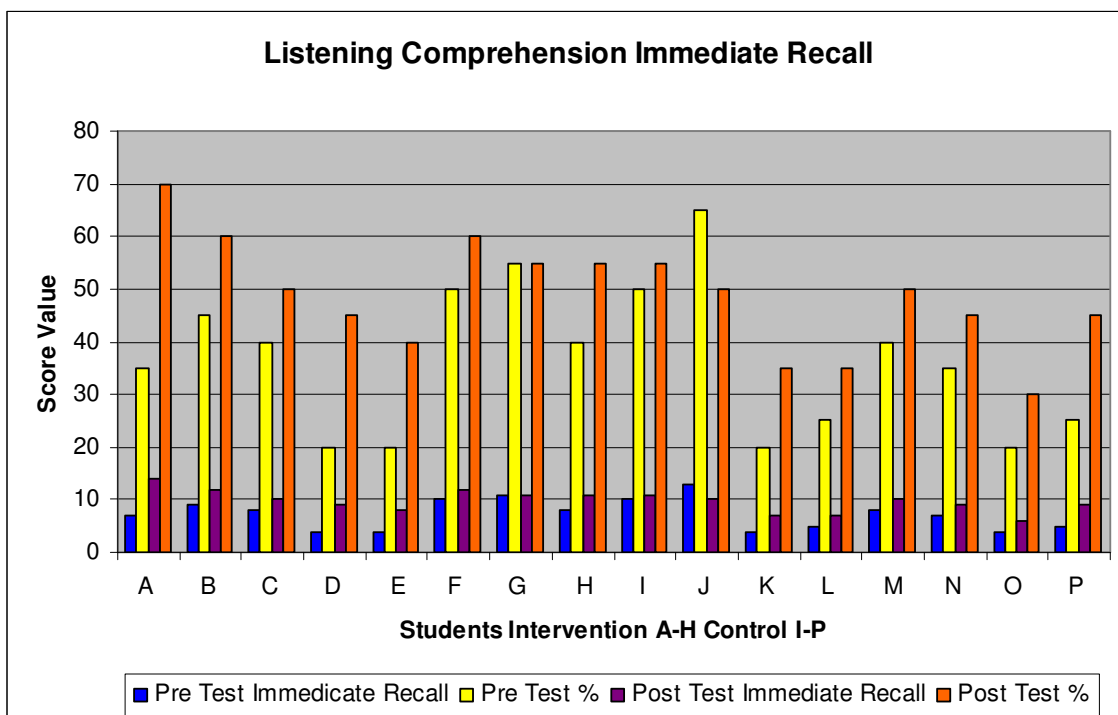
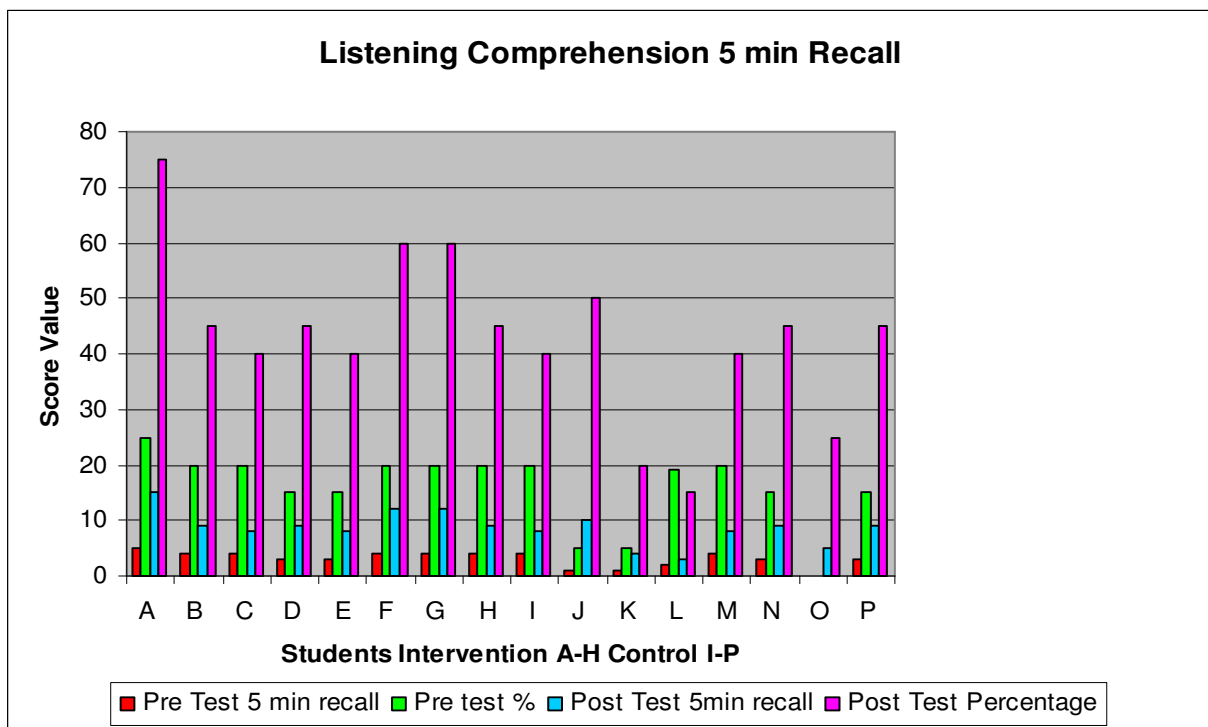


Figure 3 B Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Listening Comprehension Test 5 Minute Recall



Figures 3 C and 3 D show the average scores for Listening Comprehension, pre and post testing for both groups. The intervention group showed better performance at pre-testing as well as at post-testing in both retells. There was an increase in scores for the control group from pre-testing to post-testing. The Intervention group had received explicit teaching on retell throughout the year following the retell format (Munro 2006, P53) which may have increased their skill in this area. The general increase both groups would have been in part due to their overall development, experiences and maturity during this period.

The intervention group pre-tested to be slightly better than the control group with 3% on immediate recall 10% on 5 minute recall. Post testing results showed 6% better in the intervention group on immediate recall and 20% better on the 5 minute recall.

The lowest students D and E remained the lowest students on the post testing but nevertheless, their score had shown an increase. Some students had a large increase. Student O had no responses in the pre test. Student A doubled and more than doubled his score for 5 minute retell. He was very attentive during teaching sessions and engaged earnestly in the activities. The biggest increase was in the 5 minute retell in the post test. This may indicate a increase in their auditory memory as well as strategies to help them organise and recall ideas. The intervention group averaged an increase in recall from 25% to 50% as a combined immediate and 5 recall whereas the control group increased from 18% to 37%. Both groups have doubled their ability to recall the story.

Figure 3 C Comparison of Pre-test Listening Comprehension Test (Average Scores)

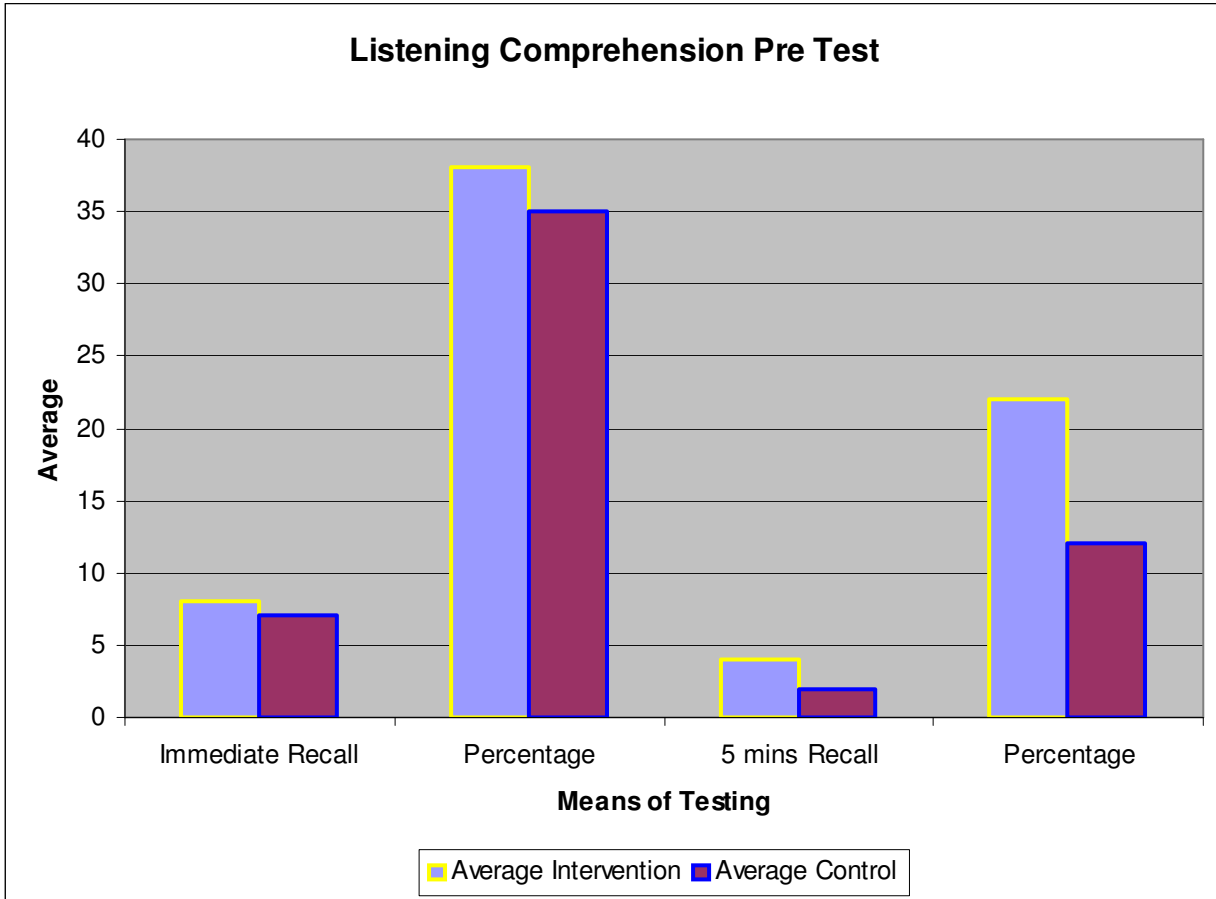
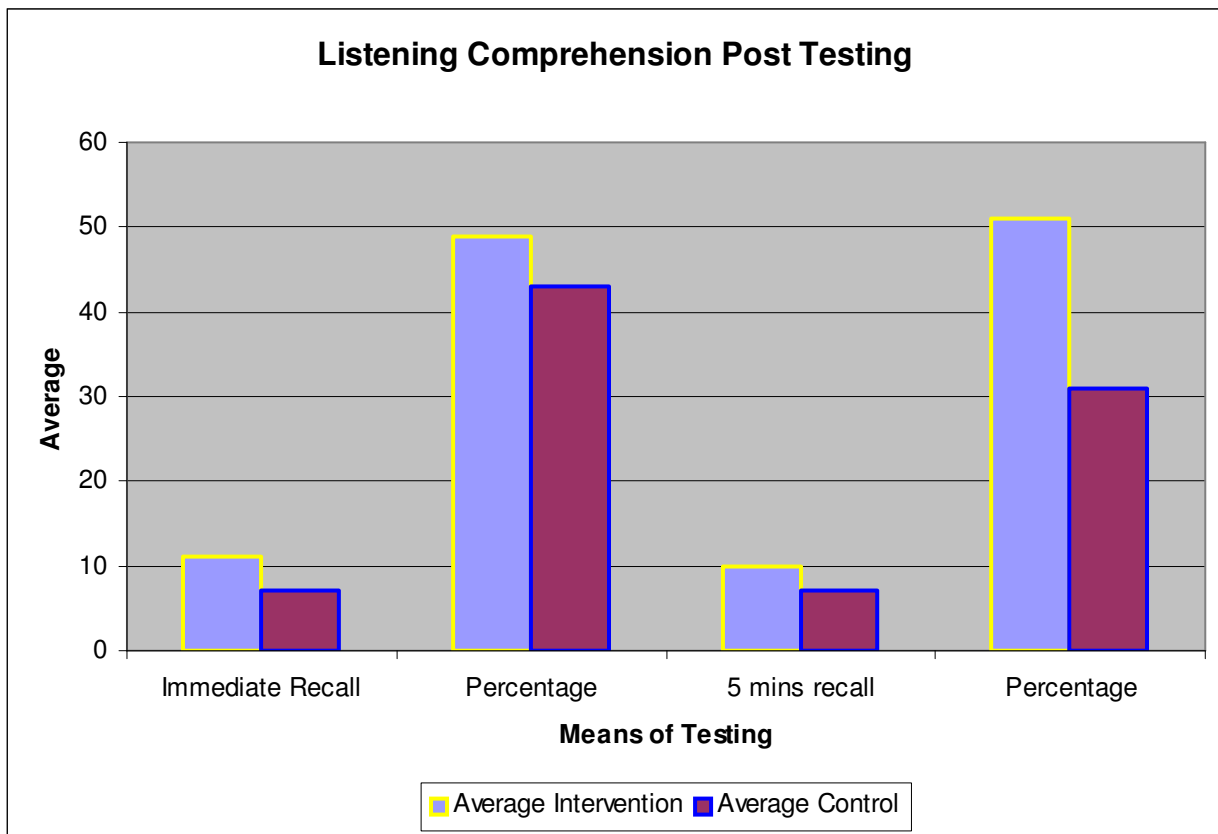


Figure 3 D Comparison of Post-test Listening Comprehension Test (Average Scores)



Discussion

The data collected does support the hypothesis: Explicit teaching of sentence structure to grade 1 students improves listening comprehension. The students in the intervention group generally improved their scores in pre to post testing in Record of Oral Language. There were slight improvements in Peabody Picture Vocabulary across the group, mainly due to two students who had an increased score between the tests. The group improved in their retell of the story about Jane in their Listening Comprehension tests. The control group did not make the same growth on these tests during the same period of time. Student C's performance on the ROL may be attributed to her use of grammar. This will require more explicit teaching to increase her knowledge of how this skill is used to support her literacy. Her recall of the details of the story was average for the group. Student A's unusually low vocabulary score surprised me when his performance in other areas was so strong. It was also interesting to note the improvement in Student D's overall performance which may have in part be due to his efforts to become a good listener. The group worked hard at this level and endeavoured to make the changes to improve their concentration. Student E in particular tried to incorporate these listening behaviours into his daily activities, increasing his concentration span during the teaching sessions. It is important to constantly review the complex nature of literacy performance and the interrelationship of the multiple processes involved in literacy.

My findings support recent research into the importance of the role of oral language skills in the development of broader language skills. As already stated, Mokhtari & Thompson (2006) found that students' levels of syntactic awareness were significantly related to reading fluency and reading comprehension performance. Lower levels of syntactic awareness corresponded with poorer reading fluency and poor comprehension. Ouellette (2006) made the distinction between the number of lexical (phonological) entries – vocabulary breadth and their semantic representation – vocabulary depth. He also suggested that observations of early childhood language show that children may store word form in their lexicon, which broadens their vocabulary but they may not be able to match a depth of meaning to these words. (P554-555) In recognising this difference Ouellette believes there will be a better understanding of the role of oral vocabulary in terms of reading skill acquisition. (P555) Greater knowledge of sentence structure in oral language did increase the students listening comprehension skills. Existing knowledge and experience of oral language at word, sentence, conceptual, topic or theme and dispositional and pragmatic levels are a pre requisites and an ongoing essential elements to the overall development of literacy skills. Students will be able to identify and comprehend written forms of syntax that they already know in its oral form. The interrelationship of oral language and reading comprehension is complex and knowledge gained in both can be used to support each other as literacy skills are developed. It is of paramount importance to closely monitor the development of both and intervene as necessary to build skills and knowledge where students have difficulty.

The implications for teaching practice of this research is the need to monitor the development of oral language skills at word, sentence, conceptual, topic or theme and dispositional and pragmatic levels, checking for age appropriate development throughout early childhood. There is also a need to provide targeted intervention programs if required and continue to provide learning opportunities to develop skills at all these oral language levels. There is also an implication for reading comprehension. The texts the students are decoding need to be at a level that match their comprehension ability and in particular, noting the sentence complexity of the text to ensure that it is similar to the oral language levels appropriate to the student. Teachers should use information evenings, classroom modelling and parent /teacher interviews to give parents more information about the importance of oral language skills, and increase these opportunities for oral language development and improved comprehension through home practice if required. Junior children are often keen to read 'chapter' books as soon as they have developed fluent decoding skills. However, it is important to check the sentence complexity and the breadth and depth of vocabulary associated with these books. It is also important to discuss the vocabulary to be sure the students do have an understanding to suit the meaning in context. Results obtained using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test did present some surprises with the students' limited knowledge of body parts like wrist, ankle and chin. Oral language difficulties could be addressed in small groups as reading fluency is addressed using the intervention groups like GRREAD and comprehension is improved for some students using RIDER. An acronym like COPY CAT might serve to help students increase their auditory memory and provide short

sharp focussed teaching. The use of acronyms works well for the memory of students and for teachers.

COPY CAT

C Choose a sentence

O Off you go

P Practise

Y Your sentence

C Challenge a partner

A And actively listen

T Trade a sentence

As my results indicate there is a relationship between oral language and listening comprehension. In the future I would like to study how performance in listening comprehension and reading comprehension correlate. I would like to include knowledge of vocabulary and literal, inferential and evaluative comprehension questions into the study. I am also interested in researching the effect of text comprehension level on reading performance.

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Appendices

Teaching Procedure

ACTIVITY TIME	Description	Data Collected
5 minutes INTRODUCTION	Picture Chat Students discuss the illustrations – obscure text Review existing vocabulary and introduce new vocabulary. (This will be possible after the first session.)	
5 minutes VOCABULARY	Vocabulary Synonyms generated from the vocabulary given from picture chat. Drama and other props used in this activity.	
15 minutes SENTENCE WORK	Sentence Production Children discuss with their grade 2 buddy and produce sentences to support the illustrations. These sentences are recorded on a shared white boards. Students take turns to read their sentences and the rest of the group tries to repeat to reproduce selected sentences from the group. Students justify their sentence in relation to the picture.	
5 – 10 minutes READ TO	Reveal and Read Text Children are instructed on how to organise themselves as good listeners and how to be a disciplined listener. Teacher reads story to children using enlarged text. While Reading and Post Reading the students individually and as a group repeat sentences heard while listening, and after listening to the story.	
5 – 10 minutes LISTENING COMPREHENSION	Story Retell Retell story in order and use picture clues if necessary.	
5 minutes REVIEW	Children Review Children review what they have learned in the session. Store and retrieve from Long Term Memory. Similar to share time in CLaSS.	

NAME: _____	GRADE: _____
_____ RECORDER: _____	
DATE: _____	STUDENT'S AGE: _____
_____ years _____ months	

RECORD OF ORAL LANGUAGE
ALTERNATIVE LEVELLED SENTENCES

LEVEL 1 – PART 1	LEVEL 1 – PART 2
A. <i>My mother's arms are cuddly.</i> []	A. <i>My brother's television is noisy.</i> []
A. <i>Kitty is eating some food.</i> []	B. <i>Mummy is pushing her pram.</i> []
B. <i>Jessie is playing at school.</i> []	C. <i>David is going to soccer.</i> []
C. <i>Dad is giving me a book.</i> []	D. <i>Sally is making me a cake.</i> []
D. <i>I bet she's in there.</i> []	E. <i>I know she's here.</i> []
E. <i>There's another chapter book.</i> []	F. <i>There are some other toys.</i> []
F. <i>He's eating his lunch slowly.</i> []	G. <i>She's riding her skateboard very fast.</i> []

Total for Level 1

RECORD OF ORAL LANGUAGE
ALTERNATIVE LEVELLED SENTENCES

LEVEL 2 – PART 1	LEVEL 2 – PART 2
A. <i>That small car over there is going to be my mother's.</i> []	A. <i>The old bike in here used to be my sister's.</i> []
B. <i>The girl near the park was walking her dog.</i> []	B. <i>The boy from over there was calling a dog.</i> []
C. <i>The car drove to the edge of the road.</i> []	C. <i>The cat went under the chair in the house.</i> []
D. <i>For the holidays Kerry got her a kite.</i> []	D. <i>For the wedding Aunty gave us a vase.</i> []
E. <i>Will you buy what is sitting on the shelf?</i> []	E. <i>The lady heard what the man was saying to the boy.</i> []
F. <i>There goes a small animal with feathers sticking Out its tail.</i> []	F. <i>Here is my sister driving in her motorcar.</i> []
G. <i>My sister cooked the eggs up very slowly.</i> []	G. <i>The boy hit the ball far across the field.</i> []

Total for Level 2

RECORD OF ORAL LANGUAGE
ALTERNATIVE LEVELLED SENTENCES

LEVEL 3 – PART 1	LEVEL 3 – PART 2
A. <i>Be as alert as you can</i> when your mother's alone. []	A. Be very careful diving where there's a deep pool. []
B. <i>My nanna and pa</i> want to start going to the shops. []	B. <i>That man and the one over there</i> like to read the paper. []
C. <i>The three boys</i> ran across the park in a fast time. []	C. Some of the people spoke quickly to each other [] at the football.
B. <i>The greengrocer</i> gave my daddy some big plums. []	D. The old teacher told his class a funny story. []
C. <i>The girl heard</i> who her brother was taking the toys to. []	E. The mother knows how much milk we will need for [] the cake.
D. <i>Here are the games</i> that you were playing in my class. []	E. <i>There goes the policeman</i> who caught out the thief [] at the bakery.
F. <i>My father often puts</i> the bike behind the shed at night. []	G. <i>My sister</i> usually puts some meat outside for the dog. []

Total for Level 3

Level 1

Level 2

Task: Listening Comprehension

- Instruction to student: *I am going to read you a story. Listen carefully. When I have finished I am going to ask you to tell the story back to me.*
- Read the first story below aloud to the student. Read it as a story.
- When you have finished, ask the student to tell you what happened. Say *Now tell me the story. Say all you can about it. You can say it in your own way.*
- After 5 minutes ask the child to retell again. Use the chart to note changes in the student's recall.

If required, use a prompt: *Can you tell me any more? What happened next?*

**Jane was at school and went out to sit on the seats and eat her lunch.
As she opened her lunch box, it fell over and her lunch went on the ground.
Jane wondered what she was going to do. Her sandwiches now had dirt all over them. She told her friend, Susan.
Susan took one of the sandwiches from her lunch-box and shared it with Jane.
After lunch, Jane and Susan went into the playground and had a good time playing chasey.**

Teacher record sheet

The student needs to retell events in sequence to score points.

Write down the student's immediate story retelling as accurately as possible

Prompt provided: Yes / No

after 5 mins

✓or X

✓or X

after 5 mins

✓or X

✓or X

after 5 mins

✓or X

Jane

at school

went out

sit

on seats

lunch

opened lunch-box

fell over

lunch on ground

sandwiches

dirt

told friend

Susan

Susan took sandwich from her lunch-box

shared it with Jane

after lunch

Jane and Susan

went into playground

had a good time

playing chasey

Scores: Immediate Recall: / 20

✓or X

after 5 minutes

✓or X

Setting (*school, playground*)

Initiating Event (*Jane dropped her sandwiches*)

Internal Response (*Jane wondered what to do*)

Attempt (*She tells her friend Susan*)

Consequence (*Susan gave her a sandwich*)

Ending (*They went off to play*)

Score: / 6

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