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Effective Writing Supports for Multilingual Learners

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ED590 Research and Complete Capstone M3391

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Abstract

This paper offers practical insights into how early elementary classroom teachers can effectively support and engage multilingual learners (MLL) throughout the writing process. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2012) documents that many MLL students consistently struggle to develop reading and writing fluency skills at the same rate as their Native English-speaking (NES) peers. The studies selected for this review focused on MLL students from prekindergarten through third grade and how classroom teachers can utilize supports they already have in place, such as working in buddy pairs or teaching phonemic awareness (PA), while utilizing new strategies like translanguaging and teaching a broader understanding of audience equip MLL students for a world in which writing is an essential part of effective communication. In addition to considering academic supports, the studies reviewed how teachers' perceptions of MLL students' L1 and their abilities also impact writing development. These insights are designed to immediately apply in the classroom, providing teachers with practical strategies and support for MLL students.

Keywords: multilingual learners, writing, translanguaging, phonemic awareness, vocabulary

Chapter 1: Introduction

Writing is a powerful method of communication, and it can be an exciting and complicated endeavor for any student to take on. Writing goes beyond merely picking up a pencil; writing requires students to apply their understanding of various language resources in various contexts while feeling the pressure of a time constraint (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Educators must provide students with a solid understanding of writing that empowers them as they gain new knowledge, deepen their understanding, and grow in critical thinking (Carvalho et al., 2017). Carvalho et al. stressed the growing significance of writing in the workplace and its potential influence on students' future careers. With the essential role of writing in everyday life, why do many students in the United States struggle with it? This challenge is magnified for multilingual (MLL) students as they are "simultaneously learning content knowledge and the English language" (Zhang et al., 2017, p. 1178). Considering this data, educators must examine their approach to writing instruction to support all students represented in their classrooms.

The number of MLL students that enter the classroom has continued to increase, bringing with it the joy of learning about new cultures, languages, and experiences. It is imperative for educators to carefully assess their methods of instructing and supporting all students in their writing development. Multiple studies have indicated that interventions and supports commonly used with Native English-speaking (NES) students, such as working in small groups or focusing on phonemic awareness (PA), can effectively enhance the decoding and spelling skills of both MLL and NES students (Dussling, 2018, 2020). Various studies have emphasized the significance of instructing students to consider their audience. Others have encouraged teachers to create classrooms that promote translanguaging and other skills that illustrate their

multilingual backgrounds to enhance writing skills and recognize it as an essential form of communication (Bauer et al., 2017; Durán, 2017). Researchers have also examined the critical component of teachers' perceptions (Hamman-Ortiz et al., 2022; Malova et al., 2022; Soltero-González, 2012; Zapata & Laman, 2016). When educators negatively perceive students' use of L1 or view MLL students as deficient in English, it impacts their engagement, motivation, and view of themselves as writers and speakers. These studies have emphasized the importance of teachers reflecting on their perceptions of MLL students and the value of providing specific language supports that meet their needs.

Definition of Terms

Before discussing the practical strategies that classroom teachers can use to support MLL writing development, it is essential to understand the terminology used around this topic. MLL students have been referred to differently throughout many studies selected for this topic. Some studies referred to MLL students as English language learners, bilingual, or dual language learners. These terms do not account for the other languages students may be learning besides English and their home language (L1), and some do not have agreed-upon rules within the research community (Williams & Fuller, 2018). In addition, English language learner and English learner can cause students to feel that their home language is not valuable and inadvertently or overtly portray these students as lacking academic ability (Durán, 2017; Williams & Lowrance-Faulhaber, 2018). Therefore, the term multilingual learner was selected because it casts a more positive light on these students' academic and language abilities.

Other important terms are languaging, translanguaging, transcription, PA, invented spelling, and receptive and expressive vocabulary. Languaging refers to how individuals make meaning of the world through their language (Bauer et al., 2017). Translanguaging is "the

systematic use of two languages," it reflects the larger practices that MLL students use, such as codeswitching, language brokering, and metalinguistic awareness, to help them understand and make meaning in another language (Bauer et al., 2017, p. 12). Zang et al. (2021) define transcription as "lower-order skills" such as handwriting/typing and spelling. PA focuses on the student's ability to recognize, isolate, blend, segment, and manipulate individual sounds within a word (Keeseey et al., 2015). Invented spelling is the application of PA when students spell unknown words. Receptive vocabulary refers to students' ability to recognize words and understand their meanings when reading and listening. In contrast, expressive vocabulary relates to an individual's use of words correctly and appropriately to create "coherent sentences in writing and speaking" (Zhang et al., 2021, p. 1182). Teachers must provide MLL students with effective support in higher- and lower-level skills to improve writing development and quality.

Importance of Topic

Within elementary classrooms, there are many beautiful and transformational learning moments with students. Teachers of primary grades (prekindergarten through third grade) see students grow into their identities as learners, yet one area tends to create the most significant challenge: writing. In my first-grade classroom, I began to recognize a pattern with all my students, but particularly among my MLL students: writing tends to be one of their biggest obstacles, and it is the area that they are the most hesitant to engage in. Through discussions with colleagues, it became apparent that many were facing a similar situation. We believe our MLL students can learn and excel in writing. However, we were uncertain how to create intentional support for MLL students that addresses their need to understand English syntax, grammatical structures, vocabulary, spelling, and writing genres. At times, classroom teachers can overlook their essential role in developing MLL students' language skills and can hand that task over to

the MLL teacher, who has more tools to address language needs among students. This should not be the case. MLL students must receive opportunities to engage in writing activities with their NES peers and learn from their classmates' and teachers' feedback. It is essential to look for recent studies and gather data to help classroom teachers understand that many practical and effective ways exist to support and engage MLL students within their classrooms during writing times.

Scope of Research

The studies referenced throughout this review focused on students within the primary grades (prekindergarten through third grade); two analyzed fourth-grade classrooms, while one provided an overview of kindergarten through fifth-grade students. Various study structures, such as case studies, ethnographies, and year-long latent studies, focused on how specific supports utilized in mainstream, monolingual classrooms equipped MLL students with the resources needed to complete a meaningful writing assignment. These studies saw how effective supports empowered students to view themselves as writers while equipping them with skills to increase the quality of their work. Several studies also addressed teacher perceptions around MLL students' L1 and ability to learn English and its impact on students' engagement and writing development. The studies have been organized based on the specific skills researchers analyzed to support MLL students in mainstream classrooms: predictors of student achievement, phonemic awareness and spelling, vocabulary, translanguaging, meaningful practice, and teachers' perceptions.

Conclusion

Multilingual learners face many challenges when learning to write in another language. As highlighted earlier, MLL students have scored lower on national writing assessments than NES peers (NCES, 2012). MLL students face challenges with English syntax, grammar, and vocabulary, which differs from their L1 (Zhang et al., 2021). Students might not have the knowledge or confidence to apply their understanding of English when writing. Classroom teachers must provide students with authentic writing opportunities to practice their skills, receive feedback, and edit and revise their work. In early elementary classrooms, teachers also need to provide students with instruction around PA to help both NES and MLL students as they learn and apply spelling rules to their writing. Several studies have found that first-graders who struggle with writing are likelier to continue having difficulties by the end of fourth grade (Croker et al., 2018). Furthermore, if students as early as first grade have significant differences in writing performance, these disparities will not diminish without adequate writing support (Croker et al., 2018). Given this information and what is known about how MLL students learn, early elementary classroom teachers must ask themselves, "What are effective ways to support and engage MLL students in the writing process?"

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This review includes studies on the impact of effective writing support for MLLs in mainstream educational environments and their effect on improving writing quality and student engagement. Researchers examined classroom teachers' strategies to assist in teaching writing skills to MLL students. The studies focused on identifying strategies that effectively engage students and enhance their writing quality. These studies employed various methods, including qualitative and quantitative case studies and ethnographies of varying lengths. This provided educators with the data and resources to implement MLL writing support in monolingual classroom instruction. The studies included throughout this review analyzed predictors of MLL student writing outcomes, the influence of PA on early spelling skills and writing fluency, receptive and expressive vocabulary, the use of translanguaging, the importance of providing meaningful practice and authentic audiences to motivate the writer, and considered the impact of teacher training and perceptions of MLL students writing abilities.

Most of the studies occurred in preschools and public elementary schools in the United States, except for two international studies: one in Canada (Harrison et al., 2016) and one in Luxembourg (Engel de Abreu & Gathercole, 2012). Due to the wide dispersal of the studies reviewed, there is a range of MLL students learning English whose L1 was either Spanish, Punjabi, Korean, Malayalam, Urdu, Tamil, Bosnian, Chinese, Turkish, Russian, French, Lingala, Tshiluba, Arabic, Burmese, Somoli, Japanese, and Hindi. In Engel de Abreu and Gathercole's (2012) study, all students were Luxembourgish-speaking students learning German as their second language. Participating students' socioeconomic status (SES) predominantly represented lower income levels; many students had qualified for free and reduced lunch. There were two studies in which most of the students who participated were from the middle class (Engel de

Abreu & Gathercole, 2012; Harrison et al., 2016). While most studies in this review focused on writing instruction in primary classrooms, two examined fourth-grade classrooms (Hamman-Ortiz et al., 2022; Malova et al., 2022), while a third cross-case study analyzed the work across three grade levels: second, third, and fourth (Zapata & Laman, 2016). Soltero-González et al. (2012) study is unique from the others as it was part of a five-year longitudinal study and intervention project. Three schools participated in Soltero-González et al.'s study, two of which use a transitional bilingual program that teaches all students literacy in English and Spanish. Due to the length of this study, participating teachers were asked to analyze writing samples of students spanning from first to fifth grade. The findings from these studies are included due to their emphasis on the importance of beginning writing instruction in early grades so that students have a strong foundation upon which to build in upper elementary.

The careful analysis of each study revealed themes demonstrating how early elementary classroom teachers can actively assist MLL students throughout the writing process and encourage them to see themselves as writers. For example, explicit instruction on phonemic awareness improved students' spelling with moderate to low literacy (Dussling, 2020), making them more inclined to write because they were less fearful of making spelling mistakes. This enabled them to concentrate on higher-level tasks such as choosing the right words, constructing sentences, and linking their ideas cohesively (Zapata & Laman, 2016). In addition, researchers found that by linking reading and writing instruction using mentor texts, students grow their vocabulary skills and are provided with meaningful opportunities to practice language orally and in writing. One study linked vocabulary instruction as an additional PA support because as MLL students are exposed to more words, they are more adept at distinguishing sounds (Pendergast et al., 2015). Many MLL students grow up in homes where the predominant language spoken is

their L1, meaning that school is where they learn to speak and write in English. When teachers create culturally inclusive classrooms and welcome students L1 to participate in discussions and writing tasks, students use translanguaging skills to reflect their lived experiences (Bauer et al., 2017). Translanguaging engages students in learning, casts a positive light on L1, and motivates students.

Early Writing Skills and Predictors

According to data from NCES (2012) that looked at the writing of eighth- and twelfth-grade MLL students, only 1% scored at or above the proficient level compared to NES students, of which 31% are at or above. This caused researchers to investigate the causes of the gap between scores. They found that MLLs' writing is more likely to have grammatical, syntactical, and lexical errors. This means that there are errors that can be caught and addressed in early grades to support writing development and quality in later grades. Zhang et al.'s (2021) research focused on how transcription and oral language skills influence invented spelling, writing fluency, and writing quality among NES and MLL first-grade students. The group looked closely at the work of 34 MLL students and 35 NES students from a more extensive study (Coker et al., 2018). The 69 students in Zhang et al.'s (2022) study had matched levels for nonsense and real word reading, reading comprehension, expressive and receptive vocabulary, single-word spelling, writing fluency for narrative and expository texts, and handwriting skills. Their findings revealed that many connections between MLL students' first and second-language literacy levels support their learning and use of English when writing. They found that MLL students performed better on handwriting fluency tasks than NES students. One area they found to have the most significant impact on MLL students' writing quality was their use of vocabulary; this was more limited than their NES peers. Their findings highlight the importance of providing

explicit instruction to build vocabulary skills and meaningful writing opportunities to put these skills into practice.

Harrison et al. (2015) conducted another study supporting these findings. Their study collected information from 112 third-grade students from five schools located in Canada. Sixty-two students were identified as MLL: 34 boys and 28 girls. The study also included 50 NES students, of which 27 were boys and 23 were girls. Researchers required students to complete a one-hour assessment focusing on their writing skills. This included handwriting fluency, rapid letter naming, verbal working memory, oral vocabulary, syntactic awareness, word-level reading, and handwriting fluency. Harrison et al. (2015) compared MLL scores with their NES peers to better understand spelling and writing skills predictors. Their study revealed that NES PA predicts single-word spelling ability, while MLL students' knowledge of PA and rapid letter naming predicts their ability to spell a single word. Another finding was that NES and MLL students' PA and rapid letter naming contributed to text-level spelling when writing sentences and paragraphs. Like the findings of Zhang et al. (2021), Harrison (2015) highlights the importance of teaching vocabulary. However, teachers must address MLL students' PA gaps to support transcription skills and improve writing quality before teaching vocabulary (Harrison, 2015).

Phonemic Awareness and Spelling

Phonological awareness and processing abilities have been studied and found to be critical components for acquiring a new language and understanding its sound structure (Engel de Abreu & Gathercole, 2012). In the early elementary grades, many NES and MLL students are in the early stages of spelling development as they improve their phonological awareness and ability to match individual letter sounds to written words. When students do not receive

sufficient support in phonological awareness, it can lead to significant spelling errors, making it challenging for readers to comprehend the writer's message. Dussling's (2020) research focused on 13 first-grade students from a public school in New York. The group consisted of seven MLL and six NES students. Four of the students were girls, and nine were boys. Dussling (2020) focused on specific ways that classroom teachers can support NES and MLL students who had scored low on PA activities in kindergarten in mixed language groups. The 13 students in the group were split into three smaller groups with staggered start times throughout the first semester of the school year. The groups received six weeks of supplemental support taught by Dussling aimed at PA tasks and their relationship to spelling and reading development. Before the six weeks of instruction, students completed a spelling pretest scored by the researchers and three psychology graduate students. Upon completing the six weeks of supplemental support, students took a post-test like the pretest. The results showed that nine of the 13 students had grown from pre- to post-test after receiving PA instruction, three showed no growth, and one student's score decreased by one point. Dussling's (2020) study reveals that explicitly teaching PA and letter-sound correspondences improved MLL students' spelling. Another noted benefit is that teaching PA to MLL students before they have reached English language proficiency can allow them to practice decoding words and sentences to improve reading fluency and comprehension and positively support spelling development (Dussling, 2018).

For early elementary students, invented spelling provides teachers insight into students' understanding of PA as they apply their knowledge of individual sounds to spelling (Dussling, 2018). When students lack PA, spelling challenges arise in later grades that can hinder students from participating in writing activities (Zapata & Laman, 2016). Keeseey et al.'s (2015) research focused on how word boxes can improve PA, letter-sound correspondences, and spelling skills

among kindergarteners identified as at-risk. The study included three students who scored at or below the 25th percentile in phoneme segmentation and nonsense word reading, separating vowel-consonant or consonant-vowel-consonant words assessments. Students received one-on-one instruction two to three times a week from Keesey over the year. The multiprobe design analyzed how the word box intervention impacted phoneme segmentation, letter-sound correspondences, and spelling. After receiving the intervention support, the students took a post-test, which the researchers and three doctoral students reviewed. Their research revealed that word boxes were effective support for each area assessed, and in some cases, students who received the intervention outperformed their classmates who had not received it. As students gain confidence in their spelling capabilities, they are more willing to participate in writing activities.

The findings from Dussling's (2020) and Engel de Abrué & Gathercole's (2012) studies align with findings from Gillanders et al. (2016), which sought to understand "how early writing develops in Spanish-English speaking children of Mexican and Central American descent" (p. 371). Researchers evaluated 140 preschoolers on name- and word-writing tasks in a multi-site study. They reassessed a small number of these students during their kindergarten year. Gillanders et al. (2016) found a similar progression between MLLs' conceptualization of writing to NES peers and similarities in how writing develops within their specific L1. As early as age three, children begin to work towards "writing at the graphic level and progressively on the relationship between graphemes and phonemes," they begin by developing the linear arrangement of writing before moving to the orientation of print and the directionality of a specific writing system (Gillanders et al., 2016, p. 372). Their interpretation of the data revealed that in many preschool classrooms, the writing focus is on students' knowledge of letter names and the spelling of their names. Gillanders et al. (2016) observed that students apply their basic

level of phonics to aid in invented spelling and will use their knowledge of either L1 or L2 phonemes to help with spelling. Spelling errors in MLL writing tend to arise when there is a phoneme/grapheme difference between L1 and L2; when teachers know a student's L1, they can identify and address the challenge. Their study also revealed that once students can apply their PA to in-text spelling, supporting students in vocabulary is a valuable next step to enhance early emergent MLL students' writing quality.

Vocabulary and PA

Vocabulary is essential in the writing process to ensure that the writer's message is clear and meaningful (Zhang et al., 2021). Selecting words and using new vocabulary requires a higher level of thinking than spelling or handwriting; therefore, when teachers provide MLL students with vocabulary instruction, it should come through authentic literary experiences and partner with meaningful practice. Vocabulary falls into two categories: receptive and expressive. Students use receptive vocabulary to help recognize words and their meaning as they read and listen to a speaker. Expressive vocabulary refers to a student's ability to use words correctly and appropriately when speaking and writing (Zhang et al., 2021). At first glance, Engel de Abrué and Gathercole's (2012) latent variable study addresses PA's effects on spelling and writing. However, the results of their study revealed that PA was uniquely linked to vocabulary in L1 and L2 when navigating between languages that are similar in structure. Engel de Abrué and Gathercole (2012) sought to understand the links between "executive processes of working memory, phonological short-term memory," and PA in L1, L2, and L3 for students between eight and nine years old. Students completed several assessments in Luxembourgish, students L1. The tests measured complex span, verbal short-term memory, PA, and proficiency in vocabulary, grammar, and literacy. PA awareness is a critical foundation for teachers to build

upon when teaching spelling rules, decoding, and language proficiency when learning a language dissimilar to L1. With a foundation of PA in L2, teachers can begin building students' executive processes, which are higher-order skills such as grammar, vocabulary, and literacy in L2.

Pendergast et al. (2015) examined the relationships between emergent MLL literacy skills and invented spelling in prekindergarten Spanish-speaking students. One-hundred-forty-one four-year-olds participated in a year-long study in an urban city in the southeastern United States. Each student was enrolled in various classrooms that exclusively taught in English. Researchers assessed students' receptive vocabulary and code-related skills in both English and Spanish at the beginning and end of the year. However, their invented spelling skills were only assessed once in the spring. The tests were conducted in L1 and L2 "to show the possible influence of a child's first language... on his or her English spelling" (Pendergast et al., 2015, p. 271). Researchers used five measures to assess the relationship between L1 and L2 literacy skills and MLL students' application of these skills to English phonetic spelling. The study's findings indicate that children's receptive vocabulary scores positively correlate with English and Spanish code-related skills within and between languages (Pendergast et al., 2015). Pendergast et al.'s (2015) study emphasizes that as an individual phoneme is being acquired, students have "positive correlations between spelling and vocabulary" (p. 279). As they learn more words, they begin to distinguish between individual phonemes more accurately within that word. Other studies have highlighted the importance of using translanguaging skills such as code-switching and the use of cognates to support students' acquisition and comprehension of new vocabulary as well as creating writing pieces that reflect their experiences in both L1 and L2 (Gort, 2012; Zapata & Tropp, 2016).

Translanguaging

Translanguaging is a skill all MLL students use to help navigate, express, and understand their experiences. Languages are always in contact with one another. When teachers embrace a translingual orientation, they foster classrooms that support being bilingual and bi-literate while considering the situatedness of communication (Zapata & Laman, 2016). Code-switching is one translanguaging tool MLL students use; it is a systematic, sophisticated, rule-governed approach to language that "increases in prevalence and complexity with more advanced bilingual development" (Gort, 2012, p. 46). Gort's (2012) qualitative study examined how six emergent Spanish-English first-grade students used code-switching throughout writing-related talk and composition. The study took place in the northeastern United States. There were three L1 Spanish participants and three L1 English-speaking participants. The school used a two-way immersion teaching method in which all students were learning English and Spanish. Gort and two research assistants conducted 126 classroom observations in two classrooms. The researchers recorded their sessions, transcribed them verbatim, and integrated their field notes. Their study confirmed earlier works that viewed students use of translanguaging and code-switching as a resource that reflects "their lives as in bilingual environments where alternating between two languages is an important and, at times, a necessary element of communication" (Gort, 2012, p. 64). Students used code-switching frequently throughout writing workshop lessons to plan, edit, revise, and publish their work. Students engaged in metalinguistic practices that enhanced the quality of the writing produced in tandem with the minilessons taught by their teachers prior to writing times.

Bauer et al. (2017) study also sought to understand how translanguaging and writing-talk supported kindergarten MLL students in a dual language (DL) school. The study focused on two kindergarten students' use of translanguaging and its impact on their writing development over a

year. Bauer et al. (2017) used a case study model that allowed them to investigate how students approach writing. The researchers relied on classroom observations, recordings, student work samples, and conversations with the teacher throughout the research process. They conducted a qualitative case study that analyzed the use of "buddy pairs" during writing instruction. The researchers selected two students as the main participants: an African American girl whose first language is English and a Latino boy born in the United States whose first language is Spanish. These two students worked as a "buddy pair" during their writing sessions. The teacher intentionally partnered students with different strengths to learn from one another over the year. The teacher used a variety of supports, such as graphic organizers, sentence stems, and structured conversation prompts, to help students as they talked about how to plan, complete writing assignments, and make edits and revisions. The researchers found that these students often went between English and Spanish depending on the task to ask questions. The systems that the classroom teacher implemented and the use of buddy pairs increased students' enjoyment of writing while improving the quality of their Spanish writing samples.

The use of translanguaging is not only effective in DL classrooms in which Spanish is the primary language of instruction. Durán's (2017) qualitative study analyzed one first-grade classroom in Texas. The school hosting this classroom utilizes English as the primary language for instruction. All students in this study "were of Mexican or Central American heritage" and were identified by the district as MLL (Durán, 2017, p. 96). The study aimed to analyze students' writing and their ability to talk about writing for various audiences. The main objective was to explore how students' understanding of their audience would impact their communication language. Durán visited the classroom two to three times a week for 45-minute writing sessions over one year. The researcher documented these observations to enable ongoing analysis and the

identification of emergent patterns. Research revealed that as the students were taught and questioned about their audience, they began to select words, phrases, and languages they believed would connect with their audience. When students knew a broad audience would read their work, they experimented with various translanguaging strategies, "such as combining or alternating languages at the page or sentence level" (Durán, 2017, p. 101). The study also found that students' choices of colors and topics were directly influenced by their understanding of the audience. By the end of the school year, students had grown in understanding the audience and could better explain their language and word choices when questioned about their writing. As a result, the researchers saw more students engaged in writing and reflecting on their work. Students grew in understanding how writing is an effective communication method and were eager to write and share their work with family members and others in their school community. When the teacher allowed students to use L1 in writing assignments or in their conversations with peers as they discussed how to organize ideas in writing, they fostered communities where students felt safe to try new things and begin using new sentence structures and vocabulary.

Meaningful Practice

In addition to providing students with foundational writing skills such as PA, vocabulary, and the use of translanguaging, teachers need to consider students' interests and ways to motivate MLL students as they draft, revise, and publish written work. Integrating reading and writing instruction can be a valuable resource when constructing writing tasks. When integrating reading and writing, teachers intentionally select texts that exemplify translanguaging, specific writing genres, or themes to build students' background knowledge and lay a foundation for their writing. Zapata and Laman (2016) partnered with three teachers who had a favorable view of students' L1 and the use of translanguaging to integrate reading and writing instruction. One

teacher in their study used bilingual texts as a backbone for writing instruction. She modeled for students how to decide which language to write in to improve their work and engage the audience reading their work. Their finding in this classroom was that teacher modeling and the type of practice matter when engaging students in writing, which supports findings from other studies.

Coker et al. (2018) noted that many studies around writing focus on the efficacy of writing interventions, yet only some studies have analyzed the effectiveness of classroom instruction outside of an intervention context. Their year-long study investigated how writing instruction and types of practice students engaged in affected first-grade writing achievement. The researchers assessed students' spelling, handwriting, vocabulary, and reading in the fall. Norm-referenced and research-designed writing tasks were given in the spring (Coker et al., 2018). The researchers spread four full-day observations of 50 classrooms throughout the year. They took field notes about the type of writing practice students engaged in most frequently throughout the day: fill-in-the-blanks or copying, completing worksheets, and generative. Generative practice consisted of students creating their ideas in writing in response to a prompt. At the end of the school year, researchers found that students performed better in handwriting, spelling, and vocabulary in classrooms where teachers provided more writing practice in generative text. This study supports findings from Zapata and Laman (2016) that the type of practice matters when considering ways to engage and improve writing quality among NES and MLL students.

There are a variety of ways in which teachers can provide students with meaningful opportunities for students to practice generating writing. Gebhard et al. (2011) analyzed a second-grade teacher's creation of a blog-based writing curriculum based on the systemic

functional linguistic design to support MLL literacy development and computer-mediated communication for academic purposes. The study was initially scheduled for two years but had to be shortened because the school faced challenges with internet access and encountered blocked websites. Despite this, the researchers were able to gather one year of data, and they found that students' use of blogging had a positive impact on their engagement and their ability to apply genre-specific features from minilessons taught by their classroom teachers in their writing. Due to students' writing being online, families viewed their writing tasks and encouraged their students; this extended writing beyond the classroom and brought it into their homes. Students gained a broader understanding of the audience and could reflect on who would read their work and select words their audience would find compelling. Duran's (2017) found a similar correlation. When presented with an authentic audience beyond their classroom teachers, MLL students were more invested in the writing process, and the quality of their writing improved.

Teacher Perceptions

A final factor researchers considered was the impact of teachers' perceptions regarding MLL students' writing capabilities and their view of L1 as either adding to or preventing/hindering English writing development. When teachers view MLL students as lacking English, they are less likely to recognize students' linguistic tools and proficiency in their L1 that can support their development of spoken and written English. Soltero-González et al. (2012) study clearly illustrated how teachers' interpretation of errors in MLL students writing and literacy is a contributing factor in how student work is judged as "developing as expected" or below expectations (p. 86). This study came at the end of a more extensive, five-year longitudinal study. Soltero-González et al. (2012) asked 36 teachers to analyze 14 pairs of

Spanish and English writing samples using a writing rubric developed by the researchers to assess MLL students writing capabilities more holistically. Of the 36 teachers who participated in the study, 18 identified themselves as Spanish-dominant, while 18 identified as English-dominant. The samples teachers assessed spanned from first- to fifth grade. The rubric design was specific and intentional in assessing writing in terms of content, punctuation, and spelling for both English and Spanish texts. It also featured a section on cross-linguistic analysis, directing teachers to note the bilingual strategies children employ while writing in either language (Soltero-González et al., 2012). As the researchers reviewed teachers' completed rubrics, they found that the Spanish-dominant teachers could more accurately identify students' language transference, such as using Spanish syntax when writing in English or Spanish phonemes used to spell English words. Considering this, the researchers pointed to a greater need to provide teachers with professional development related to cross-linguistic transfer and other translanguaging skills as a valuable resource to help teachers better recognize language needs when writing and, more importantly, how to construct lessons that address these needs. Their findings support research from other studies that point to the importance of educating teachers on the unique language needs and resources MLL students bring into the classroom.

Malova et al. (2022) conducted research through video analysis of five lessons from 17 fourth-grade classrooms with a high percentage of Latino students with Spanish as the L1 in the southeastern United States. Their study focused on how teachers' knowledge of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) shaped their approach when teaching opinion writing. They found that teachers' adjustments to writing instruction were based on State assessments rather than the language needs of MLL students. While the teachers acknowledged the importance of the standards, they questioned MLL students' abilities to achieve them, which researchers saw as

contributing to low achievement scores among students with an L1 other than English. Consequently, even with the changes teachers made to their writing instruction, their perception and misunderstanding related to how adjustments to instruction would support MLL students led to limited growth related to the quality of their work and little motivation from students to engage in the writing process. Considering these findings, Malova et al. (2022) found that it is vital for schools and universities to provide educators and future educators with enhanced professional development opportunities aimed at teaching writing to MLL students.

Hamman-Ortiz et al. (2022) support this finding through their research. Their case study occurred in a fourth-grade classroom with mostly Spanish-speaking Latino students. In this study, 93% of students qualified for free and reduced lunch, and 78% identified as MLL. In contrast to the teachers from Malova et al.'s (2022) study, the teacher Hamman-Ortiz et al. (2022) partnered with had a positive view of the instructional changes regarding writing instruction and how these changes would allow MLL students to meet the State standards outlined in CCSS. Due to this teacher's willingness to attend professional development and outside training related to genre-based writing instruction, MLL students in her class received more tailored support around their unique language needs when writing opinion pieces. As a result, their writing quality improved, and students became more engaged in the writing process.

Similarly, Zapata and Laman (2016) conducted a cross-case study across three grade levels: second, third, and fourth. Two of the classrooms in this study were from the same city in the southwest, while the third was in the southeastern United States. The teachers selected for this study had positive views of MLL students, and they intentionally incorporated students' L1 and use of translanguaging into daily communication and writing instruction. The researchers sought to analyze the literacy practices teachers used during their writing workshop time "to

develop and refine curriculum and instruction for teaching children to read and write culturally and linguistically diverse texts" (Zapata & Laman, 2016, p. 369). The researchers spent close to 90 hours working and observing these three teachers in their classrooms. The researchers found that the teachers' positive perspectives on MLL students' linguistic repertoires led to the creation of language supports such as vocabulary instruction, syntax, and meaningful writing projects that motivated and engaged students throughout the writing process. Zapata and Laman's (2016) findings highlight the importance of teachers creating language-rich and culturally inclusive classrooms as a valuable way to support MLL students in writing.

Conclusion

The many studies reviewed provide early elementary teachers with valuable insights into several effective methods to use in monolingual classrooms to support MLL students. The studies looked at multiple factors to help improve MLL students' engagement throughout the writing process and the quality of their work (Gillanders et al., 2016; Harrison et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2021). Researchers emphasize the importance of PA, vocabulary, translanguaging, meaningful modes of practice, and teacher perceptions, which teachers should actively consider when planning writing instruction. Their findings paint a picture of approaches teachers can intentionally integrate into primary classrooms that specifically support the unique language needs of MLL students.

Chapter 3: Discussion, Application, Future Studies

When approaching writing instruction with MLL students' language needs in mind, early elementary classroom teachers may question the types of effective support and practices. Researchers have analyzed a variety of supports that are effective with NES students to assess their effectiveness when working with MLL students. Many studies found that support utilized with NES students' writing is effective for MLL students. However, there are specific language needs that teachers must be aware of and prepared to address when planning and instructing MLL students. Teachers must be aware of MLL students' L1 to recognize how students apply their rich linguistic repertoire and use translanguaging as they approach writing tasks. The studies provided insights into the types of support that most effectively engage and scaffold writing activities for MLL students in early elementary classrooms.

Discussion

MLL students are capable learners and writers; the barrier can be inadequate support from classroom teachers due to a lack of understanding regarding the unique language needs these students have. Several studies found that many of the evaluations of MLL students' written work are not solely based on what they produce; it is dependent on teachers' perceptions and interpretations of their written work (Hamman-Ortiz et al., 2022; Malova et al., 2022; Soltero-González et al., 2012). When teachers perceive MLL students as being at a deficit due to a lack of proficiency in English, this negatively affects students and needs to be addressed during school professional development (PD) opportunities. In addition to providing PD focused on MLL writing, it is vital to provide training that helps teachers better understand the CCSS for writing and the language demands of each grade level (Malova et al., 2022).

Another barrier teachers face when planning writing instruction is misunderstanding translanguaging. Early elementary teachers must recognize that translanguaging is not a lower-level language skill. Instead, it reflects "The dynamic, often spontaneous, and situatedness of the movements *between* languages... and *across* languages" (Zapata & Laman, 2016, p. 376, emphasis in original). Teachers can support and engage MLL students in writing by welcoming the use of students' L1 when planning and completing writing tasks. One study found that students use their understanding of the syntax and grammar from their L1 when constructing writing tasks in their L2 (Soltero-González et al., 2011); when teachers are aware of this, it can help them to recognize better and address the errors MLL students are making while also supporting bilingual and biliteracy development.

Application

Once teachers shift their perspective on MLL students' abilities and the language tools in their repertoire, they can better plan and use the findings from research studies focusing on effective writing support. Researchers have found various effective supports teachers can use to engage MLL students throughout the writing process. Writing is a complex task that requires handwriting, spelling, vocabulary knowledge, grammar, and syntax. For MLL and NES students, fear of misspelling a word can cause students to disengage from writing tasks (Zapata & Laman, 2016). According to findings from Dussling (2020), teachers can work in small or whole groups to provide explicit phonics instruction. By equipping students with lessons on PA, students are being supported in reading and spelling development as they apply their understanding of phonemes and graphemes to their writing; encouraging students to use invented spelling is also a valuable resource in early elementary grades (Dussling, 2018, 2020; Keesey et al., 2015).

Providing students with PA instruction also has the potential to limit future spelling and decoding errors in later grades (Zapata & Laman, 2016).

In addition to PA instruction, teachers can support MLL students by integrating reading and writing. In several studies, teachers used mentor texts based on specific themes or genres, such as informative or persuasive texts, to build students' background knowledge, explicitly teach vocabulary, discuss grammar and syntax, and analyze genre-specific features (Hamman-Ortiz et al., 2022; Malova et al., 2022; Zapata & Laman, 2016). One teacher drew students' attention to cognates as they interacted with mentor texts. This helped MLL students feel that their L1 was valuable to their academic development and helped create a classroom culture where students were encouraged to use translanguaging skills (Hamman-Ortiz et al., 2022).

Teachers can enhance reading and writing integration by having students collaborate in pairs. Bauer et al. (2017) found that when students worked in pairs, they could build on each other's strengths and take ownership of their writing. By engaging in discussions about writing, students started to view themselves as writers (Bauer et al., 2017). MLL students also benefit from having an authentic audience. Teachers must create writing tasks that give students authentic writing opportunities for family members, school administrators, or pen-pals in lower or upper grades. Studies have found that when students write for an audience other than their classroom teachers, MLL students are more motivated and reflective when completing assignments (Durán, 2017).

Future Studies

While the research provides valuable insights into the challenges that MLL students face when writing and ways teachers can support students throughout the writing process, it is

essential to address the limitations that have arisen. Limitations came in various forms throughout each study, but several overarching ones became apparent throughout the research. Many of the analyzed studies were short-term, ranging from six weeks to a year, which is a significant limitation. Short studies such as these give teachers a glimpse into ways to support MLL students writing in that specific grade level and prepare students for the next grade; however, they do not provide teachers with information on how specific strategies used in early grades supported writing skills in later grades. Most studies reviewed observed student pairs, small groups of four to five students, or were constricted to one classroom. This can mean that the results were specific for pairs or one classroom.

Further study is needed with larger groups of students or from several classrooms across multiple schools to replicate findings. Many studies have only looked at writing development in students whose L1 has a similar alphabet or phonetic structure to English, like Spanish. Future studies must explore how explicit PA instruction can help students' spelling and writing development, especially those whose L1 has very different phonemes and graphemes from English, such as Mandarin or Arabic. A significant limitation is the limited number of studies conducted on MLL writing development. Several studies reviewed emphasized the limited research on MLL writing development and adequate support in higher-level skills such as grammar, syntax, and vocabulary (e.g., Pendergast et al., 2015; Gillanders et al., 2017; Durán, 2017). With increased intensity around writing expectations due to CCSS and changes to WIDA (2020) standards to support MLLs with writing, researchers must continue to explore this topic to ensure that all classroom teachers have access to up-to-date best practices to support students in becoming successful writers.

Conclusion

All classroom teachers are language teachers, regardless of their title. When teachers embrace this role and shift their perceptions of MLL students' abilities, they can create classroom environments that support all students' writing development and engagement. Several strategies used with NES have proven effective in teaching MLL students, including explicit PA and vocabulary instruction. Other supports require teachers to embrace translanguaging in discussions and writing as they provide students with meaningful writing tasks that address a variety of audiences and purposes. "Every child brings unique cultural and linguistic knowledge to the classroom" (Soltero-González, 2012, p. 577). Teachers can effectively support and engage students throughout the writing process by embracing MLL students' linguistic knowledge and recognizing their unique writing challenges.

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