What is this research about?
Students in Ontario are required to take a number of province-wide large-scale tests before they graduate, including the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). If students do not pass the OSSLT, or do not successfully complete the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC) in place of the OSSLT, they are not able to receive the Ontario Secondary School Diploma and graduate from high school.

Some researchers have pointed out, though, that students who use English as their second language and who are developing English literacy (ESL/ELD) tend to have more difficulty with tests such as the OSSLT. Other researchers have found that students who participate in after-school reading and writing activities tend to have a higher performance on tests such as the OSSLT. This study investigated the relationship between students’ performance on the OSSLT—both ESL/ELD students and non-ESL/ELD students—and their participation in after-school reading and writing activities.

What did the researchers do?
The researchers used four groups of student data from the 2003 OSSLT. These included:
1) students who were not ESL/ELD who passed the test,
2) students who were not ESL/ELD who did not pass the test,
3) students who were ESL/ELD who passed the test,
4) students who were ESL/ELD who did not pass the OSSLT.

When students take the OSSLT they are tested on their reading and writing ability. When the students take the test they also answer a number of questions about what kinds of reading and writing activities they

What you need to know:
ESL/ELD students and non ESL/ELD students who participated in afterschool reading and writing activities and who used computers to complete their homework, were generally found to perform better on the OSSLT.
participate in after school and how often they engage in these activities.

The researchers compared this data using statistical analysis methods to determine whether there were any relationships between how the four groups of students performed on the test and what kinds of reading and writing activities they participated in after school.

**What did the researchers find?**

There were a number of differences between which parts of the test each group of students scored higher or lower on and which after school activities were related to high and low test performance; however, students who participated in reading and writing activities after school, and who owned more reading and writing materials of their own, were generally found to have higher test scores than students did not.

The researchers also found that test scores were generally higher for students who used computers to complete their school work.

**How can you use this research?**

This research points to the importance of offering after school literacy programs to all students and particularly to English language learners. It also suggests that supporting school programs that teach children technological skills, such as how to complete homework using a computer, may have a positive impact on students’ English language literacy development.

This research may also be used to inform future studies on large-scale tests, that examine how best to support the literacy learning of ESL/ELD students.

**References**


**About the researchers**

Liying Cheng is Professor and a Director of the Assessment and Evaluation Group (AEG) at the Faculty of Education, Queen’s University. Her primary research interests are the impact of large-scale testing on instruction, and the relationship between classroom assessment and instruction.

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**Keywords:**
English language development (ELD), English language learner (ELL), English as a second language (ESL), Equity, Language and literacy, Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT)

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**About this summary**

The Ontario Education Research Exchange (OERE) is a project of the Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research, an Ontario network promoting the use of research in education. The OERE's clear language summaries of academic research aim to support this mandate.

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