

SPELLING GAMES: AN ACTION RESEARCH AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study the effect of spelling games errors for improving spellings of a group of Grade 6 ESL students. The research was conducted on a provincialized high school. It was designed under the paradigm of action research. A total sample of 34 students were selected for the study. The students were divided into Control group (N = 17) and Experimental group (17). The experimental group was provided with the intervention programme. The control group received the usual classroom instructions. The intervention period was carried out for four weeks. A post-test was conducted on both the groups to find out whether the intervention programme has improved spelling errors of the Experimental group. The results of the study were derived from quantitative and qualitative data. The results showed that the intervention programme improved students' spelling in English writing. The research has implications that the teachers of English should make proper implementation of the programme to facilitate and minimise the spelling errors of the ESL learners.

Keywords: spelling errors, action research (AR), ESL (English as Second Language), primary students

Introduction

Importance of spelling in writing

An essential component of English language proficiency is improving one's ability to communicate via writing since it is crucial to effective communication and essential to employment in today's world. One important factor to consider with writing competency is spelling as one single misspelled word can change a word and alter the whole meaning of the sentence. In general, good spelling is regarded as a sign of good education whereas poor spelling is considered ill (Fagerberg, 2006). Spelling is a part of good writing. Good spelling knowledge is extremely important for effective word recognition, which can greatly enhance or hinder reading. As for writing, poor spelling can make writing a laboured activity with regular interruptions to the thought process by excessive attention to spelling (Moats, 2000).

ESL Students and Spelling

Spelling is a perennial problem in the writing of ESL student, but in order to treat these errors the teacher needs to know about the nature of the spelling errors their students make. Spelling errors in the second language can either be intra-lingually or inter-lingually motivated. On the one hand, second language learners may produce spelling errors

due to their lack of familiarity with L2 systems, including phonological awareness, knowledge of orthography or morphological-semantic correspondences (Apel, Masterson, & Niessen, 2004). Inter-lingually, on the other hand, spelling errors can reflect interference from the L1 literacy skills upon L2 processing (Akamatsu, 2003; Koda, 2005; Figueredo, 2006). ESL students tend to make spelling errors. This comes as a hindrance to their writing proficiency.

Significance of the study

Writing with correct spelling is one of the effective forms of communication. The researcher, being a teacher has experienced that spelling errors is one of the most common problem of ELT students. If this issue is not addressed at the earliest, it can lead to poor writing skills. While a large number of research studies had been done abroad, there is little research done in Assam on spelling errors and means to solve the problem. Therefore, this study intends to identify the kinds of common spelling errors among Sixth Grade Students of an Assamese medium provincialised school. It also provides activities techniques which will help the students with spelling difficulties. This study also hopes to create awareness amongst the teachers of English regarding the importance of writing with correct spelling. The researcher conducted an action research to find out problems and solutions to reduce spelling errors in students.

Objectives of the study

The objective of this research is to find out whether Spelling games method improved spellings of the Grade 6 ESL learners than the traditional method in the five areas –

- Insertion / substitution errors
- Omission errors
- Homophone errors
- Pronunciation errors
- Transposition errors.

H₀ 1 There exists no significant difference in spelling errors between the Control Group and the Experimental Group after the implementation of a variety of spelling games to the Sixth graders.

Literature review

Error analysis is a “linguistic study that focuses on the errors learners make” (Darus & Subramaniam, 2009, p. 487). Ellis and Barkhuizen (2009, p. 51) assert, “error analysis consists of a set of procedures for identifying, describing and explaining learner errors.” Existing literature indicates that there are two kinds of errors – performance errors and competence errors (Touchie, 1986). Errors made by students while doing the task in haste or when they are exhausted or out of sheer carelessness with the given task are performance errors. On the other hand, competence errors reflect inadequate learning, which is a serious error. The distinction between the two aligns with the concept of mistake and error of Ellis (1997). Ellis and Barkhuizen (2009) present two major sources of errors: interlingual and intralingual. According to this language related error, students tend to transfer their first language rules to the second language and prefer to use simple forms rather than complex forms. The study claimed that some errors in spelling words are because of phonetical difficulties. Students make errors when words are difficult to pronounce.

Research has shown that this was also a problem for students in Ghana (Dadzie & Bosiwah, 2015). Therefore, a wrong pronunciation of words is one major reason for making errors. Kreiner, Schnakenberg, Green, Costello, and McClin (2002) conducted an experimental study to investigate a correlation between intellectual ability and spelling ability. Eighty-two college students participated in their study. Three version of a 308-word essay was constructed. The first version had no spelling errors, the second version had four phonological errors and the third version had four typographical errors. The participants used a 10-centimetre graph to rate the author of the essay. It was found out that the spelling errors influenced the way readers perceive the ability of writers. The investigations of spelling errors with university students by Albalawi (2016), Al-Oudat (2017), and Ahmed (2017) revealed that most foreign and second language learners commit errors related to three different categories, namely insertion, substitution, and omission. They confirmed that students follow their pronunciation to spell the words.

Action Research

“Action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers to gather information about the ways that their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn. The information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment and on educational practices in general, and improving student outcomes.”(Mills, 2003, pg.4). Action research is often considered as a cooperation activity and focused in common creation of knowledge related to practices. It is a proper methodology since it enables teachers to be involved in common practical activities, and make changes in their practices and to review their teaching and students’ learning through descriptive report, purposeful conversation, review with colleagues and critical reflecting with the aim of improving practices in the classroom. (Miller and Pine, 1990, Wilson, 2009, McNiff and Whitehead (2010); Koshy, 2010).

Since the research was an action research, the researcher assumed the role of the teacher. She personally conducted the plan of action.

Methodology

School sample and student sample

The research was conducted in a provincialized higher secondary school in Kamrup district with pupils of Grade 6. The researcher divided the students of Grade 6 into two random groups. The Experimental group (N=17) is provided Spelling games for a period of four weeks while the Control Group (N=17) received usual classroom instructions. The researcher administers an achievement test to both the groups for collection of the data.

Tools for the study

For the present investigation the following tools were used:

- Instruction materials for implementing Spelling games
- Post-test – An achievement test after the intervention programme.

Validity and Reliability of Research tools

Validity of the test

To ensure the validity of the post-test, the researcher designed a checklist of the test items and submitted to a group of experts in the field of study who made the necessary modifications in the light of their observations.

Reliability of the test

To ensure the reliability of the test items, the researcher used the test-retest method. The period between the test and the re-test was two weeks. The correlation coefficient of both the tests was calculated using Karl Pearson's Coefficient of Correlation and was found to be 0.84 % which was considered statistically acceptable for the current study.

Action Plan

The researcher conducted an intervention to the Experimental group (N=17). For the post-test, the researcher administered an achievement test to both the Experimental group and the Control Group to identify the spelling errors. The analysis was based on five categories (1) Insertion and substitution errors (2) Omission errors (3) Homophones errors (4) Mispronunciation (5) Transposition errors as shown in **Table 1**.

Intervention programme

The researcher employed various techniques and strategies to enhance improvement in students' spellings. Following are some spelling games used in the intervention programme. It was conducted on the Experimental group.

Spelling games

Game 1 (Pair work)

- Each pair of students is given a game board, a standard die, and crayons of similar colors. For example, Student 1 needs a dark *blue* crayon and a light *blue* crayon. Student 2 needs a dark *green* crayon and a light *green* crayon.
- Players take turns rolling the die and following these instructions:
Colour any correctly-spelled word on the board with your dark crayon.
Cross out a misspelled word. Write it correctly in the space. Colour it with your light crayon. Play until all the spaces are coloured. The player with the most correctly colored spaces is the winner.

Game 2 (Pair work)

- One student is the "vowel player." He gets the vowel letters. The other student is the "consonant player." She gets the consonant letters.
- Give each student a list of words you want them to practice.
- Each student selects any three words from the list.
- The "vowel player" now adds vowels to the words started by the "consonant player" and vice versa.
- The first player to complete all three words correctly wins one point. Sometimes multiple words can be formed. Accept any correctly-spelled words. For example, c r _ _ d could be completed as crowd or creed.

Games 3 (Group work)

- Divide your class into two teams.

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- Give the student in each team a clean sheet of paper and pencil.
- Announce the first word to be spelled.
- All team members are to remain silent as the first player on each team writes the spelling word.
- The player passes the board to the second player. He is allowed to keep the word as is, or to correct it.
- When the teacher calls time, the second person on each team reveals the spelling of the word to everyone.
- The teacher awards 1 point for every correct word.
- Play continues in the same manner.
- At the end of the time period, the winning team is the one with the most points.

Game 4 (Whole class)

The students were asked to find out if there are extra letters in the given words. If so, cross out the extra letter and write it in the first blank. If not, write NO in the blank. In both cases, write the word correctly in the second blank.

suggestion _____

crisis _____

beautifull _____

Game 5 (Whole class)

The students were asked to find out if a letter is missing in the given words. If so, add the letter and write it in the first blank. If not, write NO in the blank. In both cases, write the word correctly in the second blank.

planed _____

wonderful _____

writen _____

Game 6

Whole class

- Word cards, one standard die, answer key, paper and pencil to keep score. Print out word cards. Print the answer key for the teacher to keep at her desk as a reference.
- Cut out the cards, shuffle, and place face down on the table.
- The students try to form a new word, following these guidelines: If a 1 or 2 is rolled, add one letter to the word and earn 2 points If a 3 or 4 is rolled, subtract a letter from the word and earn 4 points If a 5 is rolled, change one letter to make another word and earn 5 points If a 6 is rolled, rearrange all the letters in the word and earn 6 points.
- Player 1 draws the word QUIET and rolls a 3. S/He subtracts the E and spells QUIT.
- Player 2 draws the word COUCH and rolls a 1. S/He adds an R and spells CROUCH. She says, I saw the cat crouch behind the tree and then pounce on the mouse.
- Player 2 draws the word FEAR and rolls a 5. S/He changes F with the letter W and spells WEAR.
- Player 2 draws the word EARTH and rolls a 6. S/He rearranges the letters and spell as HEART.

After the intervention programme was conducted for a period of four weeks, the researcher conducted a post-test to both the groups.

Analysis and interpretation

The results of the study were derived from quantitative and qualitative data.

The researcher conducted the post -test to both the groups – Experimental group and Control group in order to identify patterns of spelling errors among 6th Grade ESL learners and the impact of The intervention programme on the improvement of the spelling errors. For the post-test, the researcher dictated a paragraph from their textbook and spelling errors were identified and analyzed. The analysis was based on five categories (1) Insertion and substitution errors (2) Omission errors (3) Homophones and confusable errors (4) Mispronunciation (5) Transposition errors as shown in **Table 2**.

Implications

From the analysis of the action research conducted, it shows that spelling games improved students' understanding in writing correct spellings. This research recommends using of variety of teaching activities to be implemented in the classroom. The investigation indicated that most of the students spell words in accordance to their pronunciation of the words. Therefore, teachers should teach students to pronounce the words correctly along with enough listening skill to practice the words. "Teachers should see the textbook as teaching resource and not as explanation object".(Vula, E.2010). Students acquire new words on a daily basis, but if they do not see it frequently, there is a high chance of fading the word from their memory. Thus, teachers should continuously develop the kind of visual memory that enhances spelling ability. Spelling exercises and games should be given to the students for regular practice. It is highly recommended to practice usage of spellings as much as possible at the early stages of education.

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List of Tables

Table 1 shows the types of errors with meaning and examples.

Table 1

SL NOS	TYPES OF ERRORS	MEANING	EXAMPLES
1	Insertion errors	Insertion of a letter	Beautifull instead of beautiful
2	Omission errors	Omission of a letter	Planed for planned
3	Homophones	Homophone words and words with similar pronunciation and spelling but different meaning .	Homophones: 'there' and 'their'

4	Pronunciation errors	Spelling pronounced in a wrong manner	'libery' insteadof 'library'
5	Transposition errors	Transposition of two consecutive letters	'freind' for 'friend'

Table 2 shows the 't' test results of Control and Experimental Groups at Post-test level

Comparison between Post-test scores of Control group (N = 17) and Experimental Group (N = 17)							
AREAS	Post-Test	Mean	Pooled S.D.	S.E.M	df	t- value	Significance
TOTAL ERRORS	C G	7.6471	2.4427	0.8376	32	4.0733	#
	EG	4.2353					
Insertion errors	C G	1.7059	0.6725	0.2306		2.8062	#
	EG	1.0588					
Omission errors	C G	1.0000	0.7882	0.2703		1.1946	#
	EG	0.6771					
Homophones errors	C G	1.7647	0.7716	0.2646		2.89	#
	EG	1.0000					
Pronunciation errors	C G	1.7647	1.0308	0.3535	2.3296	#	
	EG	0.9412					
Transposition errors	C G	1.4118	0.667	0.2287	3.6012	#	
	EG	0.5882					

CG- Control Group

EG- Experimental Group

N = Number

- Significant at 0.05 level

df- Degree of Freedom

S.D. – Standard Deviation

SEM – Standard Error of Mean

From the analysis of the Post –test as shown in Table 2, it is can be interpreted that there exists significant difference between the post-test results of the Control Group and the post-test results of the Experimental Group. It is found that the calculated 't' ratio between the results of the Control Group and the Experimental Group for 32 df is 4.0733. For df 32, the table value of 't' at 0.05 confidence level is 2.04. Since, the calculated 't' ratio between the mean results of the Control Group and the experimental Group is more than the table value of 't' at 0.05 level of

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confidence so the null hypothesis 'there exists no significant difference in the spelling errors between the Control Group and the Experimental Group after the implementation of a variety of spelling games to the students of Class VI' is rejected.

Based on these findings, it can be inferred that the intervention programme improved the spellings of the students in the Experimental group.