

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 12. Issue 2. 2025 (April-June)

ISSN
INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

Developing Spellings to Improve Writing Skills of English Language among VIII Class Students: An Experiment

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[doi: 10.33329/ijelr.12.2.106](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.12.2.106)



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Article information

Article Received:17/04/2025
Article Accepted:23/05/2025
Published online:27/05/2025

Abstract

The present paper is experimental research, conducted to develop spelling ability among secondary level VIII Class students. Spelling plays a crucial role in concretizing ideas and thoughts into words and words to sentences. Spelling is an indispensable tool for writing. The knowledge of spellings motivates the relationship between sounds and letters, and it develops writing by enabling clear communication. The efficiency in spelling significantly contributes to overall language competence and confidence. Generally spelling and vocabulary go hand in hand and they are interconnected parts of English language, though they play a different role yet intertwined in reading, writing, and overall language skills. And VIII Class students are generally enthusiastic in learning new things that too government school students are very inquisitive. Therefore, the research was confined to VIII Class MJPTBCWR School students from Warangal district. The results are quite impressive and this paves way the way for new teachers to teach vocabulary and spellings.

Keywords: Spelling, vocabulary, pre-test, post-test, intervention and impressive results.

Background

English is global language. It is considered as the library language and link language. Due to heavy demand for English globally, it occupied the place of primary language or first language in educational institutions in all countries across the globe. Learning a second language is learning the four basic skills of the language. Despite the speaking skill is the most considerable skill for communication purpose to express ideas, opinions and feelings as the basic objective of any language for communication, the remaining language skills would not be neglected to acquire the target language.

According to Nunan, "Learning to speak in a second language is often considered the most demanding of the four skills." (Nunan, 1991, p. 39). Learning The four basic skills of English language are interconnected. Though these skills are divided in to active skills (Speaking and Writing) and passive skills (Listening and Reading) in one categorization, they are also separated in to graphic motor

skills (Reading and Writing) and aural-oral skills (Listening and Speaking). We cannot say which one is the most important language skill among all and which is not.

The ultimate objective of learning a second language is undoubtedly learning all four basic skills of language consciously. Regarding this Krashen said, "Learning is a conscious process that results in 'knowing about' language. Acquisition is a subconscious process that results in 'knowing how' to use language." (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 26)

Introduction

The present research paper gives an idea of developing spelling ability with latent ways among VIII Class students so as to develop writing skills. Spellings come under writing skills. Writing skills include all the abilities needed to communicate clearly in written form. Writing skill covers Grammar, Punctuation, Sentence structure, Vocabulary and Spelling. As spelling is one of the important components of writing skill, Spelling matters a lot in written form.

As per Graham and Santangelo, "Correct spelling ensures the reader understands the intended word and poor spelling can confuse meaning and make writing appear careless or unprofessional". So, in academics and language assessment, spelling is considered a fundamental component of writing proficiency. Spelling is considered a fundamental aspect of writing skills, contributing to clear written communication (Graham & Santangelo, 2014).

There are linguists and psycho linguists, who worked extensively on spelling and grammar and contributed for the development of language in a scientific manner. One of such renowned linguists is Noam Chomsky. Noam Chomsky worked on spelling and grammar and is considered as the father of modern linguistics. Noam Chomsky's work in generative grammar facilitated in shaping our understanding of the structure of language. He has also the credit of co-authoring of "The Sound Pattern of English" and other works that explain how rules govern word formation and syntax.

According to Noam Chomsky, "A language is not just words. It's a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is" (Chomsky, 1968). This specific quote from him directly addresses that spellings are scarce. This quote also emphasizes the depth and complexity of language, encircling grammar and, by extension, spelling as integral components. However, his perceptions into language and grammar are base for the further developments.

A cognitive psychologist and linguist who has done wide-ranging of research on spelling development among primary level children. Her research focused on phonological awareness and how children learn spelling through sound-letter mapping. "Learning to spell is not a matter of memorizing words, but a developmental process that culminates in a much greater understanding of English orthography" (Treiman, 1993). This highlights her view that spelling is a complex cognitive skill, not merely rote memorization.

Charles Read is another linguist, who pioneered research into children's invented spelling and phonological awareness and how it reflects their internal knowledge of phonology. Charles Reads's research focused on children's invented spelling and. "Children's invented spellings reveal their implicit knowledge of phonology and their active engagement in learning to write" (Read, 1971). This signifies the importance of children's early spelling attempts in understanding their language development.

According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, the term "spelling" is defined as "The act of forming words correctly from individual letters; the ability to do this." (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.) This definition emphasizes spelling as both an action and a skill essential for accurate written communication.

Rebecca Treiman, a prominent researcher in the field of literacy development, has extensively studied spelling and its role in writing skills. In her work, she emphasizes that spelling is not merely about memorizing word forms but involves understanding the relationships between sounds and letters. This phonological awareness is crucial for developing proficient spelling abilities, which in turn supports overall writing proficiency. In her book *Beginning to Spell: A Study of First-Grade Children*, Treiman (1993) explores how children learn to spell and the cognitive processes involved. She discusses how children's spelling development reflects their growing understanding of the alphabetic system and phoneme-grapheme correspondences.

Spelling plays a crucial role in concretizing ideas and thoughts into words and words construct words and sentences. These sentences become tools for continuous communication both direct and indirect. Vygotsky proclaims that, "The relation between thought and word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought." (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 125). Writing is also considered as an essential skill for language learning. Francis Bacon well defined the importance of writing skill in English as "Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man" (Bacon, 1625).

Rebecca L. Oxford, a distinguished scholar in language education, has extensively explored the integration of various language skills, including spelling, within the broader context of writing proficiency. While she may not have provided a singular, concise definition of "spelling," her work underscores its significance as an integral component of language learning strategies and writing skills. In her contributions to the *Tapestry: Writing* series, Oxford emphasizes the importance of developing writing skills through integrated activities that encompass grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. These resources are designed to help learners build proficiency in writing by engaging with all aspects of language use.

Importance of Spellings in Writing Skill:

Spelling is an indispensable tool for writing skill development. The knowledge of spellings accelerates the relationship between sounds and letters, and it develops writing by enabling clear communication. The efficiency in spelling significantly contributes to overall language competence and confidence. Generally, spelling and vocabulary go hand in hand and are interconnected parts of English language, though they play a different role yet intertwined in reading, writing, and overall language skills. Learning spelling of unknown words makes the learner active and helps for successful learning of language. "Successful language learning involves active engagement and interaction with the language." (Nunan, 2003, p. 25).

Spelling is something more than the accurate arrangement of letters. Spelling reflects a deep understanding of phonemic patterns, morphology, and orthographic conventions. Accurate spelling supports the development of reading skills. When learners understand spelling patterns, they can decode words more efficiently, leading to improved reading fluency. Proficient spelling allows writers to focus on higher-order writing tasks, such as idea development and organization, without being hindered by basic transcription issues. Mastery of spelling contributes to a learner's confidence in both academic and real-world communication, reducing anxiety associated with writing tasks. Learning the fundamentals of spelling eventually develops the competency in all four basic skills for sustainable communication at different contexts. As Nunan well quoted that "The development of communicative competence requires not only grammatical competence but also the ability to use the language appropriately in different contexts." (Nunan, 1999, p. 226).

Procedure

With an intention to develop the spelling ability among VIII Class students with an effective method, the researcher has chosen VIII Class students from MJPTBCWR School, Nallabelly, Warangal

(D) were selected for the experiment for their innate natural ability to learn language, their schema of inquisitive nature towards learning new things and their enthusiastic natural capability to learn English language. Based on the results of diagnostic results, ten average students. The researcher adopted the dictation test to understand the basic level of spelling ability of students. Though there are different types of tests can be conducted to understand the level of the spelling efficiency of students at secondary level particularly for VIII Class students such as dictation test, choose the right word, fill in the blanks and spell bee. For the objective of finding the level of students in their spelling ability and to make them aware of what spelling is and how to get command over it, the researcher has chosen dictation test. Conducting a spelling test among Class VIII students can be both effective and engaging if planned properly. For the data analysis, the statistical tools like mean, mode and standard deviation, average and percentiles were used for the calculation and tabulation.

As the first step, the researcher has conducted a diagnostic test for ten marks for ten students from the lesson of their choice. That is "The Tattered Blanket" from the book, "Our World Through English" published by SCERT, Telangana State. The book is recommended for VIII Class across the state of Telangana. "The Tattered Blanket" is the first lesson in the first unit of textbook. While consulting the students, students said that they had just completed the lesson and suggested the researcher to conduct dictation for spelling on the lesson.

After careful study of the lesson, the researcher came up with a collection of words to conduct the dictation. Later on, all the collected words from the text were divided in to two categories. Simple words and difficult words based on the number of syllables and the frequency and usage of the words as follows:

Total words: Arrive, home, expect, home, country, office, mother, lying, armchair, veranda, futile, attempt, somebody, gate, said, car, eldest, daughter, widow, huddle, thinna, head, ears, cover, towel, reluctant, slowly, screw, dark, walk, grating, sudden, visit, loud, meet, drop, note, scare, sister, little, first, bend, awkward, time, again, brought, close, wrinkle, cheek, believe, school, close, vacation, recognise, anybody, explain, sometime, memory, letter, everything, fine, quite, sharp, kids, point, tell, write, poor, dream, make, unhappy, promotion, last, always, tours, mumbling, heard, terribly, turn, should, back, exasperatedly, briefcase, contents, clothes, shaving, government, blanket, cold, mist, morning, catch, leave, long, studying, tattered, knotted, yarn, stretch, pain, neck, status, great, help, raise, some, money, sell, share, family, property, land, away, irritation, find, time, eighty, three, pull, much, longer, smiling, remember.

Simple Words: home, expect, office, mother, gate, said, car, eldest, head, ears, cover, slowly, dark, walk, visit, loud, meet, drop, note, sister, little, first, bend, time, again, brought, close, cheek, believe, school, anybody, explain, sometime, letter, fine, sharp, kids, point, tell, write, poor, dream, make, unhappy, last, always, tour, should, back, contents, clothes, shaving, cold, mist, morning, catch, leave, long, study, pain, neck, great, help, raise, some, money, sell, share, family, land, away, find, time, eighty, three, pull, much, longer.

Difficult words: Arrive, country, lying, armchair, veranda, futile, attempt, somebody, daughter, widow, huddle, thinna, towel, reluctant, screw, grating, sudden, scare, awkward, wrinkle, vacation, recognise, memory, quiet, promotion, mumbling, heard, terribly, turned, exasperatedly, briefcase, government, blanket, tattered, knotted, yarn, stretch, status, property, irritation, smiling, remember, everything.

In the second step, the researcher conducted the dictation test as a pre-test with 15 simple words of one and two syllable words and five three or four syllable words for thirty minutes by considering the frequency and usage with the words: "home, expect, office, mother, gate, said, car, eldest, head, ears, cover, slowly, dark, walk, visit, somebody, daughter, widow, huddle, awkward" (20).

In the next step, the researcher conducted ten-hour intervention. As a process of intervention, the researcher gave insights on how to remember the spelling by using effective strategies like explaining basic spelling rules like 'I' before 'E' except after 'C' and commonly misspelled words with examples from the notified collection of words and also explaining the etymology and morphology of certain words. Explaining prefixes, suffixes and root words helped the students to avoid confusion and to understand the spelling of words.

In the following stage, the researcher conducted the post -test with fifteen simple words and five difficult words from the same collection of words. They are: "*write, poor, make, last, back, cold, mist, catch, leave, long, study, pain, neck, great, help, briefcase, government, blanket, property, irritation*" (20).

The marks obtained by the students are given in the following table for the tabulation and further analysis.

Table 1: The Performance of the Students in Pre-test and Post-Test

S. No	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Difference
S1	5	14	9
S2	4	12	8
S3	3	10	7
S4	6	14	8
S5	8	15	7
S6	5	12	7
S7	6	16	10
S8	4	13	9
S9	3	11	8
S10	4	14	10
Tot	48	131	83

The performance of the students is also presented in the following bar diagram for the clear view of the results of marks obtained by the students following the intervention.

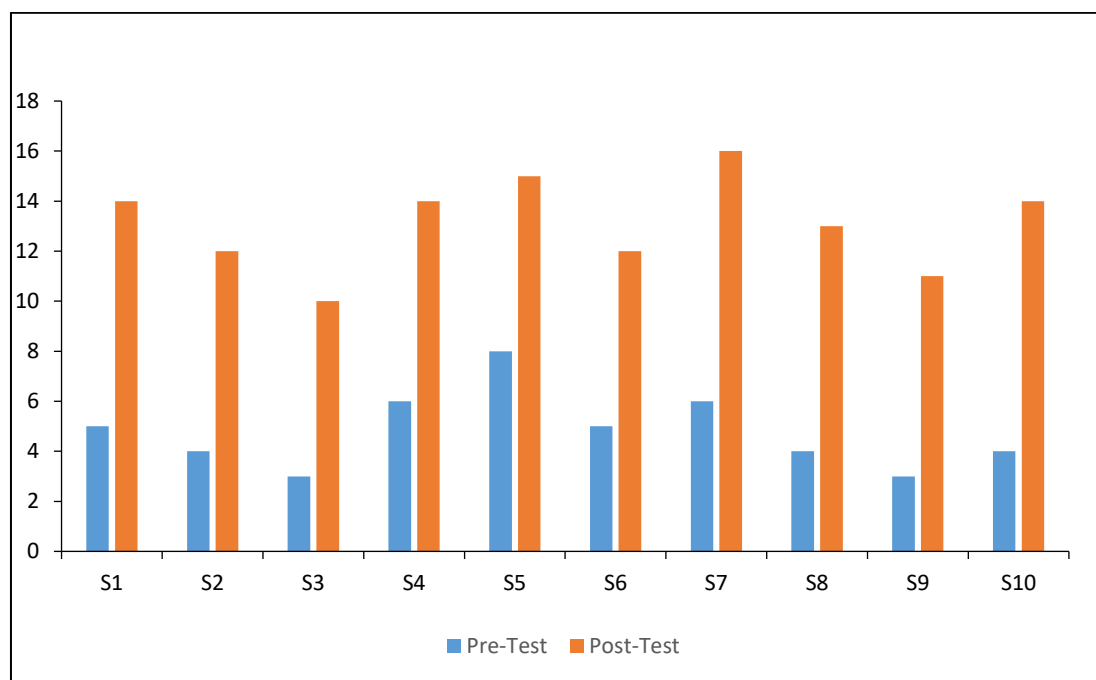


Figure 1: The Performance of the Students in Pre-Test & Post-Test

While observing the diagram, it can be understood that the performance of the students in post-test is better than pre-test. And the intervention had helped them in understanding the rules of spellings.

Table 2: The Comparison of Performances of Students in Pre-Test and Post-Test

S. No	Test	Mean	Mode	S. D
1	Pre-Test:	4.8	4	1.46969
2	Post-Test	13.1	14	1.75783
3	Difference	8.3	10	0.28814

Conclusion

From the above table it can be concluded that mean score in pre-test is 4.8, whereas 13.1 in post-test. There is a difference of 8.3 marks. And median of pre-test is 6.5 score and in post -test it is 13.5 coming to the difference of 7.0 marks. The mode score in pre-test is 4 and 14 in post-test owing to 10 marks difference. Standard Deviation of pre-test is 1.46969 and 1.75783 in post-test with the difference of 0.28814.

Hence, by considering all the difference of scores in mean and mode of the performances of the students, it can be understood that there is a progress from pre-test to post-test in the performance of the students in dictation test of spellings of words. And it is evident from the analysis that the students showed better results in post-test when compared to pre-test in dictation due to the involvement of students "Tasks should involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language." (Nunan, 1989, p. 5). Intervention made them conscious aware of linguistic features as Schimdt argued that 'conscious awareness(noticing) of linguistic features is necessary for language acquisition'. In understanding the spellings, this means that learners must actively notice words, structures, and spellings in a text to enhance understanding and retention of spellings (Schmidt,1990, p. 132).

The intervention had also made them understand the preliminary confusions in pre-test and the practice with the innovative methods of developing spelling competency during the intervention helped them to increase their ability to understand root words, pre fixes, suffixes and words often confused to give the correct spellings in the post- test. The intervention also assisted the students to perform better in their further writing activities.

However, the above research was successful to bring the identified change in the post-test among VIII Class students from MJPTBCWR School, the research was confined to only ten students and limited to only one component of vocabulary of writing skill of English language. Developing vocabulary as a whole, punctuation, grammar and other components of English language skills among backward schools, government schools would be an interesting topic for future research.

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