



Improving English Spelling Skills of Grade 8 Students Through Targeted Instruction: An Action Research Study

Laiba Gul¹, Dr. Aisma Bibi²

Abstract

This study was carried out during teaching practicum of BS Education program. The goal of this action research was to improve the English spelling skills of grade 8 female students by addressing and reducing their spelling challenges. The main objectives of this study were to identify and report common types of spelling errors made by grade 8 students, to improve English spelling errors by using the drill and practice, and to use audio-visual aids and student-centered activities to help students reduce their spelling errors. An action research design was used to help students improve their spelling skills. Whole class served as a sample and 28 female students of grade 8 from SOS school Mansehra were included. Written assessments were used to collect data in order to identify spelling errors. A five-weeks action plan was implemented that included drill and practice, visual aids, and student centered activities. Students showed a remarkable improvement in their spelling skills after 5 weeks intervention. The results showed a considerable decrease in homophone usage error, vowel confusion, phonetic-based errors, double-letter errors, and silent-letter errors. Students showed higher confidence in their ability to write in English and also improved their spelling accuracy in their written assignments. According to this study finding, students' spelling skills can be enhanced in a shorter period by combining drill and practice with visual strategies and student-cantered learning in an organized manner. It is recommended that multiple spelling teaching activities be regularly integrated into middle school English classes to strengthen students' spelling skills which lead to foundational writing skills.

Keywords: Spelling error, Action research, Drill and practice, Student centered Grade 8 students.

¹BS student, Hazara University Mansehra

² Lecturer, Hazara University Mansehra (Corresponding Author email: aismabibi@hu.edu.pk)



Introduction

Spelling is one of the most important components of language learning and written communication, as it enables learners to express their thoughts clearly. According to Moats (2005), spelling reflects the integration of phonological, orthographic, and morphological knowledge rather than rote memorization. In other words, spelling requires understanding of sounds, letter patterns, and word meanings skills.

In the context of Pakistan, English spelling is a great challenge. Students often struggle with irregular spellings, silent letters, and homophones due to limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Nation & Nation (2001) emphasize that insufficient spelling knowledge limits students' written vocabulary and fluency, making it harder to express their ideas coherently. When students fail to spell correctly, it not only affects the clarity of their writing but also lower their confidence in using the language.

During teaching practice in Grade 8, the researchers observed that nearly all students frequently made spelling errors in written tasks, even when they had a clear understanding of the content. Common mistakes included writing "defination" instead of "definition", "dispite" instead of "despite", and confusing "principle" with "principal". These mistakes not only reduced the readability of students' work but also negatively impacted their grades. This observation led to the realization that students needed structured spelling instruction instead of simple memorization. Drill and practice activities, along with spelling rules and interactive tasks were considered significant to help students remember spellings more effectively through repetition and feedback. Therefore, this research was conducted to improve Grade 8 students' spelling through a structured intervention based on the drill and practice method, visual aids and student-oriented learning. Moreover, it offered practical insights for teachers to design engaging and effective spelling lessons that go beyond memorization and strengthen students' confidence in written communication.



Problem Statement

Students of Grade 8 frequently make spelling mistakes, which not only affect their writing expression but also reduce clarity in their written concepts. There are various patterns of spelling in English language and understanding correct use of word depends mainly on its appropriate spelling. Second language learners, especially at school, often find difficulty in spelling when silent letters, double letters, homophones, vowels, phone-based words are to be used. School students suffer more than anyone else until properly guided and trained, therefore, this action research was carried out to assist students to overcome this issue.

Objectives

- To identify and report the common types of spelling mistakes made by Grade 8 students.
- To improve students' English spelling errors in a shorter period using multiple strategies like drill and practice, visual aids and student-centered activities.

Literature Review

Spelling is a vital part of literacy development and is important for students' academic success. It improves students' reading comprehension and fluency and enables them to effectively communicate their thoughts in writing. Correct spellings allow students to concentrate on the content rather than the structure of words; also spelling training improves both reading and writing (Graham & Santangelo, 2014; Kuhn & Schwanenflugel, 2017). Poor spelling can hinder communication, lower students' confidence, and reduce the overall quality of their academic performance (Barnes, Juarez, & Byers, 2024). One of the major causes of spelling errors in English is the inconsistency of its orthographic system. English contains many irregular patterns, silent letters, and homophones, which make it a challenging language to spell especially for learners of English as a second language (Moats & Tolman, 2004; Imtiaz, Hassan, & Akmal, 2023). Vowel placement, double letters, and homophones like their/there or peace/piece are frequently confused by students. Explicit spelling instruction is crucial because it gives students the principles and techniques that increase accuracy. Word walls, visual aids, and peer practice combined with explicit instruction improve memory retention and minimize common errors. (Elbro & Hornum,



2016; Byers & Juarez, 2023). These instructional approaches make students more aware of word patterns and help them to generalize correct spellings across different writing contexts.

Among the various instructional approaches, the drill and practice method has been recognized as an effective approach in reducing spelling errors. This method involves repetition, dictation, and immediate feedback, helping learners develop automaticity and fluency in spelling. Studies by Maduabuchi and Iheanacho (2016) and Jabeen and Khan (2023) showed that students who practiced spelling through drills performed better than those taught through traditional rote methods. The repetitive nature of drills reinforces correct spellings until they become habitual, which is particularly beneficial for struggling learners. However, the proven benefits of drill-based instruction, many studies have focused on a single category of spelling errors such as homophones or silent letters rather than focusing the variety of challenges students face at a time. Recent research highlights that combining explicit teaching with drill and practice yields better outcomes than teaching isolated error types (Imtiaz, Hassan, & Akmal, 2023). This approach enables teachers to address multiple spelling challenges simultaneously, resulting in greater improvement in both students' writing and their confidence in written communication.

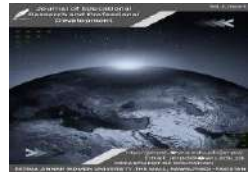
The theoretical framework of this study on improving the spelling proficiency of Grade 8 students is based on Cognitive Load Theory and Multisensory Learning Theory. These frameworks collectively explain how students acquire, process, and retain spelling knowledge through active engagement, scaffolded instruction, and multisensory input. According to the Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988), instructional design reduce cognitive burden because learners' working memory is restricted. This requires scaffolding learning in spelling education by concentrating on one pattern at a time and reducing complicated rules down into smaller, more manageable steps (Sweller et al., 2006). By distributing practice and providing frequent repetition, cognitive overload is reduced, allowing students to process and retain spelling knowledge more effectively (Carpenter, 2012). Multisensory learning theory uses multiple senses visual, auditory, and kinesthetic together to enhance learning and memory retention (Shaywitz, 2003). Combining visual cues (such as word walls and flashcards), oral information (such as phonetic exercises), and kinesthetic activities (such as writing words in the air or sand) in spelling instruction promotes



memory formation and boosts engagement because it uses a variety of senses to teach proper patterns. This method is particularly helpful for students that struggle with spelling (Moats, 2000). Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights that learners progress most effectively when supported by teachers or peers slightly above their current level (Vygotsky, 1978). In spelling instruction, peer collaboration, feedback, and guided practice help learners move from dependent to independent spelling performance (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). An overview of this literature indicates that active participation, systematic practice, and sensory integration collectively direct the spelling learning skills. It is also clear from above cited literature that English spelling errors can be decreased by combination of drill and practice, clear instruction of spelling rules, and fun strategies like word games and competitions (Graham & Santangelo, 2014). These techniques not only improve spelling accuracy but also boost students' confidence and motivation.

Methodology

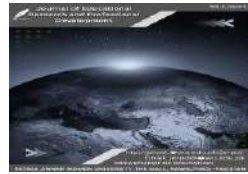
This study used an action research design implementing multiple teaching strategies like drill and practice, visual aids, and student-centered activities in a structured way to help Grade 8 students to overcome their spelling mistakes. Overall, there were 28 Grade 8 female students from SOS school Mansehra. All these students were considered population for this study. The whole class was selected as a sample based on their common spelling issue. Since the study was conducted during teaching practicum, spelling tests were used to analyze spelling errors, and a list of errors was prepared based on general errors made by most of students in this class. Oral dictation exercises, written spelling assignments, and student involvement during classes were ensured during the action plan to achieve the target in a shorter period. An action plan was designed and implemented to improve the spelling errors identified. No stressful or harmful activities were used that could have negative impact on students' physical or emotional wellbeing.



Action Plan

An action plan for five weeks was developed to improve students' spelling skills. It was implemented for two days for five weeks.

Week	Day	Plan	Activities
1	1	Initial assessment using dictation quiz.	Conducted assessment using dictation quiz to identify spelling errors. Introduced common spelling problems such as phonetic-base, homophones, vowels, silent letters and double letters.
	2	Basic spelling practice using activity and flashcards	Taught simple words with missing letters (identified in test) with examples. Oral practice of missing vowel with flashcard activity.
2	1	Focus on homophones using games and activities	Quick oral revision of previously taught lessons. Taught homophones through examples. Matching game on board for practice. Sentence correction activity using correct homophone. Assessment through worksheet on homophone usage. Feedback given.
	2	Vowel sounds practice using worksheets and activities	Short oral assessment for revision of previous lesson. Taught vowel patterns. Word search activity focusing on vowel patterns. Assessment through worksheet on vowel. Worksheet checked. Errors discussed
3	1	Double letters practice through writing	Board writing activity to recall previous lessons. Introduced rules for double letters with examples. Writing drills and dictations. Assessment through worksheet on double letter spelling. Marked worksheets. Provided feedback.
	2	Phonetic-based spelling errors using group activities and worksheets	Short revision of last lesson. Introduced phonetic spelling errors. Group activity to find phonetic mistakes. Short worksheet. Worksheet marked and corrected.
4	1	Mixed spelling practice using audio-listening and writing activity	Oral assessment for revision. Played audio with proper pronunciation. Students listened and wrote spellings. Peer checking. Discussion of answers.



	2	Mixed spelling practice through competition	Group formation comprising 6-7 students. Mixed spelling oral practice. Group spelling competition. Verbal feedback given.
5	1	Revision and practice through writing	Revised all spelling rules learned. Students edited paragraphs with spelling errors.
	2	Final assessment (after interventions) using dictation quiz	Short informal recall session. Conducted final assessment using quiz. Compared spelling improvement result. Shared performance feedback with students.

Action Implementation

A five-week plan was developed and used to find and improve spelling weaknesses of students in English. First, students' problems were identified by conducting a test and then the researcher made an action plan with different interesting techniques to practice in intervention that focused on common spelling mistakes like phonetic-based, homophone confusion, vowels, silent and double letters etc. Students were given a dictation test and their previously done class tests were also taken into consideration to find their common spelling errors and a list of words with incorrect spelling was prepared. Later, researchers prepared different worksheets, games and activities to help students learn correct spelling of all these words including some new relevant words.

In the initial stage, students practiced words by filling in the missing letters used in flashcards then played games to recognize words. In later classes, focus was more on homophones and vowels. Students did activities like correcting sentences, matching words, word search and filling in the blanks. These activities helped students to understand how sounds and letters are connected to each other and how they can improve their spelling skills. To improve their spelling understanding and reduce misunderstanding between similar-sounding words, researchers gave quick feedback. Further, students used written activities and dictation to improve their double-letter spellings. They were taught specific spelling rules and were given the opportunity to quickly correct their errors. In collaborative tasks, students identified and fixed misspelled words that are caused by phonetic misconceptions. Students were engaged in phonetic spelling drills where they listened to word pronunciations and practiced words through listen-repeat-write activity. During



these activities, their auditory understanding, pronunciation, and the ability to recognize mistakes visually improved. Correct spelling patterns were strengthened through repeated practice.

As the intervention progressed, activities that combined various spelling concepts were implemented to revise previously covered material. Students were engaged in tasks where they wrote words after hearing audio. The use of peer review and group correction promoted shared learning and encouraged students to monitor their own development. A classroom spelling competition was organized to provide an engaging learning environment, giving students an entertaining and useful chance to put their spelling skills to use.

Students completed editing and proofreading assignments in the last stage that included brief sentences with intentional spelling errors. Through these exercises, students were able to put the rules they had learned into practice and the instructor was able to evaluate their progress in their writing. Following the intervention, a dictation test was used for assessment, and the results showed a clear improvement in the students' spelling accuracy. The results indicated that improving general writing proficiency and reducing spelling errors required consistent practice, repetition, use of audio-visual aids and timely feedback. This section presents the findings of the study in alignment with its research objectives. Data obtained through classroom tests used as pre and post-intervention assessments were descriptively analyzed to check students' improvement.

The first objective of this study was to identify and report the common types of English spelling mistakes made by Grade 8 students. After the analysis of their class tests, it was found that students made five types of spelling errors: phonetic-based errors, vowel confusions, misuse of homophones, removal or addition of double letters, and missing the use of silent letters. Mostly students relied on wrong pronunciation, which resulted in phonetic-based mistakes like "referance" for "reference" and "definition" for "definition". Similarly, homophone mistakes such as "there/their" and "form/from" were common. Students frequently missed or added double letters, such as writing "begining" instead of "beginning". Errors involving silent letters, like "enviroment" for "environment" or "listening" for "listening," were also noted. These findings



confirmed that spelling difficulties were both common and widespread, significantly affecting the clarity and legibility of students' written work.

The second objective of this study was to use the drill and practice method, AV aids and student-centered activities to help students improve their English spelling. Oral and written drills were done to assist students' spelling learning. Their English spellings skills improved with the use of drill and practice. Students were able to memorize and recognize proper spelling patterns through oral and written drills like dictation, missing-letter exercises, and sentence correction tasks. Students who had previously made phonological and orthographic mistakes started to comprehend spelling rules and used them correctly in their writing. Students' ability of vowel placement, double-letter usage, and distinction between homophones increased. Overall, it was found that the drill and practice method was effective in improving spelling. Additionally, regular feedback and corrections after each task enhanced learning. To support students further in learning spellings, another thing practiced was the use of AV aids and student-centered activities. The spelling mistakes were greatly reduced using visual aids such as word charts, flashcards, and group activities and competition activities. While group-based spelling exercises also promoted cooperation and peer learning, visual aids like word charts and flashcards improved memory through visuals. Students' interest and engagement were increased by activities like peer competitions, audio-based listening-to-write assignments, and proofreading games. Spelling practice became more enjoyable and meaningful using these student-centered activities. Structured practice using visual reinforcement, and student-centered activities significantly improved spelling accuracy and learner confidence. Above all, feedback to encourage students was also ensured throughout drill and practice.

Discussion

This action research study showed that implementing structured spelling activities that include drill and practice techniques led to a remarkable enhancement in the spelling abilities of grade 8 students. The results showed a great decrease in spelling errors related to phonetics, incorrect use of vowels, confusion with homophones, mistakes with double letters, and issues with silent letters.

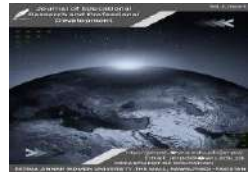


These findings were aligned with earlier research that highlighted the value of explicit and direct spelling instruction, including repetition and feedback. For example, Jabeen and Khan (2023) found that students who engaged in structured spelling practice performed well than those who relied only on rote memorization, and Maduabuchi and Iheanacho (2016) pointed out that repeated practice facilitated easier and more automatic spelling.

In accordance with Constructivist perspectives, students actively participated in activities and collaborated with peers, which encouraged the development of their spelling knowledge in a meaningful context. Breaking complex spelling rules into easy tasks, providing regular practice, and giving immediate feedback helped reduce cognitive load and improved memory retention (Sweller et al., 2006). Additionally, the integration of visual and auditory methods strengthened memory recall and helped students facing spelling challenges in achieving a better understanding (Moats, 2000).

The intervention effectively presented different categories of spelling errors at the same time. This study confirmed recent findings that suggested a combination of teaching strategies is more effective than one method focusing on a single type of error (Imtiaz, Hassan, & Akmal, 2023). The enhanced spelling accuracy observed in students was accompanied by increased self-confidence and motivation, highlighting the positive emotional impact of enjoyable and interactive classroom activities. Peer competitions, group proofreading, and game-based activities fostered active engagement and self-regulation.

The research proved that a proper designed, multi-sensory, and repeated method for teaching spelling can decreased spelling errors and boosted students' self-confidence in their English writing. It supported the idea that regular practice, AV aids, and student-oriented methods are crucial for developing spelling learning skills in middle school students. The results indicated that incorporating structured, spelling-focused tasks into regular English lessons can address students spelling related challenges.



Conclusions

Based on the findings, it was concluded that the use of drill and practice, AV aids and student-centered techniques successfully decreased spelling errors in a short period of time especially those related to phonetics, confusion of vowels, incorrect usage of homophones, errors with double letters, and issues with silent letters.

Furthermore, using AV aids and student-oriented activities made spelling learning enjoyable event. Peer interactions, competitions, and spelling games, had enhanced students' motivation and engagement in the spelling learning process.

Tackling various types of spelling mistakes was found to be more effective than concentrating on single error category.

Recommendations

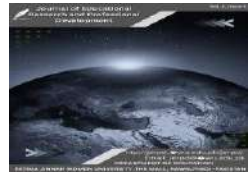
Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Regular spelling drills should be integrated into classroom instruction, combining explicit teaching of spelling rules with repeated practice. Immediate corrective feedback should be provided to reinforce correct spellings.
- Student-centered interactive and engaging activities such as spelling competitions should be used to motivate students and promote active learning.
- Middle school English curricula should focus more on spelling instruction, ensuring sufficient time and resources for practice and reinforcement of spelling skills.
- Further studies may explore the long-term effects of drill-based and multisensory spelling interventions across different grade levels and student populations.



References

- Bransford, J. (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. National Academy Press.
- Byers, S. N., & Juarez, C. A. (2023). *Introduction to forensic anthropology*. Routledge.
- Carpenter, S. K. (2012). Testing enhances the transfer of learning. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 21(5), 279–283.
- Elbro, C., & Hornum, M. (2016). Teaching spelling patterns: A study of effective strategies for middle school students. *Reading and Writing*, 29(3), 221–234.
- Graham, S., & Santangelo, T. (2014). Does spelling instruction make students better spellers, readers, and writers? A meta-analytic review. *Reading and Writing*, 27, 1703–1743.
- Imtiaz, M., Hassan, K. H. U., & Akmal, F. (2023). Analyzing spelling errors committed by English as a second language (ESL) learners at secondary school level. *Journal of Social Sciences Review*, 3(2), 181–189.
- Jabeen, S., & Khan, H. (2023). The efficacy of the phonics method vis-à-vis the drilling method for teaching spelling in the Pakistani context. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 7(5), 227–238.
- Kuhn, M., & Schwanenflugel, P. J. (2017). Reconsidering fluency's role in reading comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 52(1), 1–18.
- Maduabuchi, C. H., & Iheanacho, K. A. (2016). Use of drills and secondary school students' achievement in the English language spelling. *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods*, 6(1), 306–315.
- Moats, L. C. (2000). *Speech to print: Language essentials for teachers*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing.
- Moats, L. C. (2005). How spelling supports reading. *American Educator*, 29(4), 12–43.
- Moats, L. C., & Tolman, C. (2004). *Language essentials for teachers of reading and spelling*. Sopris West Educational Services.
- Nation, L. S., & Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language* (Vol. 10, pp. 126–132). Cambridge University Press.



- Piaget, J. (1973). *To understand is to invent: The future of education*. Grossman.
- Schraw, G., & Dennison, R. S. (1994). Assessing metacognitive awareness. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 19(4), 460–475.
- Shaywitz, S. (2003). *Overcoming dyslexia*. Knopf.
- Sweller, J. (1988). Cognitive load during problem solving: Effects on learning. *Cognitive Science*, 12(2), 257–285.
- Tharp, R. G., & Gallimore, R. (1991). *Rousing minds to life: Teaching, learning, and schooling in social context*. Cambridge University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (Vol. 86). Harvard University Press.