

Improving English spellings of Class IV Students of Namgaycholing Primary School

Abstract

This research is being carried out with the main objective, to study how I can improve the English spelling of class IV students at Namgaycholing Primary School. The intent of the study has originated from my own experiences and shortcomings in the field of English spelling learning and teachings. So as the researchers this research project intends to make students learning English as 'Second Language' to become good spellers.

In this study, data was collected by analyzing document of students which are notebook, testpapers and exam papers. The documents collected was from all 36 grade four students. The documents analyzed for the data covered all the types of learners in the classroom.

The study brought changes in the spelling abilities of students learning English. As my focus was on improving spelling skills through using various strategies in the classroom, achieving this objective brought immense improvement in their spellings. Hence students became good spellers and were encouraged to do better.

Introduction

Bhutanese children start learning all the subjects in English right from their first year (age 6) in school except Dzongkha (the national language). Therefore, it is important that children become proficient in the English language which includes four basic skills: reading, speaking, listening, and writing. Spelling is crucial to students' success in reading and writing; this is because word

recognition and spelling both rely on similar funds of knowledge (Pierre, 2012). Poor spelling can cause dire consequences for struggling learners. Poor spellers are very limited in their ability to communicate, since spelling plays a critical role in reading and writing fluency, as well as in developing capacity within students to become articulate speakers (Hameed, 2016). Students need a level of proficiency in spelling to continue their academic or professional career in the future.

In Bhutan, the English language is not only used as a medium of instruction in schools and universities but also widely used as an official language across the nation and for everyday communication (both verbally and in written form). While there is no research conducted in the Bhutanese context, anecdotal evidence indicates that writing in general and spelling errors in particular are a common problem amongst Bhutanese students (Tshomo et.al, 2008). Making use of a correct spelling is important for effective communication as a misspelt word is likely to convey a wrong message. However, it is not an easy task for non-native learners to use correct spellings. English is a second language for all Bhutanese students and it is inevitable that learners are bound to make errors. What is more important is identifying the difficulties students face and supporting them to experience success and meaningful second language learning (Baleghizadeh, 2010). Hence the purpose of this study was to explore strategies to help students of class four at Namgaycholing Primary School to become good spellers.

Situation Analysis

Country Background

Bhutan is a tiny Buddhist Kingdom sandwiched between the two giant countries, India and China. It is known as the last Shangri-La throughout the world. The country is known to the world through its unique but magnificent culture and nature as well as the GNH policy. It has diverse range of flora and faunas along with various traditional occasions such as Tsechu which attracts tourism from all over the world. The country is divided into twenty different regions called Dzongkhags with various sub regions but remains unified under less than one rule, the Wangchuck dynasty.

Education in Bhutan

The country has the policy to provide free education to the children till grade twelve. The Government has established schools all over the country ranging from primary schools to tertiary institutes and even has schools for special need students. English has been the medium for instructions in all the institutions regardless of the school levels as it is implemented in the curriculum from Pre-Primary classes. Namycholing Primary School is located 35.9 Km away from Samtse dzong and falls under Tashicholingdrungkhag. There are 248 students with 24 staffs including the supporting staffs.

Education System of the country

Monastic education was the only formal education available to the Bhutanese students until 1950s. Modern education was established in the country during the reign of the first king, Ugyen Wangchuck. The first modern school was started at Haa and one at Bumthang in the following year for the crowned prince and the children of the people serving in the King's court. By late 1950s there were twenty-nine government and thirty private primary schools. By 1961 the

systematic efforts towards education sector began with the introduction of the First Development Plan that provided free and universal primary education. The Government established 400 schools by 1988. However even in the twenty first-century there is still shortage of schools with adequate facilities.

The schooling starts with preschool at the age of five for a year, followed by five years of primary school, three years of secondary school and then three years of high school. Instructions in the schools are provided through national language Dzongkha and English. As of 2020, there are 319 primary schools, 61 lower schools, 71 middle schools, 82 high schools and 2 special institutes including private schools.

Problem Statement

English spelling is one of the most common problems the majority of the students are facing despite English being the frequently used language in the schools. While teaching English to our class IV students we found out that they make frequent spelling errors in their writings. Due to this, when they were asked to share their points or answers to the class they mispronounced the words. When the words were mispronounced the audience was not able to understand the terms or the points the speaker was sharing and in such cases the speaker failed to provide the information they wanted to share with the audience. Afterwards they started losing confidence in themselves and they did not participate in the class discussions actively because they were often criticized by their friends even though when they possessed good writing and reading skills.

Poor spelling abilities affected the writing and reading skill of students for they could not convey the message they have written as it had lots of spelling errors. Then they stopped taking initiative

in writing as well as reading. As they mispronounced the words, their reading skills were greatly affected because as a reader they have to be fluent and pronounce words correctly. Therefore, the students needed to have good spelling abilities as it is a vital factor in their speaking, reading and writing.

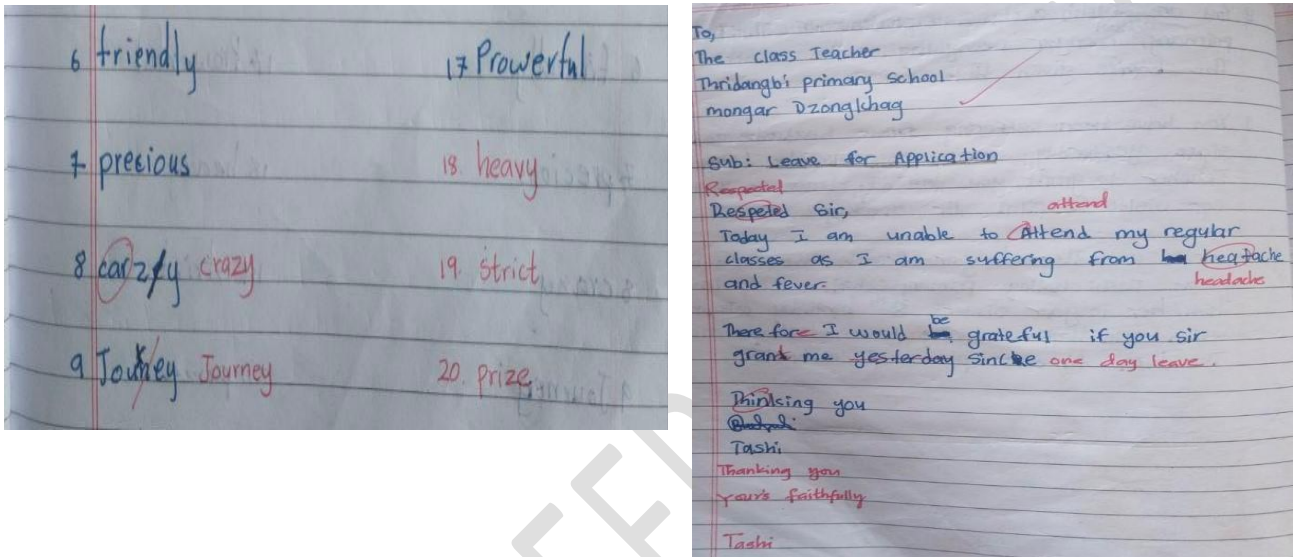


Fig 1. Poor spelling abilities

Even during my school days, I tend to lose certain marks in writing due to spelling mistakes. As we used to spell the words incorrectly, I had the tendency to mispronounce the words when I read a text. Even while speaking I used to stammer to pronounce the words I intended to say correctly so that my teachers and friends could understand what I was trying to talk about. My poor spelling ability has been with us throughout the school's days and even today I still face it at times. Recently while teaching to class IV students, I noticed that the students are having this same poor spelling abilities as of ours and they are facing similar difficulties due to this. Students had good reading, speaking and writing skills but due to poor spelling abilities they were performing poorly in English as well as English Medium subjects which was a concerning issue.

I have always been concerned about the students having problem with spelling skills as it was affecting their academic performance as well as interest in English. Teachers tried various teaching strategies to enhance their learning in English but with poor spelling abilities, it was always a challenge. Recently I assigned them a task to write a passage about themselves. As I corrected the task I found that they have written the points beautifully but the poor spellings of the words made their writing look poor that we had to correct the words written now and then in most of the books. Even the high achievers had spelling errors in their writing. As a result, I had to spend a lot of time trying to correct their text so that other readers could understand their writing.

The points were accurate but spelling errors made it hard for us as the readers to understand the writing of the writers (students) that I had to re-read the passages again. When few of them were asked to read their passage to the class, the ones who had made several spelling mistakes mispronounced lots of words that the audience couldn't understand their points and even made fun of them. I started to observe them after this assignment and I noticed that the students participate less in the class and group discussion as they are afraid of mispronouncing the words. They even communicate less with their peers whereby there is less social interaction among them and they even hesitate to write as well as read. Due to the poor spelling abilities, I find our elementary level students losing social interaction, active participation and literacy skills in the class as well in the subject.

Objectives of the study

- Develop communication skills

Communication skills are essential for students to grow and interact with the world. Spelling is a critical component of communication (Best, 2017). Good spelling facilitates communication among the students. Incorrect spellings in the written text can change the meaning of their communication to something completely different or makes it bit unclear. Even while talking to each other, due to incorrect spellings the students have in mind, they mispronounce the word making the communication vague and funny. They do not participate in the class and group discussions as they make a lot of pronunciation mistakes while sharing their points. The students should possess effective communication skills to interact with other peoples in and around them and this is not possible with poor spelling abilities.

- Improve reading skills

Learning to spell and learning to read both involves understanding the relationship between letters and sounds (Jones, 2009). The students need to understand letter combination and sounds of the letters to spell the words correctly. After that they need to use these understandings to decode new words in the text while reading. Students who struggle to spell words correctly are unable to read the words in a text and use in their spoken vocabulary. As a result, students are not able to read fluently and comprehend the written text while reading.

- Improve writing skills

Spellings also play a vital role in creating confident and able writers. Students with good spelling skill are able to use wide range of vocabularies and select precise words in their writings to communicate their message. If they have poor spelling skill, they might stop

constantly in between to think about to how to spell the words as they write which can interrupt the flow of their ideas. On the other hand, they prefer play safe by only using the words they already know how to spell which leads to loss of vocabulary power as well as clarity in their writing.

Significance of the Study

This study was expected to give me and other teachers to understand how poor spelling skills of the students result in poor reading, writing and communication skills. I was able to adopt strategies to improve their spelling skills after observing and analyzing the observations. I was also able to improve our students' reading, writing and communication skills as I had the concept on why they were poor spellers. As I was able to help them to become good spellers I had good readers, writers and communicators who became active participators in the class. I started to have interactive classrooms as well as effective teaching and learning with our students. On the other hand, I had to manage time between our regular teaching and carrying out activities to improve their spellings. Thus, students' cooperation was required to fulfill these objectives.

The students became good readers, writers and communicators when they started to improve in their spelling skill. They interacted and participated in the class activities as they were able to speak their points well with clarity. They began to show their interest in English classes and shared their opinions and thoughts on the topics as we taught. Through this study students were able to identify why they lacked spelling skills and adopted various strategies to improve their spellings. They became skilled in spelling wide range of words without struggle at some extend as per their ability. They could comprehend various texts whereby acquiring reading fluency,

wrote easily and communicated with others, bringing a lot of opportunities for themselves and the school.

Through this study the school and students were informed how this research will benefit them. It helped school achieve their goal of every students being able to speak and write English. When the learners acquired good spelling skill, they performed better in their academic by scoring good and average marks as they now made less spelling mistakes. The school was able to have interactive classrooms where learning was collaborative as per the Kagan's structure. I had to work towards time management to teach and implement the interventions and learning activities to improve their spelling skills. Hence improving English spelling skills of the students was essential for us as their teacher, themselves and school to have effective learning and teaching outcomes.

Personal Competence

I had a clear concept about what an action research is and what make up action research. I knew that it just cannot be theoretical but need to have strong evidences and justifications as its data base. I understood that it should come up with resolutions better than those of existing ones and should be practical. I was aware that I have to undergo various processes from planning to data collection and then reflecting. I was aware what could go wrong if I fail to undergo all the process involved and what kind of action research paper I would produce.

Possessing all the concepts mentioned above about action research, I carried out the research in a proper and systematic order. I carefully planned the research and successfully completed it without much issues. I already noted down set of strategies I was going to apply on the students as I researched to study the impact of each strategy on their English spellings. I had even

research articles and other literatures to read that helped us explore further. After I had done the research, I reflected on the whole process of and was ready to take up another round of research if required as I was aware about what I am supposed to do after the reflection on the research.

In the process of the research, I paid proper attention to each student in the class. I cautiously observed our students to make sure that we understand the spelling ability of each child. As I am good in remembering names of the students, I was able to make out of their writings if they were good or poor spellers. My good communication skills helped me to interact with students coherently. As I interacted I was able to find if their poor spellings were hindering their communication as well as participation in the class. Having taught for last few decades, I had skills to use various teaching method through which we are going to improve spellings of our students.

Literature Review

Introduction

I reviewed literature about how to improve English spelling. It was a comprehensive summary of previous researches on English spelling improvement. The reasons for carrying research on English spelling improvement were to learn how other researchers have defined and measured key concepts about English spelling and see ourselves what came before, and what did and didn't work for them. I wrote a concept note about our topic (the meaning of English spelling) in the literature review. I also wrote the findings and strategies suggested by other researchers to improve the English spelling of our children.

Scope of the study

Kernaghan (2007) defines spelling as the encoding of linguistic forms into written forms. In language, sounds are provided by oral language and letters are provided by written language. This is the essence of reading and writing. Kernaghan (2007) states that spellings encode speech and reading decode writing. Encoding of linguistic form is all about the using individual sounds of letters to write words. Also Bakshi (n.d) states that spelling is the writing of one or more words with letters and diacritics. Spellings are important because they build connections between letters and sounds, and then between words and sentences.

While McPherson (1984) refers spelling as a system of using symbols the letters of the alphabet to represent the sounds of speech. In some of the languages the correspondence between the speech sounds and written symbols is almost exact. For each speech sound there is a single letter and that letter always stands for same sound. But this however does not exist in the modern English as the alphabets do not correspond to the sounds when we speak.

Spelling can be defined as forming of words using the letters in correct order. When one has to write the spellings, they have to arrange every single alphabet letters in proper order to give out the correct of the sound. Spelling as we know it today consists of the complicated set of rules and conventions for writing down words. As these set of rules are complicated, students tend to develop poor spelling abilities. The complication of the rules leads the children to confusion whereby they spell words incorrectly. Thus, I wanted to find out strategies on how I can improve English spelling of class IV students of Namgaycholing Primary School.

Bridging the Gap

Trends in education system have shifted overtime with teaching children to read phonemically to teaching children to read more holistically. However with change in time, as stated by Angelisi (2000), the rate of poor spellers among the students is increasing. She asserts that the reason behind this issue is not the way students learn but the way students are taught. Memorization and taking spelling test are the common methods teachers use to teach spelling and make students to learn spellings. But in this 21st century with cooperative learning strategy being implemented throughout the schools, is the teaching methods of spelling similar till date? The changes in strategies of teaching and learning and its effectiveness on spelling improvement remain unknown due to absence of studies on it. This research found the effectiveness of various teaching strategies in teaching spellings to students and proposed strategies to help teachers.

It has often been said that the English language is the most difficult, of all languages, to read, write, speak and understand. There are only 26 letters of the alphabet; however, there are many phonics and spelling rules that correspond with each letter. Tshomo et al. (2018) state that some errors regarding spelling out the words are because of phonetically difficulties of words whereby students make errors when words are difficult to be pronounce. This problem has also been seen in Islamic students and some other parts of abroad countries. Therefore wrong pronunciation of the words leads to spelling errors in English learners. Could this be similar with the Bhutanese students? Due to lack of adequate researches, it is uncertain if Bhutanese students also commit spelling errors due to pronunciation difficulties and through this research, one was able to understand if it is same or not with Bhutanese students. The other problems were also considered and analyzed.

Critical Review

Spelling is an essential literacy skill which has a significant effect on students who are learning English as second language for their educational as well as career status. However students are not able to master this skill because most of the spelling teachings in the schools are done through traditional approaches. Yahmedi, et al. (2019) states that Word Study approach is an important approach for teaching children spelling and is one that seems to be quite successful. When teacher uses the word study approach, there is an increase in orthographic knowledge and spelling abilities in the students as they learn spellings by understanding patterns in words. Similarly, Angelisi (2000) found that encouraging students to search for certain spelling patterns in words can help them remember the spelling of the words better. Rather than simply making students to memorize the spellings of the words in isolation, word study approach helps every child to complete same or similar activities with words on time.

Visualization is another strategy to be implemented in the classrooms to help students build spelling skills. A research by Nahari et al. (2016) state that visualization is an effective and a valuable methodology for improving spelling skills. The visualization is referred to students' ability to see the letters of the words in the mind. Through this they are able to recognize possible and impossible letter sequences, notice if a word looks incorrectly spelled, identify the part of the word that looks incorrect and replace it with answer option. Even Tshomo et al. (2018) suggests that teachers should continuously develop the kind of visual memory that enhances spelling ability. Other visualization strategy refers to the visual aids including flashcards, word walls and word charts. This is the reason why lower primary classrooms in the schools have word charts or word walls. Education Ministry should prepare and distribute instructional materials to increase teachers' knowledge and use of visualization strategies as new and effective strategies for teaching spelling so that students become confident spellers.

Another approach becoming popular these days is teaching and learning through games. Teachers in the training centers are trained how to integrate games in teaching-learning session. A significant impact on spelling skills has been found when one used games in their teaching. A study by Rello et al., (2015) claim that action games improve the children's spatial and temporal attention, which is essential for decoding words. When students are able to decode the words they develop their spelling ability. Teaching through Games always captures the concentration of students which makes them attentive enabling them to decode words. Similar to it Nurhayati (n.d) in his research found that when teachers used effective teaching and learning process through games they could improve their students' spelling abilities. While using various interesting activities through games the students become very energetic as they need some activities that could make them move so that they don't get bored easily. Learners learn to spell better when they enjoy the lesson.

As the world of today is driven by technology, teachers can help students in improving their spelling abilities through integrating ICT in their lessons. ICT provides a range of opportunities for the students to learn through its diverse facilities. Vedora et.al (2006) when conducting an experiment using computers with students found that use of computer was efficient and effective way to teach spellings to children. The need to blend the use of computer technology with spelling skill acquisition is recognized by various researchers and practitioners. Similarly a research by Bushnell et al., states that texting using cell phones help children to play with words exposing them to various spellings. Though debate that cell phones are declining student's literacy skill is still an issue but when it comes to spelling skills, texting can benefit them if they use it properly. On the other hand a research carried out by Hameed on his 26 Arabic students participants found that extensive use of the dictionary with an aim to improve student's spelling

abilities proved efficient as the participants could spell better after using dictionary. It is a mean through which children learn the meanings of difficult words but as they look up for meaning, they go through various words in sequence. Looking up for words sequencings help them to remember spellings. Spelling skills requires good sequencing skills of the words.

Teachers are always the reason behind for student's learning so is they for their spelling skills. If a teacher teaches spellings effectively through using various strategies, it results in good spellers. A research by Hutcheon et al., (2012) states effective spelling instruction not only can increase children's performance on spelling tests but also may increase the length and proficiency of their compositions. When they are exposed to spelling instructions, they acquire techniques on how to develop their spellings skills. On the other hand research by Lee et al., (1982) found that chained practice of spelling probably accounts for the improvement in spelling. To improve one's spelling skill; they have to practice the spellings on their own. As they practice spellings in chain manner, they learn the spellings and are able to remember all the spellings. Hence both teacher's instructional strategies and student's practice determines the improvement of spelling in students.

Summary

Various researchers have found various strategies and approaches that can be used to improve spellings of learners. From traditional approach of teaching such as memorization to modern approaches such as games, teachers can help students with their spelling skills. Teachers need to integrate different techniques or approaches in their teaching. However, no single technique can cover all aspects of teaching and learning spelling and suit all language students, with their diverse needs, expectations, and achievements. Successful teaching and learning depend on the

efforts of both teachers and students, and their desire and ability to implement the most effective approaches and techniques.

Methodology

Research Tool/s

The research tools are very important to carry out research and to collect data. To collect the information or data, I used document analysis tools to make information more authentic. Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic (Bowen, 2009). It is valuable for collecting qualitative data. Wilson (n.d) as cited in Bowen (2009) states that analyzing document includes coding content into themes, similar to how focus group or interview transcripts are analyzed. Rubrics or scoring guides can be used to evaluate documents.

Improvement of spellings in students was analyzed through their notebooks. The documents to be analyzed for the research were readily available as well as reliable and accessible. As the documents were reliable I could evaluate the earlier claims regarding spelling of students. It helped to track development and monitor progress of our students with their spellings after the interventions made. I could also verify progress or claims made by other researchers. The data we obtained were specific and stable for our presence did not affect the data to be analyzed. Thus the data collected was accurate to be claimed. Moreover, it was cost efficient as I did not have to spend a lot on gathering data as the sources of data were readily available. Hence document analysis assisted in attaining accurate data for the research.

List of documents to collect data

1. Notebook
2. Test papers
3. Exam papers

Table 1. Action Research Matrix

AR Question: How can we improve English spelling of Class IV students of Namgaycholing Primary School?				
Indicators/ Areas of improvement	Specific Actions (New Inputs)	Action Timing (Development Sequence)	Data Collection Method (Tools)	Remarks
Mixing up of Homophones	Teach different homophones through games and activities that would enhance correct spelling and word usage in the right content.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Week 1 collect baseline data on use homophones - Week 2- 4 intervention. - Week 5-6 post intervention data gathering and analysis. 	Collect the data on which homophones are mixed up and analyses the information through document analysis	
Phonological awareness	<p>Teach phonics of each alphabets</p> <p>Teach blending of sounds</p> <p>Teach rhyming words</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Week 1 collect baseline data on use of phonological awareness. - Week 2-4 intervention. - Week 5-6 post intervention data gathering and analysis. 	Collect data on use of phonological awareness through document analysis.	

Mixing letter sequence in a word	Teach the correct sequence of word by practicing strategies such as visualization and games related to letter sequence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Week 1 collect baseline data on use of syllabification. - Week 2-4 intervention. - Week 5-6 post intervention data gathering and analysis. 	Collect data on mixing letter sequence and how a student has improved over the time.	
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Ethical Consideration

Throughout the research project, a proper code of ethics is recommended as it allows the research to flow and function smoothly. Creswell (2007) concluded that as a researcher we need to respect the participants and the sites of research. As a researcher, I have not put the participants at risk, but have respected and honored them. Before engaging the participants in the research process, I have sought their due permission from the school, concerned teachers and each participant, therefore none of the individual was forced into participation but, participated voluntarily in full will and spirit. During the data collection, I have considered all the ethical points and each point given by participants were duly respected and taken into consideration. While collecting data, the names of all the participants were kept under confidentiality to respect the code of research ethics. After the completion of this action research all the participants were acknowledged for their valuable contribution.

Considering and understanding that I cannot disturb the lesson sessions for literacy, while planning to teach I considered that I should either take a separate time to intervene or I can simply use the strategies as I teach. Therefore, to have the usual English session as well as

myintervention, I used the strategies as activities and used separate times apart from academic sessions.I even planned the duration of the intervention to make their learning and our data gathering on intervention strategies effective.

Baseline Data Collection

Namgaycholing Primary School has classes PP till Six. For the data collection of the study, I analyzed the documents of class IVstudents. The students study English as one of the major learning subjects in the class and their age ranges from 10 to 14 years old. The classes have total of 36 students. I directly consulted with the concerned authorities such as the school administration, the class teacher and concerned parents. I verbally explained them the purpose of our study and asked for the permission to carry out this study with the respective students as the participants. Fortunately,I was granted with the permission and we could carry out this study without much challenges.

The learners maintain their own English notebooks for the English classes. To collect the data on the spelling errors they make, I collected notebooks, test papers and exam papers. and then examined for the spelling errors they made. I captured the pages of their notebooks at times in order to analyze their writing for our study. Meanwhile other aspects of language were ignored as the sole purpose was to determine the spelling errors.

After marking the misspelt words of the learners, total number of errors were recorded under each category in a table (Table 3). The misspelt words were categorized into four groups of errors. I adapted these errors from the research paper work carried out by Tshomo et.al (2018) as it was relevant to the study Icarrying out. After analyzing each number of errors in each category and later on as a total, we determined the percentage

of each type of spelling error. Types of errors and their simple explanation along with examples have been given in the Table 2.

Table 2: Types of errors

Types of errors	Meaning	Example
Transposition Error	Transposition of two consecutive letters	Firend for friend
Homophone and Confusable errors	Errors words with similar spelling or pronunciation	There for their
Pronunciation errors	Spelling according to sound of the letter	<i>Nife for knife</i>

Table 3: Total number of errors

Type of error	Transposition Error	Homophone and Confusable errors	Pronunciation error
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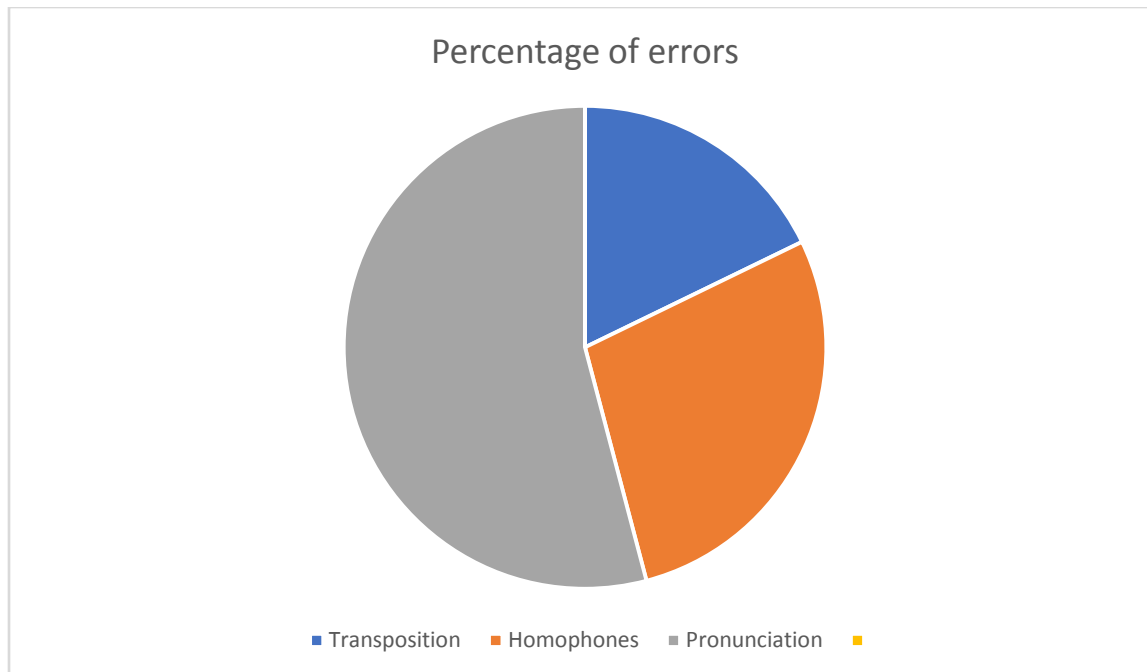
No. of errors	43	68	131
Total	242		

While examining their books and papers for the spelling errors, I found a total 242 errors. We noted down number of each types of error and found the percentage of each error. The highest type of error was pronunciation error with 54.1% and the lowest type of error was transposition with 17.8 %.

Table 4: Percentage of types of error

Type of errors	Number of errors out of total no.	Percentage
Transposition errors	43	17.7%
Homophone and Confusable errors	68	28.1%
Pronunciation errors	131	54.1%

Fig. 2. Percentage of types of error



From the findings after analyzing the documents of the learners we concluded that the spelling errors mentioned above falls under the following three areas which are the indicators of poor spelling abilities in learners.

1. Weak Phonological awareness

Weak phonological awareness is the children's knowledge on phonics of individual letters and words which lead them to pronunciation of words differently than how they are supposed to sound resulting in poor spelling of the learners.

2. Mixing up homophones

Homophones are the words that have same pronunciation but different meaning and spelling. However, as they have same pronunciation students tend to use the incorrect word in a sentence, which changes the meaning. A learner with poor spelling usually is confused between homophones and tend to use the incorrect word in the sentence.

3. Mixing sequence of letters in a word

It is when the writer mixes up the sequencing of a letter or two in a word while writing. The position of the letters are in a word are switched. Often only few letter sequences are changed but at times almost sequence of all the letters are switched.

Intervention

Building on the insights gained from our assessments and literature review, I introduced targeted interventions. These interventions ranged from adapting teaching methods to incorporating new resources and providing additional support to students identified as needing extra assistance. I identified three indicators which indicated that the learners have spelling difficulties after the data collection findings. As a response to each indicator from the findings, I came up various strategies as following.

1. Weak Phonological Awareness

a) Sound it out strategy

It is a process of decoding a word by identifying the sounds of each individual letter in a word and then blending those sounds together. I taught the learners sound of each alphabet letter and letter own taught them to blend the sounds of the letters together.

After that I asked them to spell out the words by firstly sounding out the individual sounds of each letter and then by blending the sounds. I carried out this strategy with the words they learned in each session.

b) Word sorting

Yahmedi et.al (2019) as cited in Read (1971) states that word sorting is based on theories such as that “children make consistent, overt judgments of sound similarities”. Learners are required to sort of words according to common patterns of their sounds. During our intervention process we carried out the activities in which learners were required to sort and organize words by 4 ending sounds; -ing,-at,-an and ad. They first carried out the sorting or –ing and –at words. Later on, they did the sorting of –an and –ad words.

c) Word boxes

Gullory (n.d) states that word boxes are an appropriate intervention to use with a whole class, small groups, or individual children and it is intended to help with acquisition of phonemic awareness skills. It consists of divided boxes where children have to place the counters according to the number of sounds in the word. In the later stage they place the letter squares of the words after removing the counter. While I was intervening, for the first week or session, I simply let them fill the boxes with counters according to the number of sounds in the words. E.g. wish= 3 counters as w/i/sh/. In the next session, I then made them to first fill the divided boxes according

to sounds in the words and after that they then filled up the divided boxes using the letter squares of the words.

2. Mixing letter sequence in words

a) Visualization strategy

Visualization is believed to be crucial for helping students spell correctly as explained by the fact that spelling is a visual process: we need to visualize, or see a word we have encountered before, in order to spell it (Nahari, 2016). It involves a range of process until the child is able to visualize the spelling of the words. I started off by writing 5 targeted words each (frequently misspelt words) in a session on the board and read each letter out as I wrote. Then students traced those words in their notebooks along with reading out. Later on, I wrote each word 3 times and students did the same in their notebook along with reading out. Next, I now started to write each letters of the word in the air as I read out each letter and students did the same. At last, I asked the learners to close their eyes and then write each word with their letters in the air. After that I moved to next 5 targeted words in the next session.

b) Hangman game

It is a guessing game where one has to guess the word an opponent or other person is thinking by guessing one letter at a time. It involves the gradual drawing of a stick figure hanging from the gallows on each incorrect letter guessed. I used this game towards in the session for two weeks as a brain break. However, I made them guess the words related to their content as well as the words they misspelt the most. I conducted the game in groups.

c) Word Scramble

It is a word puzzle game based where one has to re-arrange its letters to reconstruct the original word. For intervention, we listed targeted words or frequency words on the chart and provided a chart to each group of 4 members. Learners were to unscramble the listed word and the group who finished unscrambling most correct original words was the winner. I used different set of scrambled word lists for each intervention period.

3. Mixing up homophones

a) Illustrated word chart

Illustrated word chart is a collection of words with illustration which are displayed in large visible letters on a wall, bulletin board, or other display surface in a classroom. The illustrated word chart is designed to be an interactive tool for students and contains array of words that can be used during writing and reading. It helps students see patterns and relationship in words, thus building spelling skills. During the intervention period we made illustrated word charts in which students matches a word with the correct illustration and an illustration with correct a word. For example; if the word on the chart is sun, then they need to find illustration that matches the word sun. Some of the targeted words included in the activity are son, sun, bear, beer, peer, pear, ice, eyes, here, hear, there, their.

b) Word puzzle

It is an English word spelling game where students find words out of given definition. There should be certain definition of words written on the activity sheet. Students should look for a correct word from the definition and fill in the box accordingly. The words contain in that sheet

would be of homophones and they need to write correct spelling of each word in the box. As I implemented the intervention strategy, I had created certain definition of homophones and prepared sheet where students can write correct spelling of a word identified. During the activity, I let students read a definition at a time and identify correct word. Then made them fill the empty boxes with correct spelling. For example; the round yellow thing in the sky. They should identify it as a sun and fill the empty box with correct spelling.

c) Prisoners Base Game

It is a game in which students should play in team. From each group a member will come in front and write a spelling of word pronounced by a teacher. Students who spell the word incorrectly become prisoner. If the remaining members write the word correctly, that team's prisoners are released. A team is retired if all of its members become prisoners. At the end of the game, the team with the fewer prisoners is the winner. So, for the students to learn spelling better, I had prepared a list of homophones, divided them into 2 teams and let them play the game. For example, teacher pronounced the word 'Beer' and provided definition as a clue. Students from both the team were required to write correct spelling of the word.

Post- Intervention Data Gathering

The post intervention data include notebooks and papers of the students that were analyzed during the baseline data collection. The documents were analyzed based on the spelling errors they made after the intervention.

Post Intervention Data Analysis

1. Weak Phonological Awareness

Learners' weak phonological awareness of letters cause them to mispronounce words leading to spelling errors in their writing. Number of pronunciation spelling errors has been shown in the table below after the intervention

Table 5. Number of pronunciation spelling errors

No. of pronunciation errors	143
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2. Mixing letter sequence in words

Learners tend to misplace a letter or two in a word. The table shows the data on the transposition errors in spellings committed by each learner after the intervention.

Table 6. Data on the transposition errors in spellings committed by each learner after the intervention

No. of Transposition error	33
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3. Mixing up homophones

The table below shows the data on Homophones and Confusable errors made by each student after identified strategies were implemented to address the problem of mixing up homophones.

Table 7. Data on Homophones and Confusable errors made by each student after identified strategies were implemented to address the problem of mixing up homophones

Number of Homophone and confusable error	38
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Findings from the post intervention data

The post intervention data indicated that good use of strategies to address the spelling problems results in spelling improvement among the students. I observed that problems mixing letter sequence in words and mixing up homophones can be accounted and improved through the strategies implemented such as games like word scramble and prisoner's base. Students developed a sense of how each word is constructed and has improved their spelling ability.

However, regarding the weak phonological problem which caused pronunciation errors of spellings, we were disappointed to conclude that the strategies such as sound it out, word boxes and word sort couldn't solve this problem in students. I analyzed the factors that contributed in failure of addressing this problem and found out that word boxes were complicated for learners, they forgot the sounds of the letters such as di-graphs and tri-graphs as soon as the intervention stage was over and their native language accent overshadowed the pronunciation of words. Moreover, I observed that students prepared and were comfortable to communicate either in Dzongkha or Lhotsham kha resulting in inconsistent use of English

words and language. These major factors resulted in mispronunciation of words and even letter sounds and blended sounds of letters. Hence through this post intervention data I could observe that use of effective strategies can work in improving spelling abilities, however some strategies remain ineffective due to others factors contributing in the problem and posing as a challenge in addressing the spelling abilities issues.

Comparative Analysis of Baseline data and Post Intervention Data

By sixth week, post-intervention data were gathered to compare with baseline data to measure the effectiveness of strategies implemented to address spelling problems of the learners. Overall, I could conclude that we can improve the spelling of students through addressing their transposition error and homophones and confusable errors with the adoption of the strategies we implemented. The errors percentage of these two reduced when compared the baseline data (Transposition error: 17.7% to 15.4% and Homophones and confusable errors: 28.1% to 17.8%). However, we conclude that we could not address the pronunciation error by intervening as the number of data as well as the percentage has increased when comparing with the baseline data (54.1% to 66.8 %).

1. Weak phonological awareness

The table below shows the data on number of pronunciation errors made by learners before and after intervention.

Table 8. Data on number of pronunciation errors made by learners before and after intervention

Before Intervention	Post Intervention
131	143

Among the three types of spelling errors committed by the students, the pronunciation error which was a result of weak phonological awareness of the students was the highest (131). This indicated that the problem is severe in this case. It consisted of 54.1% which was nearly more than a half. Majority of the students had this spelling problem as they intended to spell the words according to how each letter is pronounced or either how they have heard from the adults rather than how they sound. Kat or cat as they are directly using the pronunciation of word K rather than using the letter sound of c.

I implemented strategies such as teaching sounds of letter to word boxes to mend this problem. However, through the post intervention data, I could clearly conclude that those strategies didn't worked to improve spelling ability of the students as the total number of pronunciation errors from the table shows that the number has increased from 131 to 143. This means that rather than helping children to overcome this spelling problem, we have turned this problem into a worse case. Students were confused as most of the time letter-sound correspondence is not related to spelling. Even the word boxes strategy was complicated for the learners and they even had the tendency of forgetting the letter sounds after a while. Accordingly, I determined the three intervention strategies were a failure for this spelling errors due to pronunciation of the words.

2. Mixing letter sequence in words

The table below represents number of transposition error committed before and after the intervention strategies.

Table 9. Number of transposition error committed before and after the intervention strategies

Before Intervention	Post Intervention
43	33

Before the intervention stage, transposition error was the least spelling error of the students consisting of only 17%. The data gathered after post intervention of strategies showed that using the strategies for the identified problem we succeeded in addressing the problem as there was reduction in number of transposition error committed. Through these data I drew the inference that the strategies I implemented were successful to improve student's spelling through reaching the transposition error.

3. Mixing up homophones

The table below shows the baseline data and post intervention data on homophones and confusable errors.

Table 10. Baseline data and post intervention data on homophones and confusable errors

Before Intervention	Post Intervention
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68	38
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During the baseline data analysis we found that mixing up homophones a problem with each individual but was not a big concern as it only consisted of 28%. However this problem hindered the spelling ability of the learners as they conveyed the wrong message in a sentence by using the spelling of another word which has same pronunciation as the particular word.

The data in the table clearly gives us the message that I could improve spelling of the students by addressing to the problem of mixing up homophones. Strategies such as illustrated word wall, word puzzle and prisoner bas game to teach them homophones of their grade level. The data indicated that these strategies were effective as I received a positive outcome when gathering the data after interventions

Reflection

This action research experience underscored the significance on the need for ongoing assessment, and the importance of tailoring interventions to meet the unique needs of each student. It also highlighted the positive impact of creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment, fostering a sense of curiosity and enthusiasm for language acquisition.

In the process of carrying out this action research, I was able to address the issues relating to education and could select the topic for the research based on the learning capabilities of the students. Meantime, I underwent a lot of practices. I developed the skills on how to browse

authentic and reliable information from the internet and even worked towards producing a better quality of academic writing to enhance our formal writing in the research article.

Conclusion

The action research on improving English spelling proficiency in Class IV was a transformative experience. The journey involved a blend of research, implementation, and reflection, leading to positive outcomes for both students and educators. Moving forward, this reflective process will inform future instructional practices, contributing to the continuous enhancement of spelling instruction strategies in the primary school setting.

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