

Research Article

Spelling Proficiency of Secondary School Students across Disciplines Vis-À-Vis the Attitude of Teachers towards Spelling Proficiency

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Abstract: Language proficiency includes accuracy in various aspects of the language namely vocabulary, pronunciation, expression, syntax etc. Learning English as a second language in India is more challenging due to socio-cultural influences on all aspects of language, including spellings. Due to the 'facility' of spell-checkers offered by technology and the world moving on to short message services, there seems to be lesser emphasis on spelling accuracy. This could seriously hamper the future prospects of learners. Hence the study was undertaken to find out the level of spelling proficiency of secondary school students and also to see if the attitude of Arts and Science teachers towards spelling accuracy had any influence on the same. The spelling proficiency of students was tested across disciplines, including the age appropriate Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) words. It was found that the students showed greater spelling proficiency in certain subjects than others. The correlation coefficient tested between the spelling proficiency score in a subject/discipline with the attitude towards spelling proficiency of the respective subject teachers revealed no significant correlation between the two. The study emphasizes the importance of a partnership between teachers and students to work towards building up a desirable attitude towards spellings and striving for proficiency.

Keywords: spelling proficiency, disciplines, teachers' attitude, Arts teachers, Science teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Language is an important means of understanding the environment that we live and thrive in. It influences an individual's intellectual, social, emotional and psychological dimensions of the personality. It has been defined by Oxford English Dictionary as "Words and the methods of combining them for the expression of thoughts". Robins defines it as a symbol system based on pure or arbitrary conventions... infinitely extendable and modifiable according to the changing needs and conditions of the speakers.

A language has several components to it, such as vocabulary, syntax, semantics, phonetics, etc. Proficiency in each of these components would determine linguistic proficiency. English as a language that is used for communication and taught as a subject are two different approaches. While English taught as a subject would ensure language proficiency and accuracy in the various components of the language, English as a language for communication would demand communicative and social competence over and above linguistic competence. Schools need to

emphasize on both the approaches in language instruction. A compromise on any one of the two would lead to incomplete acquisition of language.

One of the important components of English language is spellings. Research has shown the importance of spellings in academic excellence. However the focus on spellings as laid down by English teachers and other subject teachers may not be the same. While English teachers focus on the accuracy of spellings in addition to other components of the language, other subject teachers focus on the content accuracy of their respective subjects. It remains to be seen how much focus the other subject teachers would be giving on the spellings in their respective subjects. The study therefore focuses on the spelling proficiency of learners in English subject as well as in other subjects vis-à-vis the attitude of English teachers and other subject teachers towards spelling proficiency. The study also attempts to study the preparedness of Grade IX students for competitive exam namely SAT (Spelling Aptitude Test).

Quick Response Code



Journal homepage:

<http://www.easpublisher.com/easjehl/>

Article History

Received: 15.04.2018

Accepted: 05.05.2019

Published: 29.05.2019

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Review of literature done in this area dwell on the causative factors of spelling errors and also on pedagogies/approaches that could remedy the issue. Al-Bereiki Shekha A. *et al.*, (2016) in their study revealed that the highly rated causes of the misspellings as perceived by the teachers were the complexity of the English spelling system, letter(s)' combinations in English, poor reading proficiency, students' carelessness, sounds that exist in English but not in Arabic and the fact that sound-letter correspondence in English is not regular. Some suggestions for remedy of the spelling errors were breaking long words into smaller parts, drawing students' attention to silent letters, keeping personal dictionaries of challenging words, including tasks that stimulate both sound-to-letter phonic spelling and spelling of irregular words, noting down the most common spelling errors and praising the students for spelling difficult words correctly. Esther M. (2015) found that spelling errors found in students' essays include, omission of letter(s), addition of letter(s), reduplication of letter(s) among others. Bosiwah L. and Dadzie G. (2015) identified six error types – omission, addition, substitution, inversion, pronunciation and miscellaneous out of which omission errors were committed most. It also revealed that, students in the private school show some level of mastery in spelling ability than their counterparts in the public schools. The result also indicates that boys perform better than their female counterparts when it comes to spellings. Arisona N. (2013) found that there were continuous improvements on the students' mean score after applying dictation technique.

The result of a study conducted by Sekarini R. (2013) showed that "Spelling Bee" could improve the seventh graders' spelling ability, to increase their motivation and awareness of the use of correct spelling in writing, and to learn new vocabulary items. Parkash J., Hooda S. (2013) found that the English language proficiency of Government Secondary School Female teachers is more than Government Secondary School Male teachers English language proficiency; that of Private Secondary School Urban teachers is more than Private Secondary School Rural teachers English language proficiency; and that of Government Secondary School Urban teachers is more than Government Secondary School Rural teachers English language proficiency. Surtini (2013) showed that the use of Word Olympics Game pretty well improves the students' word spelling ability. Liu Y (2011) demonstrated that pupils who learn words using word lists only remember words in the short-term retention, while the sentence writing method results in greater long-term retention. Miressa M. and Dumessa M. (2011) revealed through that the origin of English Language words is one of the causes for the students' failure to spell words correctly. That means, since some of English vocabularies were borrowed from other languages, so they lack uniform and consistent spelling rules. Besides this, the discrepancy between the

pronunciation and written form of many English words along with less emphasis given to the spelling lesson contributed a lot to the students' spelling errors. Allaith Z (2009) through a study on 'Analysis of spelling performance in English among students whose first language is Arabic.' highlighted predominantly the effect of first language on spelling in English. Diniyati N. (2009) found that the use of crossword puzzles to improve students' spelling is very beneficial for the students. Kernaghan T. (2007) indicated that students used a variety of strategies to spell correctly. The primary strategy articulated was sounding out; the better spellers also used analogy and visualization.

Some studies have also shown the influence of spelling proficiency on academic and professional achievements. Racca R., Lasaten R. (2016) in their study highlighted a significant relationship between the students' English language proficiency and their academic performance in each of the subjects. Thalamkandathil F., *et al.*, (2015) found a significantly positive correlation between the scores of the English exam and the written exam and the oral exam parts respectively of the medical examination. Clement A., Murugavel T. (2015) revealed that many third-year Engineering students are still lacking confidence to face their campus placements that are to take place in their final year of study. Moreover, it has been found that the methodologies of English faculty members need to be enhanced as large number of students want more interactive sessions to improve their language skills. A study conducted on 'Impact of English Proficiency on Academic Performance of International Students' by Martirosyan N., *et al.*, (2015) revealed significant differences in language proficiency and multilingualism in relation to academic performance. Sunday O., *et al.*, (2014) found that English language influenced students' academic performance in vocational education. Aina J., *et al.*, (2013) revealed a correlation between proficiency in English language and academic performance of students in science and technical education. It was suggested that, admission into any course in science and technical education should be based on credit pass in English language.

There are many studies done on the significance of spelling proficiency in academic achievements, factors influencing spelling proficiency and also on approaches to develop spelling proficiency. However there are very few studies that highlight the role of not only English teachers but also other subject teachers in developing spelling proficiency. The present study aims to study the attitude of teachers towards developing spelling proficiency and its influence on students' spelling proficiency.

Very often it is believed that the responsibility of developing language skills in learners rests on English teachers alone. While language teachers ought to shoulder major responsibility for the development of

language proficiency, it needs to be seen if the teachers of other subjects consider this as a responsibility too. Usually it is assumed that teachers of other subjects do not really concentrate on language accuracy as their emphasis is on concept accuracy in their own subjects. In fact it is usually felt that they even compromise on language accuracy and consider it of not much significance than the conceptual knowledge of their respective subjects.

The study therefore also encompasses the attitude of teachers of other subjects towards English language proficiency in order to see if that influences the language proficiency of learners in general.

EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

Based on the literature reviewed, the study was designed and its

Objectives of the Study

The study had the following objectives;

- To ascertain the spelling proficiency of secondary school students in English subject.
- To ascertain the spelling proficiency of secondary school students in other school subjects.
- To ascertain the spelling proficiency of secondary school students in the SAT words
- To compare the spelling proficiency of secondary school students in English subject with other subjects.
- To compare the spelling proficiency of secondary school students in the various school subjects with their spelling proficiency in SAT words.
- To find out the attitude of English teachers towards spelling proficiency.
- To find out the attitude of other subject teachers towards spelling proficiency.
- To compare the attitude of Arts teachers and other subject teachers towards spelling proficiency.
- To find out if there is a correlation between the attitude of teachers towards spelling proficiency and the performance of secondary school students in the spelling proficiency test.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses for the study were as follows;

- The secondary school students have very high spelling proficiency in English subject.
- The secondary school students have very high spelling proficiency in other subjects.
- The secondary school students have very high spelling proficiency in the SAT words.
- The teachers are very high on attitude towards spelling proficiency in English.
- The other subject teachers are very high on attitude towards spelling proficiency in English.
- There is no significant difference in the spelling proficiency of secondary school students in English subject and other subjects.

- There is no significant difference in the spelling proficiency of secondary school students in various subjects and the spelling proficiency in SAT words.
- There is no significant difference in the attitude of Arts teachers and Science teachers in their attitude towards spelling proficiency.
- There is no significant correlation between the attitude of teachers towards spelling proficiency and the spelling proficiency of secondary school students.

METHODOLOGY

The Descriptive Survey Method was conducted for the study as the investigator wished to describe the extent of spelling proficiency among the learners as well as the attitude of teachers towards spelling proficiency in English subject as well as other school subjects.

Besides The Sample

An available sample of teachers and students were taken from three schools. A total of 75 teachers and 155 students were considered as a sample for data collection.

Tools

The tools used for the study were as follows;

- Spelling Proficiency Test – the test was made in the words from the subjects English, History, Science and SAT words. Each test was marked out of 50. The words selected for the test in each subject were selected from grade 8 which was a grade lesser than their present grade. The SAT words were selected from the entire list of words in accordance to the age of the students. The words were validated too.
- An Attitude towards Spellings Scale – the scale had 13 questions and it was a 4-point Likert Scale namely Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using the Descriptive and Inferential Analysis. The Descriptive Analysis included Mean and Standard Deviation, while the Inferential Analysis included ANOVA, t-test and Percent Mean.

Descriptive Analysis:

The following table 1 shows the Descriptive statistics of the scores of Grade IX students in each of the subjects and SAT.

Table.1 Descriptive Statistics of the scores on Spelling Proficiency in each of the subjects and SAT

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
English	155	30.89	7.78
Science	155	33.23	10.30
History	155	30.10	7.96
SAT	155	25.44	6.96

Interpretation:

- The students show greater spelling proficiency in Science subject than in other subjects.
- The students show least spelling proficiency in the SAT words

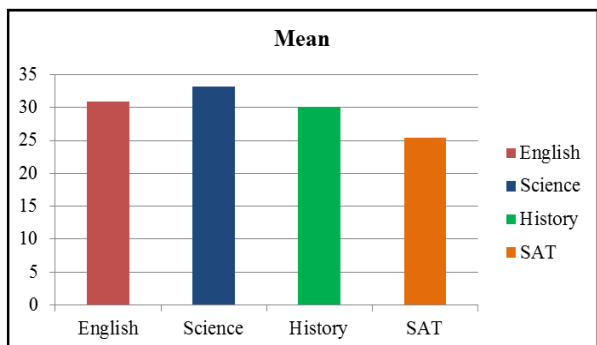


Figure.1 Graph showing the Mean Scores on the English Spelling Proficiency in the various Subjects & SAT

The following table 2 shows the Descriptive statistics of the attitude of Arts and Science teachers towards Spelling Proficiency.

Table.2 Descriptive Statistics of the Attitude of Arts and Science teachers

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
ARTS Teachers	47	41.04	5.11
SCIENCE Teachers	32	38.00	5.52

Table 4 shows the Magnitude of each of the Mean scores;

Table.4 Magnitude of Percent Mean Scores

Variable	Mean	Percent Mean	Magnitude
Spelling Proficiency in the subject English	30.89	62.53	Barely Substantial
Spelling Proficiency in the subject Science	33.23	61	Barely Substantial
Spelling Proficiency in the subject History	30.10	62	Barely Substantial
Spelling Proficiency in SAT	25.44	54.97	Moderate
Attitude of ARTS Teachers towards spellings	41.04	62.67	Barely Substantial
Attitude of SCIENCE Teachers towards spellings	38.00	40.91	Low

Interpretation:

The Mean Scores obtained in the spelling proficiency of subjects Science, English and History were barely substantial and it was lesser in case of SAT words.

INFERENCEAL ANALYSIS

I) **ANOVA:** The Inferential analysis done to test the following hypotheses was ANOVA;

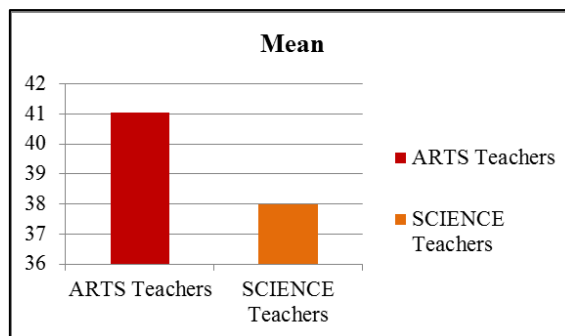


Figure.2 Graph showing the Mean Scores on the Attitude of Arts and Science Teachers towards English Spelling Proficiency

The Percent Mean Significance was calculated for each of the Mean scores and their magnitude was checked on the basis of the following Table 3. The Magnitude of the Mean Scores was calculated to know the extent of the existence of the variable.

Table.3 Magnitude of Means

PERCENT MEANS	MAGNITUDE
0 – 20	Negligible
21 – 40	Low
41 – 60	Moderate
61 – 80	Substantial
81 – 100	Very high

- There is no significant difference in the spelling proficiency of secondary school students in English subject and other subjects.
- There is no significant difference in the spelling proficiency of secondary school students in various subjects and the spelling proficiency in SAT words

TABLE 5 (A)

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4964.348	3	1654.783	23.767	.000
Within Groups	42889.290	616	69.625		
Total	47853.639	619			

TABLE 5 (B)

Multiple Comparisons						
(I) Sample	(J) Sample	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
English M=30.89	Science	-2.342	.948	.066	-4.78	.10
	History	.787	.948	.840	-1.65	3.23
	SAT	5.452*	.948	.000	3.01	7.89
Science M=33.23	English	2.342	.948	.066	-.10	4.78
	History	3.129*	.948	.006	.69	5.57
	SAT	7.794*	.948	.000	5.35	10.24
History M=30.10	English	-.787	.948	.840	-3.23	1.65
	Science	-3.129*	.948	.006	-5.57	-.69
	SAT	4.665*	.948	.000	2.22	7.11
SAT M=25.44	English	-5.452*	.948	.000	-7.89	-3.01
	Science	-7.794*	.948	.000	-10.24	-5.35
	History	-4.665*	.948	.000	-7.11	-2.22

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

II) **t-test:** To test the following hypothesis, t-test was used;

- There is no significant difference in the attitude of Arts teachers and Science teachers in their attitude towards spelling proficiency.

Table.6 Significance of Difference between the Mean Scores of Arts Teachers and Science Teachers

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	t-value at different levels (Table D from Garret H.E.)	Level of Significance
Attitude of Arts Teachers	47	41.04	5.11	2.60	0.05 level = 1.98	0.05 level
Attitude of Science Teachers	32	38.00	5.52		0.01 level = 2.65	

CONCLUSION:

The hypothesis is rejected. Thus there is a significant difference in the attitude of Arts and Science teachers towards spelling proficiency in English. The Arts teachers have a significantly better attitude towards spelling proficiency than the Science teachers.

III) **Correlation:** Pearson’s Correlation test was used to test the following hypothesis;

- There is no significant correlation between the attitude of teachers towards spelling proficiency and the spelling proficiency of secondary school students.

Table.7 Correlation Coefficients of Variables

Sr. No.	Correlating Variables	Pearson’s Coefficient of Correlation	Level of Significance
1	English spelling proficiency of total number of students in Arts subjects	Attitude of Arts teachers	0.150 Not Significant
2	English spelling proficiency of total number of students in Science subject	Attitude of Science teachers	0.071 Not Significant
3	General English spelling proficiency of total number of students	Attitude of teachers	-0.088 Not Significant

Conclusion: The hypothesis is accepted. There is no significant correlation between the attitude of teachers towards spelling proficiency and the spelling proficiency of secondary school students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the research are as follows;

- The spelling proficiency of secondary school students is significantly higher in English, Science and History than in SAT words.
- The spelling proficiency of secondary school students is significantly higher in Science than in History.
- There is no significant difference in the spelling proficiency of secondary school students between English and Science.
- There is no significant difference in the spelling proficiency of secondary school students between English and History.

- The Arts teachers are significantly higher in their attitude towards spelling proficiency than the Science teachers.
- There is no significant correlation between the attitude of teachers towards spelling proficiency and the spelling proficiency of secondary school students.

DISCUSSION BASED ON THE FINDINGS

The spelling proficiency of secondary school students in the various subjects was barely substantial. This is very discouraging considering that the students were all from English medium schools. Their performance in the SAT words is even more disturbing. It appears that the students do not have a stronghold on spellings in any of the three subjects. The students have scored significantly lower in the spellings of the SAT words than their own subject words. This means that the students are not really being prepared in schools to face such competitive examinations. One of the objectives of teaching English is to develop spelling accuracy besides developing other linguistic proficiencies. Most competitive exams for those aspiring to study abroad would look for spelling proficiency besides other linguistic proficiencies. However the secondary school students do not seem to be eligible to qualify for the competitive exams. There would need to be interventions to consciously promote spelling proficiency among learners.

There is a difference in the attitude of teachers towards English spelling proficiency. The Arts teachers have a better attitude than the Science teachers. However there isn't any significant correlation between the attitude of teachers towards spellings and the performance of students in the spelling proficiency test. It could probably be an indication that the teachers are not really concerned about the level of spelling proficiency of students. They rarely contribute to the spelling proficiency of students. There appears to be an attitude of indifference towards spellings by teachers as well as students. This is quite alarming and teachers would need to make specific interventions to enhance the spelling proficiency of students and it is not just the role of English teachers but also of every subject teacher.

Focused strategies would need to be implemented by teachers of all disciplines in this direction. All subject teachers would need to make concerted efforts to enhance the spelling proficiency of students as their future success would depend on that. Spelling proficiency of students is the responsibility of all teachers and not English teachers alone.

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