

## Diagnosing students Spelling problems and presenting rationale solutions at Aljouf University (PYP)

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### Abstract:

*The study aims to identify the spelling problems of Aljouf university students and find out rationale solution for them. The study was conducted in the University of Aljouf, preparatory year section, Algurayat. The descriptive approach which analyses the contents is used overall the study. The sample of the study was chosen randomly among the whole population targeted. The subject were asked to write freely on whatever topic they want, the ideas is to make them write freely apart from the fear of committing mistakes. The subject work later was analysed and discussed and the findings are: Mother tongue interference, Complexity of English (Irregularity and inconsistency) of English spelling, Weakness in recalling and memorization, Learners are unaware of spelling rules, keyboard dependence and lack of practicing English spelling. Accordingly, the study recommended: instructors should give more explanation about the English language system and how is it different form the students' mother tongue, students should have more practice on regular and inconsistent spelling points, recalling and memorization should be given more concentration and intensive exercises, instructors should give more focus on spelling rules and encourage students to revise and follow up and student shouldn't depends heavily on computing typing tools (for example: keyboard).*

**Key words:** Spelling problems, students, Aljouf University

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Writing is one of the most important skills compared to speaking, reading and listening. It is nice representation of the language. It is very productive and expressive. It represents the production of thinking and mind. It enables us to show our ideas, thoughts, opinions, attitudes and other different contributions. Writing in addition to that, represents our personality and impressions since each person has his own character, even twins who are supposed to be identical. Writing is unique, there are no two alike pieces of writing even if they are written by the same person, and of the same genre and purpose, each piece carries its own characteristics. Regardless of the genre you are writing, your writing should be clear, neat and understood. In order to make your writing neat and clear, you should take care of certain points which are very important in presenting writing in an accepted shape. The most important points of these are spelling. Spelling is the bones of the text, unless you manage spelling system of the language your writing will become too difficult and tiring. It is the cornerstone of writing presentation. Spelling is real symbols (alphabets) of the language that create words which carry the content of the written text, and having distinction in writing begins from acquiring, remembering and understanding this alphabets of the language and how it works. To write correctly, you have to spell correctly in the first place. Spelling does not only contribute to writing, but also to reading, since it relate directly to it. Reading will be a hard job for learners if they are weak speller. Thus, we can say that good speller are good write, and vice versa. Since reading is a piece of writing in the first place, good spellers again are good writer. The paper is an attempt to investigate spelling problems of preparatory year program at Aljouf University in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The idea is to identify these problems and suggest ways to help students overcome these problems.

## **THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS:**

It is an issue for long time, teachers and family helpers keep annoyed and worried about the students' spelling and the way they handwrite. Students misspell words and have serious problems with spelling, they face problems when remember or recall letters. Also students' handwriting is poor and lack organization and neatness. These problems of spelling and handwriting affect negatively on their performance which creates difficulties for their instructors to understand their message and consider their problem. The researcher himself as a teacher at Aljouf University, preparatory year program, has experienced this problems and it kept triggering him to investigate the issue. Spelling problems can be due to omission, addition, substitution and transposition of the sounds or letters. Some students also fail to use the rules correctly, and rely on their tongue when they transmit ideas to a target language quality of teaching, weak approaches of teaching, lack of follow up, absence of motivation, etc. Handwriting problems can be due to teaching approaches again, posture, pen hold, follow up, ect. The study aims to find out these spelling problems that "pyp" students' face and suggest rational ways of solution.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:**

It is a wish that the study benefit the students in the first place, instructors, family helpers, syllabus designers, and give feedback to the teachers and managements of the secondary schools since they are the students' previous level.

## **OBJECTIVES:**

The objective of the paper is to find spelling and handwriting problems of (PYP) students when write in English language, and find rationale solutions for them.

## **QUESTIONS**

1/ what are the spelling that (PYP) face when writing in English language?

2/ what are different rationale solutions that the study can offer?

## **HYPOTHESES:**

1/ there are many spelling problems that students of (PYP) encounter.

2/ there are many rationales solutions that the study can offer according to the problems being found.

## **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY:**

The study is run on the students of (PYP) at Aljouf university, Alqurayst male section, and it will be conducted in the first semester of 2014/2015.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

The issues of spelling are big. It needs volumes to cover but the study attempts to shed the light on it and motivate furthers studies and paper to rush. Al – Saedi (1989:17) defines spelling as "putting the elements (letters) of each word in the right sequence. Thus shows that avoiding putting letter in wrong sequence generates non words. Graham and Miller (1979) also defined spelling as "the ability to recognize, recall, reproduce or obtain orally or in written form the correct sequence of letters in words" (p. 2). One must not only have spellings of words stored in memory but also be able to retrieve it without help from visual cues (Lerner, 1997).That indicates the fact that spelling is basics for writing. Spelling is very important for everybody to communicate his ideas. Al- Khaffaji and Al-

Shayib (1987: 7) state that "to spell correctly makes written communication easier while misspelling might lead to interruption of communication and misunderstanding". Good spelling helps conveying the meaning of the text. On contrary, bad spelling hinders understanding the ideas. Spelling errors are ones of the most common errors that hinder writing, so developing student spelling helps them to write freely without the fear of committing errors. Language skills influence each other, reading influence writing since reading is a piece of writing in the first place. (Koda, 2005; Randall, 2007; Fender, 2008) points that bad spellers are usually bad reader. This indicates that to be proficient reader you have to be proficient speller, and to achieve this you need to exert more effort and pay more attention to spelling. (Moats, 2005/2006) pointed that proficiency in spelling actually supports reading. This clearly demonstrates the integration between spelling and reading, therefore, students who struggle with reading are advised to know how to segment, blend, and spell phonetically regular words using phoneme-grapheme correspondences (Uhry & Shepherd,1993), that is why spelling matters a lot in learning process.

## **SPELLING TEACHING:**

At times, spelling has been marginalized in education, presumably because teachers either place more importance on other reading and writing's skills or believe that the English language spelling system is too irregular and unpredictable to make instruction profitable (Simonsen & Gunter, 2001). However, it seems clearly that spelling is the cornerstone for all language skills. Mastering spelling assists to mastering writing. Therefore, unless you master spelling it is difficult to master writing and then the communication will be a hard job. Spelling is so indispensable. To teach spelling, you need to know the nature of English language itself. English language

has 26 letters of the alphabet that can produce approximately 44 sounds (phonemes) that are represented in 250 different spellings (Ball & Blachman, 1991). English language is said to be irregular, inconsistent and illogical. That is because English is not one to one correspondence, it doesn't sound as it looks. Hasan (2000, 3) states that English is not a phonetic language, i.e., it is not written as it is spoken or it does not have closer phoneme – grapheme correspondence. Therefore, relating the sound to the word can generate strange word. For example the words (aisle), (know) (laugh) don't match the way they look and English is full of these example. Although a large amount of the words in English obey certain rules still there many of them don't follow particular rules, thus, makes learning spelling a difficult task. George Bernard Shaw put it most succinctly in his famous spelling of the word 'fish.' Using the sound system of the English language, he demonstrated that the word 'fish' can be spelled as 'ghoti' using 'gh' as in rough, 'o' as in women, 'ti' as in nation. This example shows how English is irregular and illogical at some examples. Therefore, several people including Benjamin Franklin and George Bernard Shaw himself are known to have made efforts to simplify the English language (Thomas, 1974). They recommended writing (fether) instead of (feather) and (no) instead of (know) and some examples alike, as a trial to ease the language system and create morphophonemic harmony, relating words to sounds.

Due to the fact that English is irregular, inconsistent and illogical knowing the nature of the language priors it's teaching. Surveying the spelling nature, there are four points should be given more concentration and care if learners need to be proficient spellers. First let's learners know that:

**Phonological knowledge:** how words and letter combinations sound. the names of letters, the sounds they represent and the ways in which letters can be grouped to make different sounds e.g. vowels, consonants, consonant blends, word families

**Visual knowledge:** the way words and letter combinations look. There is no consistent approach to what English does with borrowed words. Either visual knowledge or etymological is used with this regard. (focus on literacy spelling 1998) The best way to learn how to spell the common word (two) correctly is simply to learn that it looks like that, relying on visual knowledge.

**Morphemic knowledge:** the meaning of words and the way words take different spellings when they change form it is illustrated in (focus on literacy spelling 1998) as follows:

- how to use morphemes to assist them to spell words
- how compound words are constructed
- knowledge of suffixes and prefixes and the generalisations that can be made and the rules that can be generated about adding them to words.

**Etymological knowledge:** the derivations of words. The origin of the word, where the word comes from. The best way to learn how to spell psychology correctly is to learn that it starts with the Greek letter psi and has within it the other Greek letter chi, the same letter as in Christmas. This demonstrates the importance of etymological knowledge, not only for older students, but also for students at any stage of learning when they need to learn the spelling of a particular word.

## **SPELLING PROBLEMS:**

Spelling is difficult for many people, but there is much less research on spelling to tell us just how many people spell poorly or believe they spell poorly. Bahloul (2007) indicates that English spelling is a problem for all learners, including native speakers. I strongly agree with him because there are many examples proves his claim, so spelling problems annoy not only nonnative learners, but native learners as well. Many

researches reached to great values in analyzing spelling errors, because analyzing these errors help a lot in developing good ways of instruction suits each problem. Book and Harter (1929) pointed out that although it is difficult to determine the causes behind spelling errors, they cannot be prevented unless their causes are accurately determined and clearly understood by teachers. Some of the most common spelling causes that lead to committing spelling mistakes are:

**Development of stage:** some of the spelling are said to have relation to the development of the stage and mostly committed by children for example writing (frist) instead of (first).

**Irregularity of English language spelling:** some of English language are irregular and that is because there is no on – to one correspondence between the written word and its pronunciation, Henderson (1981) , (break) versus (cream), (made) versus (maid) are good examples of irregularity of English spelling and English es full of this kinds of examples. Mother tongue: Corder (1993) argues that those speakers whose mother tongue has more similarities to the target language are likely to find it easier to acquire than other speakers whose mother tongue is more “distant linguistically” (p. 21). Brown (2000) and Saville-Troike (2006) refer to the influence that the mother tongue may have on L2 acquisition as transfer. Learners use their previous knowledge to solve their current problems, so they use their mother tongue to learn L2 spelling and their mother tongue influences learning positively or negatively depends on the similarities and differences between the two languages. The abovementioned causes of spelling problems are to the large extent the main causes of spelling errors and problems. Consequently, learners commit a lot of learning problems – which spelling problems one of them - later during their learning process. These are mostly the main causes for the spelling problems committed by the learners. They can be easily solved by designing materials and using



approach bearing in the roots of the problems. The other problems of spelling are mainly due to the fact that students are unaware of spelling rules, or laziness which are easy to overcome.

### **METHODOLOGY:**

The methodology of the study in this part is divided to the subject, data gathering, tool, procedure and data analysis.

#### **Subject:**

The sample of the study consists of 30 students from Aljouf University. All of them are students from Preparatory year program (PYP). They are supposed to go to medical fields: medicine, pharmacy, dental, laboratories and so on. Their ages range from 19 to 20. All the students are from Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and of course their mother's tongue is Arabic.

#### **Tools:**

The study adopted content analysis. The work of the students is analysed and described.

#### **Procedures:**

The subjects were asked to write freely on whatever subject they want. The idea is to express their thoughts in any issue without constraints. The researcher targeted the spelling so no need to impose students to write on certain topic. The composition session was done in the class room. It took one hour time. The work of the subject was read, marked and reviewed twice to have logical and convincing results.

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:**

Error analysis is a means of finding a shorter way to diagnose the learners' difficulties in foreign language learning (Nickel,

1971:6). The analysis of errors can help to find the weaknesses as well as the positive sides of the learners' work. It also assists teachers to create a remedy for the points of weaknesses and build on the good sights as well so as to push the learning further towards its goals. The analysis of the students' spelling errors showed that most of the students' spelling errors relate to the vowel sounds, consonants sounds errors are very few compared with vowel. This demonstrate that student have a clear problems with acquiring and learning vowel sound of the English language. That might attribute to the effect of the mother tongue or the way student are taught, since some of teachers themselves have problems with pronouncing vowel sounds. Spelling errors are also can be ascribed to the way learners pronounce or being unaware of the English spelling rules. Due to this the spelling errors are organized as follows:

**Substitution:** (swemming, Tradichenl, Nit (not), Witching/wotching, Brather/ brether, Joues, Melk, Univirsty, Soldear, Becouse, Sumtime, famelly, Wan(one), Chana, Salf, Groub, Studant, Hosbetal, Reelity).

Here learners try to substitute a letter or some letters with other letter or letters to match the way they pronounce. Learners relate orthography to their pronunciation versions. The pronunciation of the word (traditional) as (Tradichenl) is clear that the subject relates (ch) only to the way they pronounce this diagraph. With regard to the (group), some learners pronounce as (groub) this is due to the mother tongue interference since there is no (p) sound in Arabic language.

**Omission:** Restarant, Towr, (Wether, wither/wather),brechfast, Medum, Frinds, Nurs, Hose, Spake/spek, Univirsty, Fotball, Busnesman, Lik, Famli/famelly, Languge, Beuteful, Expensv, Bred, Usally, Wekend, Btwee, Reelity. With regard to this area, errors show that students omit one letter or more. Although English is inconsistent and irregular, one sound can be

pronounced differently, as it is explained in the literature review section, learners also show that they have problems with recalling and memorizing spelling. Some of the subject pronounce (breakfast) as (breckfast). In addition to the omission of (a) learner added (c) to (k), this indicates learners are not aware of irregularity of English spelling and the visual knowledge.

**Unaware of the spelling rules:** Studed, Marrid, Contreys, Shoping: having look to this section, it is clear that learners are not aware of the English spelling rules. They don't understand in what situation they replace (y) to (i), and letters doubling rules in single syllable, ends with consonant preceding by one vowel. Although learners replaced (y) to (i) in the word (marrid), they failed to write ( e ) after (i) which ensure that learners are unaware of the spelling rules.

**Addition:** Usining, Movise, Meak, Froom, famelly, Doctore. Learners here add unnecessary letter(s). Although some example here are influenced with the way learners pronounce, some examples showed learners' laziness and carelessness, which are the result of being influenced by the direct correction of keyboard spelling mistakes when typing.

**Disordering:** Pincel, Deseir. Learners write some letters in a disorder presentation which creates meaningless words. This shows that learners are weak in recalling and memorizing.

**Unrecognizable Words:** Tehor (teacher), Hobbuing, Caracture. This few errors show that learners write the way they pronounce. They relate the morpheme to phoneme.

## **CONCLUSION**

In light to the data analysis and discussion related to the findings and hypotheses the following conclusion can be presented. Students of Aljouf University face difficulties with spelling. This appeared clearly in the weak versions of spelling analysed and discussed above. These spelling errors can be attributed to the following:

- 1/ Mother tongue interference
- 2/ Complexity of English (Irregularity and inconsistency) of English spelling.
- 3/ Weakness in recalling and memorization.
- 4/ Learners are unaware of spelling rules.
- 5/ keyboard dependence
- 6/ lack of practicing English writing and the way students are tested or examined doesn't challenge and motivate writing or mastering spelling.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

With regard to the conclusion drawn, the study recommends the following:

- 1/ instructors should give more explanation about the English language system and how is it different form the students' mother tongue.
- 2/ students should have more practice on regular and inconsistent spelling points.
- 3/ recalling and memorization should be given more concentration and intensive exercises.
- 4/ instructors should give more focus on spelling rules and encourage students to revise and follow up.
- 5/ student shouldn't depend heavily on computing typing tools (for example: keyboard).

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