A Comparative Study to Know the Causes of Spelling Errors Committed by Learners of English at Elementary Level in Distract Kasur and Lahore in Pakistan

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Abstract:

Some education experts said that a learner should be mastered in four major language skills. Writing is one of those basic skills and learners often face difficulty to master in and commit errors in this skill, especially in the area of spelling. Spelling skills of words is very important factor in writing skill. It is fact that English language has complex system because it is not a syllabic language and has layers of sound, pattern, meaning of one word due to influence of other languages that's why second language learners have trouble to master in this skill. Therefore, the researchers conducted to this study in order to find out the types and causes of errors which learners make in their written work. The purpose of this study also was to identify the best teaching strategy which may be useful in learning spellings of words. The sample in this study was 100 students of 8th grade and 20 teachers who were teaching them by using English as medium of instruction. Students' writing samples were collected and analyzed and teacher's information were taken by using questionnaire. The results gained from the analysis of students' writing samples and teachers' questionnaire have revealed four types of errors which were made by 8th grade students and three actual causes of committing spelling

errors. This result also suggests the three most important activities which may be useful in learning spelling skills.

Key words: Investigation, nature, causes, spelling errors, learner, English, elementary level

1. Introduction

The English language plays a vital role as an international language in every field of life especially in education. So it is the need of people to be able to communicate with other in English. This communication can be in either spoken or written. Writing is an essential part in the process of learning any foreign language. In spoken no one need to worried about the correct form of English while in writing incorrect form even one single misspelled letter can change a word and alter the whole meaning of a text so writing should have correct form of English words and their correct spelling. In the popular view, correct spelling is a sign of education. On the other hand, bad spelling simply looks ill (Fagerberg, 2006). Cook (1997) also says that effective spelling is important for users of a second language because of its social overtones, if for no other reason. Yet the amount of attention given to it in research is minimal.

Croft (1983) pointed out that accurate spelling is necessary for effective writing and this is only possible justification for learning. As the focus of attention in this study is on English spelling, Fagerberg (2006) states English spelling is undoubtedly a difficult matter, and learners around the world have trouble getting the letters right. It is a bitter fact that learning a second language cannot be separated from creating errors. Even then native speaker are not free from committing errors. Learners are still producing spelling errors in large number in their writing after a lot of drilling and training in the schools and institutes. Even a teacher cannot

understand whatever they want to communicate in the form of writing. Wrong spelling causes bad communication between the students and the teachers even between writers and readers. Learners who spell correctly can express their feelings and ideas more clearly than learners with poor spelling skills (Peters, 1985). Good spelling can also increase learners' confidence in communicating with others in written form. So there should be awareness of importance of use of correct spelling in writing among learners.   Spelling errors are also helpful to give information about three aspects of process of language learning, firstly spelling errors can tell us about students' interlanguage(the type of learners' language which shows the state of proficiency which is achieved in the target language at a given time) Secondly, they can reflect the influence of the 1st language on the learners' second language performance and finally they can provide clues about the cognitive state of learners e.g. dyslexia, cognitive damage or illness which may cause of spelling errors.

Pakistani learners also have difficulties with spelling especially they face difficulty in association between sound and letters and with English vowels Cook (1991, 1) asserts that "unlike native speakers, students may not know the actual system of English, and will appear to use the wrong letter" so this research survey focused on spelling errors committed by learners of elementary level of public and private sectors from two different districts named Lahore and Kasur.

1.1 Objectives of the study

This study will be intended to:

1. Find out the types of error, factors that become the causes and difficulty for students
2. Identify the sources of spelling errors in writing composition.
3. find out the most dominant errors within students' written work

4. Investigate the useful activities or teaching strategies which help in learning spelling skills?
5. Find out differences between the performance of students' of public and private sector.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What type of spelling error do the students committed in English?
2. Which words do learners most frequently misspell?
3. What are the causes of doing spelling errors?
4. Do focused activities help learner improve their spelling skills?

1.3 What do we mean by spelling?

Various writers define spelling differently. For instance, spelling is defined as the act of forming words correctly from individual letter (Hornby, 2000). This means spelling has its rules to form words correctly, that is, letters must appear in correct sequence to be meaningful; otherwise it will lead to spelling errors. We can say that Spelling is a study of Phonics as related to the grouping of words for spelling such as an, man, can etc. it is the study of Syllabication because one learn to divide words and spell by syllabication such as: mul-ti-pli-ca-tion; dic-ta-tion; re-la-tion. And the study of Prefixes suffixes as well because one can also learn what they mean and how to use them. It is the study of learning pronunciation of words correctly to spell correctly.

1.4 Why spelling is an Important Skill?

Spelling is an important activity in the process of learning a foreign language. 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".Spelling is a linguistic skill. Learners should have good phoneme (sound) and word awareness skills.

Learners should be taught that how the speech sounds (phonemes) of the language correspond to the letters (graphemes) that make up words termed the "alphabetic principle." These skills are helpful in reading and spelling skills.. Spelling skill also depends on one's ability to find the meaningful roots in words (e.g., suffixes and prefixes), know word origins, and remember letters and words. This skill is referred to as orthographic memory. Rather than rote memorization of spelling lists, teaching spelling requires direct instruction in the language forms (i.e., morphology), sound structures, word meanings, and origins.

On the other hand, according to Al-Hamash (1974,114) "spelling is necessary for composition and composition writing strengthens the mastery of correct spelling though spelling is different from composition." He adds that the mastery of spelling demands the mastery of English spelling patterns at the level of recognition (reading) and at the level of production (writing).

Sounds, letters, word parts, word meaning, and word history are those elements which play the important role in learning to spell the words of English language. Spelling is a reflection of one's word knowledge. The more learners know about words and the more words learners know how to spell, they will be able to tackle new and challenging words. It has been noted and many experts also said that because of correspondence between sound and letters of words, their origin and meanings, learners overgeneralize the one rule to other words and this thing may cause creating errors.

1.5 Definition of Error

Throughout the history of English Language Teaching, a number of definitions of errors have been proposed by different experts. Basically, these definitions may share the same meaning; yet there is much to be considered in terms of their differences. Some scholars are in favor of defining errors basing

on their degree of frequency. Cunning worth (1987, p.87) sees errors as "systematic deviation from the norms of the language being learned".

Errors are the flawed side of learned speech or writing. They are those parts of speaking or writing that deviate from some selected form of mature language performance (Dulay et al, 1982, 138).

Edge(1997, p.18) defines "errors" in a simple way as followed "If a student cannot self-correct a mistake in his or her own English, but the teacher thinks that the class is familiar with the correct form, we shall call that sort of mistake an error." This indicates that errors are made unconsciously. According to Corder(1967), an error is characterized with two features namely systematic deviancy and learner's deficiency to self-correct.

1.6 Mistakes vs. Errors

It is vital that a clear distinction between mistakes and errors be presented. There are two widespread trends of view related to the differentiation between errors and mistakes. One states that mistakes are a cover term for errors whilst the other claims the opposite.

Lee (1990), an advocate of the later perspective, sees "errors" from two different points of view namely psycholinguistics/ or Native speaker speech and Applied linguistics/ or English Language Teaching (ELT).

1.7 Role of errors in English Language Teaching

There are many methods which are used to teach English and every method has different views towards the role of "errors". According to experts' views "errors are to be avoided at any expense and they are negative manifestation of learner's performance."

The experts of Audio-lingual method argue that a great effort should be made to prevent learner's errors. on the other

hand, supporters of modern language teaching approaches like Communicative Language Teaching   see error as an indispensable part of the learning process which proves that real learning is taking place and that error is an indication of learner's efforts in producing the language (Corder,1967 & Brown, 1980). Corder (1967) also argues that errors are the most important source of information revealing that learners are organizing knowledge available to them to produce the language at a particular point of time. Edge (1997) is also the supporter of this kind of thought.. He regards errors as necessary learning steps which are evident for the fact that students are learning the language successfully. By the same token, Bartram, M & Walton, R (2001, p.11) see errors as "an inescapable…natural part of language learning" and that they are "part of the learning process: not the wrong turning on the road of mature language use but actually part of the road itself." These two scholars consider the process of learning a second language similar to that of a baby learning his mother tongue.

1.8 Surface structured taxonomy

This taxonomy concentrates on the ways in which surface structures are altered. Using this taxonomy m Dulay et al. (1982, 150) divide errors into the following categories: (1) omission, (2) additions, (3) misformation, and (4) misordering. Omission is typical for the early stages of L2 acquisition, whereas in the intermediate stages misformation, misordering, or overuse are much more common (Dulay et al. 1982, 155)

Omission errors

- Omission Errors refer to the absence of a morpheme or a group of morpheme that must appear in well formed utterance. There is evidence that grammatical morphemes (e.g. noun and verb inflections, articles, prepositions) are omitted more often that content morphemes which carry the meaning (Dulay et al. 1982,

154-155). For example, in the phrase "I still not know" has omission of auxiliary "do" error.

- Addition Errors are the opposite of omission errors like they are characterized by the presence of a morpheme or group of morpheme that must not appear in well formed utterance. Dulay et al. divide them into three categories: (a) double markings, as in *Did you went there?, (b) regularization, e.g.* sheeps, *cutted, and (c) simple addition, which contains the rest of additions (1982, 156-158).

- Misformation Errors refer to "the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure" (Dulay et al. 1982, 158). For instance in the phrase "the way he feeling" has misformation of the verb. The correct phrase should be "the way he feels'.

- Misordering Errors are characterized by an utterance where a morpheme or a group of morpheme is incorrectly placed, as in *I get up at 6 o'clock always, where always is misordered (Dulay et al. 1982, 162).

2. Methodology

This chapter focuses on a detailed depiction of the methodology applied in this research paper. Specifically, the size and characteristics of the participants altogether with data collection instruments, pilot study in order to test instruments and administration of these instruments.   The research design used in this study is descriptive design because descriptive research design is a valid method for researching specific subjects and as a precursor to more quantitative studies. The basic reason for carrying out descriptive research is to identify the causes of spelling errors committed by second language learners.

       The target population of this study was the elementary students along with teachers who were teaching elementary

learners at public and private schools from two districts Lahore and Kasur. The purpose of choosing public and private sectors from two different districts is that researchers are eager to see the difference between learning and teaching process which is adopted in those sectors. The sample consisted of students of 8th class from both private and public sectors. The purpose behind this is that those students had been learning English since last 2 years especially in government schools but this is not the case with Private sectors.

The researchers selected 25 students from each school mentioned above by using random sampling technique. Besides this, 20 teachers who were teaching English and teaching other subjects using English as the medium of instruction were also included in the study using availability sampling technique.

2.1 Accessible Population
The study population from which the researchers drew their samples is from following schools
- Government Pilot Secondary School for Girls. Wahdat Colony, Lahore.
- Syed School System, Model Town, Lahore.
- District Public School, Kasur.
- Government Girls High School, Kasur.

2.2 Instruments development and validation
In order to conduct this study, the researchers employed two data collection instruments namely Survey questionnaire and test for students. The questionnaire designed for teachers has three parts. The first part provides the general information about teachers like their names, gender, organization etc. the second part of this questionnaire consists of three rating questions which highlighted the teachers' views on types, causes and sources of doing spelling errors, it provided the information about useful activities which help in learning spellings. The third part is based on Likert scale consists on

following five rating under one statement;
1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Not decided 4= Strongly Disagree 5= Disagree

The data for this study are collected also based on the result of the students' test that given as the instrument. This tool consists on three parts. The first part contains 15 items consist of multiple choices, in second part a paragraph is given with incorrect spellings which students have to mark and replace with correct spellings and the third part contains short essay type question in which students have to respond in writing. To test the reliability and validity of the instruments, the researchers collected the data from 15 students and five teachers by using convenient sampling. After the first pilot study the reliability of questionnaire designed for teachers was .734 which allowed the researchers to conduct the study but the reliability of 2nd instrument (Test for students) was found .574 so after the result of pilot study, the questions of instrument was revised and some items were either deleted or improved especially those which were difficult to understand for students. Then second pilot study was undertaken to try out the revised questions and at this time the reliability was .713 which allowed the researchers to administer the instrument at large scale.

Table 1
Exercise 2

Variable	No. of respondents	% of respondents	Cumulative Percent
no. of all correct responses	8	8.0	8.0
no. of 7 correct responses	9	9.0	17.0
no. of 6 correct responses	14	14.0	31.0
no. of 5 correct responses	7	7.0	38
no. of 4 correct responses	43	43.0	81.0
no. of 3 correct responses	13	13.0	94.0
no. of 2 correct responses	4	4.0	98.0
no. of 1 correct response	2	2.0	100.0
no. of all incorrect response	0	0.0	

Total	100	100.0	

Table 1 indicates that the total number and the percentage of the correct responses are only 8% whereas those who gave seven correct responses are 9%, 14% for six, 7% for five, 43% for four, 13% for three, 4% for two and 2% for one correct response. There is no one who gave all incorrect response. As indicated in Table 4.16, the highest number of respondents 43% marked only five misspelled words and wrote with correct spellings. The rate of incorrect responses reveals that the students are incompetent in using English spellings. The researchers found out that some students also marked those words which haven't wrong spellings and wrote them with incorrect spellings. Example of such kind of work are given below;

Figure 1

As indicated in this sample, the student marked the word "movie" as a misspelled word because according to him the correct spelling is "*movie". Same the case with the word "dad". As the result, the researchers found that students' are not proficient in using correct spelling in their writing.

In order to see the difference of performance of students of private and public sector, the researchers compare the work of students belong to private and public sector.

Following sample belong to student of private sector;

Figure 2

As indicated in this example, the student performed well just he committed two mistakes. He replaced "gowith" with "growth". Though he used correct spelling but it seems that he didn't give attention to the sentence because this word makes no sense according to the context. Secondly he marked "that" as incorrect spelling and wrote the same spelling below. On the whole, his work was good.

Following sample belong to student of public sector;

Figure 3

As indicated in above sample, the student didn't commit any spelling error. Though she didn't marked and wrote some words which were misspelled like "too", "gowith". This shows that this

student is somehow proficient in using correct spelling.

To sum up, the researchers found no significant difference between the performances of students of both sectors. Because in private sectors, some students performed well and some didn't. same the case with students of public sectors.

To analyze the students' written work, the researchers used following procedure;

- Finding out the spelling errors in respondents' written work;
- Finding out the percentage of errors of spellings according to the types of errors;
- Finding out the most dominant error of spelling in their writing paragraph;

A table is given below in which the researchers determined the percentage of errors

Table 2

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Exercise 3

Types of errors	Percentage
Omission of letter	11.0%
Addition of letter	7.0%
Reversal of letter	4.0%
Past tense (irregular)	6.0%
Mispronunciation	20.0%
Wrong format	19.0%
Wrong punctuation	20.0%
Wrong article	14.0%

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Table 2 shows that the dominant errors which students made are mispronunciation and wrong punctuation with the portion of 20%. Then it comes to the wrong format and wrong article with 19% and 14% respectively. Omission of letter occurred with 11%. The errors which are found in low percentage are addition of letter with 7%, past tense with 6% and reversal of letter with 4%. An example of students' work is given in order
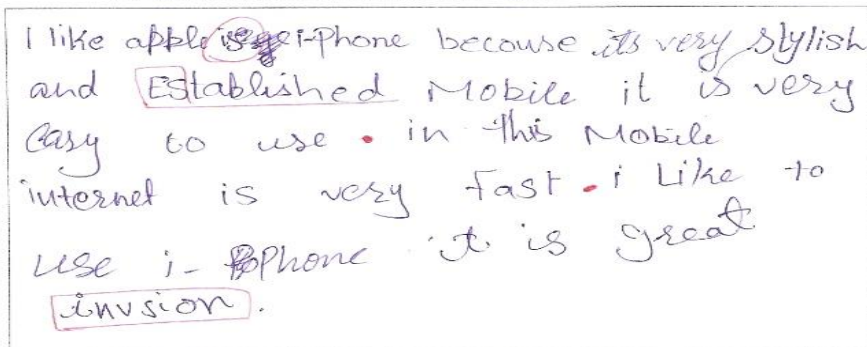
to illustrate it clearly;

Figure 3

Comparison of Students' Performance of Public Private Sector

Table 3

Organization

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Public sector	10	50.0	50.0
Private sector	10	50.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	

Table 3 shows that same number of respondents was selected from public and private sectors.50% of respondents from public and 50% of respondents from private sectors.

Table 4

District

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Lahore	10	50.0	50.0
Kasur	10	50.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	

Table 4. shows that 50% of respondents were selected from

Lahore district and 50% from Kasur district.

PART II

Table
1. How often and which type do your students make spelling errors?

Types of errors	1 (never)	2	3	4	5(always)
Omission of letter	10%	20%	25%	30%	15%
Addition of letter	25%	40%	20%	15%	0%
Reversal of letter	35%	15%	5%	5%	0%
Past tense (irregular)	25%	35%	10%	15%	15%
Mispronunciation	0%	20%	30%	35%	15%
Wrong format	35%	35%	25%	5%	0%
Wrong punctuation	15%	20%	20%	25%	20%
Wrong article	5%	15%	60%	20%	0%

Table 4.1 shows that 70% teachers agreed that their students make errors in omission of letters, 35% agreed with addition of letters, only 10% of respondents agreed with reversal of letter, 40% were with past tense, 80% with mispronunciation, 30% with wrong format, 55% with wrong punctuation and 80% teachers thought that students use wrong article. As indicated in table 4.22, the types of error which occur mostly in students' written work is mispronunciation and wrong article with 80% then omission of letter (70%), wrong punctuation (55%) and then past tense with 40%. The errors for which teachers thought they are not common in students' written work are addition of letter, wrong format and reversal of letter with the portion of 35%, 30% and 10% respectively. A bar chart is given below to illustrate it more clearly;
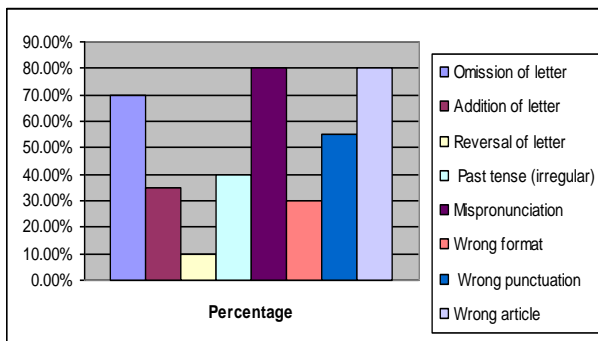
Types of Errors

Figure 4.1

Table 4.2
2. What are the sources/causes of students' spellings errors?

Major sources	1 (least significant)	2	3	4	5((most significant)
Influence of 1st language	0%	10%	40%	25%	25%
Ignorance of rules restriction	20%	40%	35%	5%	0%
Incomplete application of rules	0%	45%	40%	10%	5%
False concepts	60%	20%	20%	0%	0%
Learning environment	0%	5%	15%	30%	50%
Lack of teaching aids	0%	25%	70%	5%	0%
Communication strategy	75%	10%	10%	5%	0%

Table 4.2 indicates that the leading cause of spelling errors is ineffective learning environment because 95% of respondents are agree with it then it comes to the influence of first language with the 90% of respondents. 80% of respondents think that lack of teaching material is the major cause of errors. Then incomplete application of rules with 55% and ignorance of rules restriction with 40% come in the list of causes of errors. The least significant causes are false concepts and communication strategy because only 20% of respondents are in favor with

false concept and 15% with communication strategy. A bar chart is given below to illustrate it more clearly;
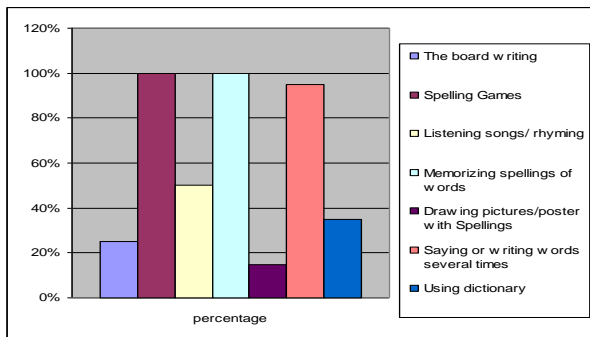
Findings
Students Test

- Little more than half of the respondents 53% attempted the question "The car lost one of ___ wheels' correct. The remaining either attempted wrong 38% or did not reply 9%. This means that almost half of the respondents don't know the use of "its".
- Half of respondents 59% attempted the question "The same problem happened _____" correct. The remaining either attempted wrong 37% or didn't reply 4%. This means majority of the students know the correct spelling and format of "everyday".
- Only 11% of respondents responded correctly of "Kashif remained _____ for the rest of the lesson" while majority of the respondents 69% attempted this question wrong and the remaining 20% of the respondents didn't respond. This means that majority of the students don't know the correct spelling of the word "quiet".
- 37% of respondents attempted the question "Everything is going to be _____" correct while the remaining either attempted it wrong 38% or didn't reply 25%.This table demonstrates that majority of respondents don't

know the spelling and correct format of "all right".

- Only 15% of the respondents marked the correct option of "Please, _____ my excuse" while half of respondents 49% marked wrong option as correct answer and the remaining 36% didn't reply. It means majority of students are very much confused regarding the spellings of "accept" and misguided by the pronunciation of the word.
- Majority of the respondents 70% know the right answer of "The _____ were going to school yesterday" while 30% attempted this question wrong. This means mostly students are aware of right use of ""kids".
- Only 21% of the respondents attempted the question "Their company used to offer _____ services on that field" correct while the remaining 45% attempted it wrong and 34% didn't reply. This means majority of the students don't know the correct spelling of the word "professional".

Teachers' Questionnaire

Majority of the teachers agreed that their students make errors in omission of letters, 35% agreed with addition of letters, only 10% of respondents agreed with reversal of letter, 40% were with past tense, 80% with mispronunciation, 30% with wrong format, 55% with wrong punctuation and 80% teachers thought that students use wrong article. The leading cause of spelling errors is ineffective learning environment because 95% of respondents are agree with it then it comes to the influence of first language with the 90% of respondents. 80% of respondents think that lack of teaching material is the major cause of errors. Then incomplete application of rules with 55% and ignorance of rules restriction with 40% come in the list of causes of errors. The least significant causes are false concepts and communication strategy because only 20% of respondents are in favor with false concept and 15% with

communication strategy. 100% respondents are in agreement with that spelling games and memorizing spellings are the most important activities then 95% of respondents believe that saying/writing words again and again is the important activity. 50% of respondents support listening songs/rhymes activity while 35% agree with using dictionary. According to 20% and 15% of respondents are in agreement with board writing and using pictures/posters respectively. that's mean the most important activities are spelling games, memorizing words and saying words again and again while unimportant activities are board writing and using posters. 75% of the respondents agreed with the statement that their students are weak in use of correct spelling while the rest of 25% respondents disagreed with this statement. Nobody expressed neutral opinion.

Conclusions

After the in depth discussions of the findings obtained from the teachers' questionnaires and students' test, the following conclusions have been drawn; Pakistani learners are facing very much difficulty in using correct spellings of words because it is an area of English language where meaning plays important role more than pronunciation of words. The reasons behind learners' error in English language are; It is difficult for learners to understand the complex system of English spelling because it contained a lot of layers of sound, pattern and meaning of one words due to influence of other languages and this language is not a syllabic language so sometimes words are not written as we pronounce them. Both teachers and students do not give much attention to spellings of words and spelling rules even students show carelessness in their written work. Teachers usually neglect the area of spellings during their teaching process. Learning environment and the influence of the mother tongue (the first language) are the major cause of creating spelling errors. Learner's frequently do errors in those

words which have same sounds but spellings are different like there, their, they're (mispronunciation) and in those words which have silent letter like listen, should etc (omission of letters).

Recommendations

In the light of findings of the following recommendation are given below:

Teachers should realize their responsibility to teach students properly because their future is in their hands. They should use different strategies and interesting activities to teach them to motivate and encourage learners to learn spelling as Invernizz and Hayes (2004), identifying the students' error types can allow teachers to design learning tasks to focus on the learners' specific needs. They should emphasize the irregular spelling patterns to train their students to spell correctly. It may be useful to give the learner a dictation because in a piece of free writing the learner may avoid words that are difficult but in dictation strategy it is impossible. Another reason behind it is that dictation will include words with arrangement of letter patterns and sounds and thus show up specific difficulties more clearly. The teacher has to direct the students to compare their misspelled word with correct spelling and explain to them why they might have committed the spelling. Students, on their part, should give attention to learn the spelling of words and they have to write every word with correct spelling because lack of desire and inattention to learn correct spelling of English words is also a cause of creating errors. Students should receive more listening practice and should be more exposed to English language in improving English spelling. Many useful and practical activities, interesting lessons on spelling rules and pattern must included in the curriculum and syllabus of the education system such as students' textbooks and teaching materials have to improve to enable the learners develop their

spelling skills. Students training courses should organize on spelling errors for English teachers.

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