

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This study revolves around Form One students' spelling errors. Students' spelling errors can be used to gauge their development of spelling. Their errors are good indicators of the level the students are in, in their spelling development. Hence, this level is a good indication to teachers to start their teaching of spelling.. Thus teaching becomes more purposeful for the students as they are taught according to their level of development.

The highest category of spelling errors was Phonetic followed by Semi Phonetic, Double Consonant and Vowel Substitution. The top four highest spelling errors indicated that the students were not correct spellers and still in between the stages of phonetic- transitional. Students relied on sound symbol or phoneme – grapheme relationship with a little bit of considerations for vowel and consonant. Students were at the verge of moving to transitional stage from phonetic stage. Students start off by using letter –sound correspondence in order to spell before the gradual shift occurs in the strategies of spelling until eventually become correct spellers (Marsh, 1980)

To confirm the classification of errors, interviews were carried out. Students' explanation of their errors varied but they had their own reasons. Their reasons were categorized into five and the most common explanation for their errors was phonetic. Students' explanation again supported the notion that cognitively, students were relying on sound symbol and used the same method of spelling throughout for all the words encountered. Students were 'centered' by phoneme grapheme relationship and they explored the usage throughout. At times, they did use other strategies such as 'denial' 'unknown' or 'strategic'. So here students were in between preoperational and concrete operation. As cognitive level is significantly related to spelling development, these students were still between the stages of phonetic – transitional stage of spelling development.

5.2 Conclusion

The findings suggested that students' spelling development were between the stages of phonetic- transitional where students at this level represented phonetically the sounds in a word though not totally. Students omitted nasals, confused with vowels and consonants though could reverse some of the letters in words.

Cognitively, students were between the stages of preoperational and concrete operational and at these stages, students could not think abstractly and hypothetically (Flavell, 1985). They were able to reverse their thinking (Kail, 1998). Decentration too was just taking place so these students need concrete,

practical problem solving approach. They need something 'tangible' for them to refer when they are spelling words. Cognitively, at the preoperational – concrete stage, students cannot understand complex rules of spelling. Thinking abstractly and hypothetically is beyond their ability (Flavell, 1985).

Students who are between the stages of phonetic –transitional with cognitive development of between operational –concrete operational can accept any method of learning spelling besides through sound symbol relationship as these students have the maturity to accept other approaches such as 'word webbing', provided they are simple and easy. They are not so centered by phoneme grapheme relationship anymore. They need teaching using concrete materials. These students need student dominated environment to experiment their concepts of spelling words thus to absorb correct spellings. These students need to be given an opportunity to discover themselves the structure of English. Taking all these into considerations, teaching methodologies need to be suited according to the students' spelling development.

5.3 Implications Of The Study

This study has some implications to the present spelling system that demands a change in teaching methodology so as to cater to students' spelling development stages and to reduce the unwanted spelling errors.

5.3.1 The Spelling System

The traditional spelling system was that teacher would give a list of words to the students for them to memorise. Students were free to use any method to memorise the words. Then the teacher would question the students by asking them to write down the words without referring to the given text. Later, students' spelling would be marked according to 'how many rights and wrongs'.

Teachers adapt to sounding out syllables when pronouncing a word thus leads to students following this method of learning to spell. The teacher teaches words according to sound symbol relationship. When students rely on this approach throughout to spell, they make spelling errors, as English orthography is not phonetically regular.

Furthermore according to Read (1975), learning is not a matter of memorizing words or phoneme – grapheme relationship but a developing process that culminates in a much greater understanding of English spelling. Learning is beyond the simple relationship between speech sounds and their graphic representations.

Hence this phonetic system coupled with other effective system should be taught together to produce better spelling results amongst students nowadays. This

study gives a new insight to the teachers to be creative in teaching strategy of spelling.

According to Hanna and Hodges (1971), careful analysis of students' errors can reveal the specific things that need to be reviewed or to be taught. Second, such an analysis can reveal a degree of severity in spelling errors. For example, if a student were to spell 'lam' for 'lamb', this degree of spelling error is not as serious as spelling 'lamb' to 'lib'. The first spelling error used phonetic as the base to spell because 'lamb' is pronounced as 'lam'. Hence, 'lamb' was spelt according to sound – symbol relationship. But when 'lamb' was spelt as 'lib, this spelling errors was not referring to any base or any system to spell. Thus, the second spelling error shows that the speller is not depending to any system to spell. Therefore, the severity of spelling errors varies. The first error indicates the phonetic stage in the spelling development but the second error reflects semi phonetic stage in spelling development and these two different stages need different kinds of approach in spelling.

English orthography is not a system that is dominated by the surface sounds of spoken language. To learn to spell is not to get in the habit of associating sounds directly with letters. Rather English spelling is dominated by underlying sound segments that conveys meaning. Learning to spell is a matter of acquiring knowledge rather than habits.

Emphasizing the more superficial aspects of the spelling system – sound to spelling and pattern correspondence may be a bankrupt policy where many of our students are concerned. They require more of a ‘handle’ on the orthography. We ought to be able to provide that handle by more qualitatively directing our students’ conscious attention to the written word.

Since children’s spelling do exhibit stage like characteristics, it follows that teachers could acquire useful instructional information regarding stages of development, sources of difficulty and signs of progress by examining the quality of children’s spelling attempts as well as by simply determining their correctness. Students’ spelling errors are worth for careful analysis, if the teaching of literacy were to be improved (Garney, 1977).

The findings revealed that children made a lot of errors in the categories of phonetic and semi phonetic and they were still in the stage of pre –operational and concrete operation, so classroom practices like extensive phonic drill and the typical weekly spelling list – test cycle hardly encouraged essential active participation and concept formation. It would seem profitable to construct a learning environment in which children have the opportunity to test and evaluate their own hypotheses about the orthography. Such environments might logically include activities that encourage and stimulate natural language use through extensive speaking, reading and writing as means of communication and expression.

Children also need opportunities to compare and contrast words on a variety of levels (sound, structure, syntax, semantic) hence, systematically discover and utilize both intra -word and inter-word pattern of organization.

It is reasonable enough to conclude that learning to spell is not simply a matter of enough drill work or rote memorization. The development of spelling proficiency seem to involve both cognitive and linguistic process as there is a significant correlation between spelling development stage and cognitive development (Zuttell, 1979).

5.3.2 Teaching Methodology

According to Burns, Griffin and Snow (1999), it is important for parents and teachers to understand that spelling errors are not in conflict with correct spelling. On the contrary, these errors play an important role in helping children learn how to write. When children make spelling errors, they are in fact exercising their growing knowledge of phonemes, the letters of the alphabet and their confidence in the alphabetic principle. If a child were to write 'iz' for the conventional 'is' it can be celebrated as quite a breakthrough. It is the kind of error that shows you that the child is thinking independently and quite analytically about the sounds of words and the logic of spelling.

The idea that a teacher should dominate the classroom does not augur well in language learning. What is important is that he/she should play the role of co –

communicator with the learners. Direct instruction in a teacher - dominated classroom may not contribute to effective learning. It is when the students themselves play an important role by increasing students' talk and participation that learning becomes meaningful (Nair , 2000).

According to Gentry (1977) the first step is, to encourage creative writing. Allow children to make spelling errors. Let them assume active roles in acquiring written language. Children must manipulate and discover words. They must test their theories of how the alphabet works by contrasting their production with standard orthography. Children do these things when they are encouraged to write independently. So spelling errors are not something to be ashamed of but to look at from the positive view that children are in the process of learning the standard spelling.

Therefore, children need the opportunity to discover for themselves the structures governing English spelling, just as they invent the structures that enable them to assimilate reality and tacitly construct the transformational rules, which govern the structure of spoken and written language.

Children must be encouraged to spell as best as they can and not be held accountable for adult spelling standard. Teachers may closely scrutinize spelling errors and follow a child's spelling development without bringing unnecessary attention to errors (Henderson, 1972).

Anyhow, children's spelling errors will soon give way to standard spelling when children encounter more information on standard spelling or English orthography. Children's understanding of spelling is based on a set of tacit hypotheses about phonetic relationship and sound spelling correspondence and that children are able to modify these hypotheses, readily as they encounter new information about standard spelling. Some children's spelling shows aspects of spelling errors for years and do change after exposure to standard spelling instruction (Read, 1975).

A teacher should learn to respond appropriately to spelling errors. If a child is using a strict phonetic strategy as the finding shows, a teacher should avoid confusing her/ him with an exaggerated sounding out of the word (Gentry 1977). According to Piaget (1973), children whose cognitive stage is in transition from pre- operational to concrete operational, make a lot of phonetic spelling errors and require a more specific but parallel coordination of structures or patterns. What the children do need is the opportunity to manipulate words so that the relationship among spelling, meaning and phonology become clear. Children should be permitted to contrast these words with words that begin with other beginning sounds, for example the child has spelt the beginning sound of 'trade' with 'ch', the child should be given other words that begin with 't' – 'track', 'tree', 'truck' or 'trick' and to contrast with 'ch' – 'chuck', 'chick', 'church' 'chat'. Finally, the teacher should have the child categorize the words according to their standard spelling.

Dale (1975) and O' Rourke (1974), described the technique of 'word webbing' as another activity through which children may discover word pattern and relationships. In a root web, for instance, words like 'sympathy', 'pathetic' and 'pathology' are linked through their common root 'path'. By constructing such webs and checking their accuracy, students can simultaneously extend both their spelling and vocabulary growth through the discovery of underlying, systematic patterns of meaning and spelling.

Webster (1987) claimed that when children are faced with a word that they are uncertain about spelling, they have the desire to write it down to see if it 'looks right'. What this probably indicates is that words are more easily remembered as visual patterns. Another strategy to be remembered is 'the whole visual pattern of the word'. Some ideas of the sentence context must be taken into account otherwise words which sound alike, such as 'hair' and 'hare' could not be distinguished. There are words to remember on a visual – whole basis with little interference from the letter sound, 'yacht', 'egg' and 'who' for examples. More than likely, children may attempt to copy, store and retrieve spelling patterns using a medley of strategies.

This information can be a good diagnostic for teachers to develop spelling skills using proper methods at the formative school years.

5.4 Recommendations For Further Research

The results of this study as well as the constraints suggested four directions for future research including:

- a. replication
- b. comparison of performance on spelling test with spelling on writing samples.
- c. comparative studies on invented spelling between Form One, Three and Five.
- d. to compare spelling errors in oral spelling and written spelling

One recommendation for further research would be to repeat this same study in other schools at a wider scale. More schools should be involved rather than just on a particular school.

A second recommendation for research would be to compare students' performance in a test situation with their performance on writing samples. In the test, students know spelling is important and in informal writing, students know spelling is not the most important aspect. Through interviews, students might reveal their rationale for their spellings in these two situations.

A third recommendation would be to compare the spelling errors between Form One, Three and Five. This is to check on the gradual development in their intellect and spelling stages.

Fourth recommendation would be to compare spelling errors in oral spelling and written spelling to test on the differences and complexities of spelling overall.

Read (1986) had carried out research with other children from other countries and dialect. He found that children share common spelling errors across different dialects. Spelling was affected by pronunciation and common problem with nasals and vowels were found in his studies from other countries. The researcher believed that this research on spelling errors will provide sound guidance to teachers as they continue in their effort to improve spelling skills in accordance to students' spelling development and cognitive abilities.