

## A Mixed Method Study on English Spelling Errors Committed by Undergraduate Students at Sanghar

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### Abstract

This study investigated the major English spelling errors committed by undergraduate students of SBBU, Sanghar Campus. The university students face spelling problems and get undesired marks in exams. With the help of Cook's (1999) classification of English spelling errors, the study identifies substitution, omission, transposition and insertion errors committed by students. The present study aims to know the types of English spelling errors committed by university students and the effective strategies to overcome such errors. For conducting this research, the mixed method was adopted and the data was collected from 100 students of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University Sanghar Campus. Students were requested to write an essay of 200 words on their favorite topic and also dictation test was conducted later spelling errors were detected and differentiated into the types of spelling errors. Moreover, Five English language teachers were interviewed to know the effective strategies to overcome spelling errors. The quantitative data was analyzed by Cooks classification and the qualitative data was analyzed by thematic process. The findings indicated that mostly university students at Sanghar committed omission and substitution errors. They need techniques and awareness about spellings errors that can greatly impact their quality writing. Teachers suggest that by using mnemonics, chunking, usage of good dictionary, and conscious reading and writing can improve spelling errors. The study recommended that frequent feedback by teachers and awareness about spelling rules can overcome English spelling errors.

**Keywords:** Spelling errors, Substitution, Omission, Transposition, Insertion, Undergraduate students.

### 1. Introduction

Language is the key that discloses what is running in the mind of human being. It is the verbal language which differentiates human being from other living beings (Yule, 2006:9). Human experiences come from the developed practice of language which is based on voiced and non-voiced activities. Written and spoken language is used to convey the actual mean of their communication. Writing is very important for the second language learners because writing is used to enhance the creativity and help them to develop the critical thinking. Organized writing is a big challenge for both students who belong to L1 and L2. Generally, it is very beneficial for the EFL students (Muslim, 2014).

Many of the learners of English language need to know the four basic language skills, which is reading, writing, listening and speaking. The investigators take writing as a method instead

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of product. The principal objective of this method is to produce a written work which would work as the tool of communication between reader and writer according to the knowledge they have (Al-Abed Al Haq and Ahmed,1994). According to Norman (2000:39), English language is away from the actual writing phenomenon, as anybody is well aware about the spelling difficulties. Actually, English doesn't afford single sample of a two way, one to one correspondence- sound to letter and letter to sound.

It is an ability of a learner to write a correct spelling of words. Writing an accurate or exact spelling is count in the qualities of good writing text. Cook (1999 p.1) declares that "students who are not native speakers do not use the actual system of English and start to write incorrect words". The approach of English spelling errors provides an opportunity to learner to have a better understanding and way to correct their spelling errors (Al-zuoud & Kabilan, 2013). This study investigates the spelling errors according to the classification of cook (1999), which are substitution (replacement of letters with another or incorrect letter), omission (forget to write any letter), insertion (addition of extra letter), and transposition (change the position of letters).

"Writers, which commit grammatical errors, spelling error captures a great position, in the writers who are actual L1 speakers or the learner/ master of language" (Leacock et al., 2002, p.15-17). Thus, error analysis is presumed as an important part of linguistics analysis which emphasizes on the students' committed errors. Adam (1991) claims that though, spellings has always been seen as the poor sister of language arts and as such hasn't experienced the multifarious injunctive ways which have designated the reading and writing's teachings.

The reason of this research is to examine the major English spelling errors committed by the university students at Sanghar and to know the appropriate strategies to overcome these spelling errors. For the purpose behind selecting this topic is that throughout the Pakistan, nobody has worked on this, all the investigators are found mostly from abroad like The United Arab Emirates, Malaysia etc.

### **1.1. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

In English, spelling has its great importance because without correct spelling we cannot convey our ideas properly. This research will be of great importance for both the English as second language learners and the teachers. For example, it will make people aware that will direct the linguistic users ' attention to these errors and help them avoid committing these errors. This study will be helpful to teachers and students who have spelling phobia because this study will suggest strategies to overcome their phobia of spelling errors.

### **1.2. Problem Statement**

Spelling errors are the major problems of the students while writing; they face different kind of difficulties that directly affect their writing and grades. Just because of spelling errors, most of the students face difficulties in writing assignments and most of the students are left behind in the competitive exams as well.

### **1.3. AIM OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this research is to know the types of English spelling errors committed by Undergraduate Students at SBBU Sanghar Campus and to suggest the effective strategies to

overcome those errors.

#### 1.4. OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the major English spelling errors committed by Undergraduate students at SBBU Sanghar Campus
2. To know the most common errors committed by the Undergraduate students at SBBU Sanghar Campus.
3. To investigate the Strategies to overcome the spelling errors.

#### 1.5. RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How far the major English spelling errors are committed by Undergraduate students at SBBU Sanghar Campus?
2. To what extent the common errors are committed by the Undergraduate students at SBBU Sanghar Campus?
3. What are the strategies which can be used to overcome the spelling errors?

## 2. Literature Review

Smith and Swan (2001) had an investigation in which he discussed that the Arab Students mostly commit mistakes and those mistakes are discussable. The investigations related to Arab spelling errors are very rare and majority of them focus on the difficulties which are faced by Arab Students in learning EFL (Al-Jarf, 2005). Al-Jarf, (2005) investigated in Saudi-Arabia about the relation between listening and spelling. The findings were shown that percentage of students of EFL found 41.5% of the words with 49.5% exact response of the question in listening comprehension test and with 52% correct answers in the decoding test. Al-Jabri (2006) researched in two rural schools on 114 Omani students of 5th grade to know their errors in spellings. Findings resulted as that errors are mostly found in the area of omission and substitution while transposition and insertion were less frequent to be found. Fender (2008) investigated for knowing the errors of spelling committed by Arab students and Non-Arab students. Result was declared that their skills of spelling become less successful in multi-syllabic words.

Benyo (2014) had an investigation about errors in spelling committed by students of first year at Dongola University for knowing the guidance behind these problems. Findings revealed that mostly students face the difficulties while using the vowels and identifying the sounds which aren't found in Arabic. Study also resulted that being unaware and insufficient information about the rules of spellings in English of students might be also the cause of their errors in spelling.

Al-haisoni et al.(2015) conducted the research in Saudi-Arab's University of Ha'il's 122 students of undergraduate program for examining the errors in spelling. The findings revealed that omission is the most common factor among the mistakes. Mostly errors occur in the usage of vowels and pronunciation. It resulted that most of the errors occur because of the anomalous interference in L2 of L1.

Al-zuoud and Kabilan (2013) conducted research on the spelling errors in which he involved 43 Jordanian students of undergraduate program. From which result revealed that 228 errors were found from 43 written papers. Then the errors were identified and categorized into four

types according to cook's classification (1999): substitution, omission, transposition and insertion. Findings resulted that most frequent errors are substitution and omission among students.

SN Subhi et al. (2015) had a study about the spelling errors committed by the English students at Malaysian University. Findings indicated that mistakes are committed by the students in high percentage while writing. For analyzing the data SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences; version 22.0) was used.

In Canadian context, Figueredo and Varnhagen (2004) had a comparison with the difference of errors in spelling and correction among Canadian students. In this study 53 participants 16 males and 37 females were involved. For collecting data, investigators utilized two essays written by the students of a university and participants were asked to readout those essays and then to diagnose the errors of spelling in the essays. After it, investigator categorized the errors into three types: phonological, orthographic, and morphological. Findings indicated that participants committed more phonological errors in the comparison of morphological and orthographic errors.

Another study, rendered by He and Wang (2009) investigated errors of spelling among two Chinese EFL beginner young learners for 14 months. Findings indicated that spelling occurred while using 20 sound-based letters and 10 name-based letters. In the addition, it also was discussed that errors are occurred by those EFL writers who don't have grip over vowel and consonant complexities in the English spelling system.

In Singaporean context, Dixon, Zhao, and Joshi (2010) investigated the first language's (L1) influences on bilingual children's performance of spelling in their second language (L2). Generally, findings revealed that statistically important effects of first language on conventional spelling while it doesn't affected on phonological spelling, controlling for reading proficiency. That's, the Chinese (Morpho syllabic) clique not only got score more than Malay (alphabetic) and Tamil (syllabic) clique overall, but had also made more actual-words transposition and substitution errors.

### **3. Research Methodology**

A mixed method was adopted and the data was collected from 100 students of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University Sanghar Campus. Students were requested to write an essay of 200 words on their favorite topic and also dictation test was conducted later spelling errors were detected and differentiated into the types of spelling errors. Moreover, Five English language teachers were interviewed to know the effective strategies to overcome spelling errors. The quantitative data was analyzed by Cooks classification Because Cook classification is used to know the frequency of errors. There is no need to know the mean and median of the error and the qualitative data was analyzed by thematic process.

## **4. FINDINGS**

### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

This section is based on the findings of this research and the analysis of English spelling errors mostly committed by 100 undergraduate students of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University Sanghar Campus. The investigator identifies each type of spelling error (omission, insertion, transposition, and substitution) individually. The study mainly concerns with the

Cook's classification (1999), who studied the English spelling errors committed by the EFL learners.

## 4.2. QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

### Dictation Test Findings

**Table 1: Frequency of English spelling error based on OSIT/undergraduate students at SBBU Sanghar campus**

Types of spelling errors	Frequency	Percentage
Omission	440	44.62%
Substitution	359	36.42%
Insertion	152	15.42%
Transposition	35	3.54%
Total	986	100%
Total words of dictation	2000	49.3%

As shown in Table 1, After knowing and categorizing the English spelling errors of 100 students in dictation test, the total amount of English spelling errors committed by students in dictation test are 986 spelling errors out of 2000 words with the percentage of 49.3%. Omission spelling errors committed by students are 440 with the percentage of 44.62%. Substitution errors in dictation test were 359 with the percentage of 36.42%. Students committed 152 errors in insertion with the percentage of 15.42%. There are 35 spelling error in transposition with the percentage of 3.54%. The majority of undergraduate students at SBBU Sanghar campus committed English spelling errors in omission and substitution with 799 from the total of 986 with the percentage of 81.03%.

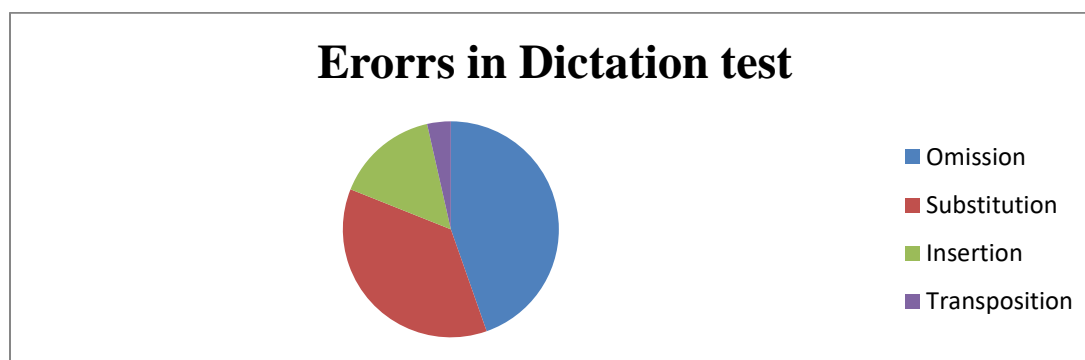


Figure 3: Chart of English spelling errors based on OSIT/undergraduate students at SBBU Sanghar Campus

Figure 1 shows the common types of English spelling errors committed by undergraduate students at SBBU Sanghar Campus in dictation test was 'omission' (44.62%) such as (intelect) for (intellect) or (occured) for (occurred) further in 'substitution' (36.42%) such as (conveniance) for (convenience). Third was 'insertion' (15.42%) such as (occourrence) for (occurrence) and in last, spelling error was 'transposition' (3.54%) such as (dicesion) for (decision).

Essay writing Test Findings		
Table 2: Frequency of English spelling error based on OSIT/undergraduate students at SBBU Sanghar campus		
Types of spelling errors	Frequency	Percentage
Omission	80	44%
Substitution	61	33%
Insertion	33	18%
Transposition	9	5%
Total	183	100%

As shown in Table 2, after knowing and categorizing the English spelling errors of 100 students in essay writing, Omission spelling errors committed by students are 80 with the percentage of 44%. Substitution errors in essay writing test was 61 with the percentage of 33%. Students committed 33 errors in insertion with the percentage of 18%. There are 09 spelling error in transposition with the percentage of 5%. The majority of undergraduate students at SBBU Sanghar campus committed English spelling errors in omission and substitution with 141 from the total of 183 with the percentage of 77.04%.

Figure2: Chart of English spelling errors based on OSIT/undergraduate students at SBBU Sanghar Campus

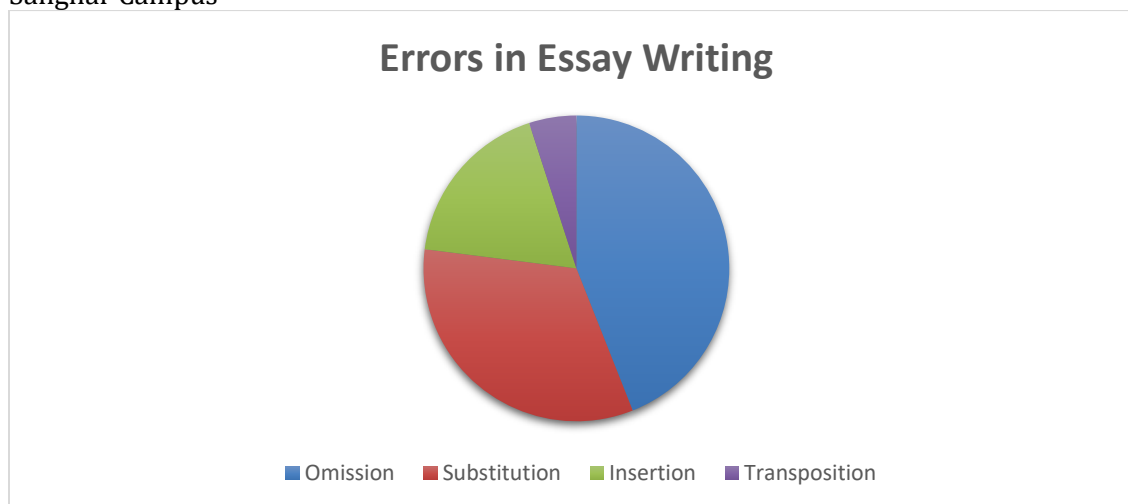


Figure 4 shows the common types of English spelling errors committed by undergraduate students at SBBU Sanghar Campus in essay writing was 'omission' (44%) such as (stratgies) for (strategies) further in 'substitution' (33%) such as (commend) for (command). Third was 'insertion' (18%) such as (linguisitic) for (Linguistic) and in last, spelling error was

'transposition' (5%) such as (buesniss) for (business).

### **4.3 Qualitative Findings**

#### **4.3.1 Strategies to overcome spelling errors**

Spellings in English are not as much as difficult for native as compared to non-native speakers. English is a developed and a hotchpotch language. And it also emerges many new words day by day from other languages. English language has variant ways for spellings the similar sound and many variant ways for pronouncing the spellings. But to improve your spellings in English is not a big deal: it can be done with having some tolerance; there will be a noticeable improvement in spellings by utilizing such strategies which are used by good spellers.

#### **4.3.2 Use Mnemonics**

Mnemonics is a device or memory support system which helps students or learners to learn difficult words or spellings because it is used for improving memory. Through spelling mnemonics, we can easily learn difficult words in short period of time. It helps learners to learn difficult words in a tricky way. For example: the word "Achieve" students can learn this word in a tricky way that student must remember ('I' before 'E' instead of after 'C'). Mnemonics give other ways to remember difficult spellings that students make a sentence of a single word like a word "RIGHT" (Right information give helpful techniques). Teachers suggest that this strategy can help the students to learn spellings and to overcome the spelling errors to a big extent.

#### **4.3.3 Making habit of reading**

Reading is an art that allows the reader to know many things. Spelling errors are one of them; most of the researches have shown the reading is a fastest way to overcome the spelling errors. Such researches have also recommended that for being a good speller, a person needs to be a good reader. Being habitual of reading enhances our vocabulary and through our conscious reading we can overcome the spelling errors.

#### **4.3.4 Using a good dictionary**

Though good memory plays an energetic role in memorizing words and the spellings of words, but according to such researches good spellers need not to wholly depend upon memory: they rely upon such updated dictionaries. Many kinds of dictionaries are available in market, in both soft as well as hard, offline as well as online. Many of teachers strongly prefer to right spellings. They cut out your marks because of spelling errors. For non-native learners of English, such great and updated dictionaries are designed. Such as Dictionary of Contemporary English by Longman or Oxford's Advanced Learner's Dictionary. These dictionaries can be very useful and informative for them. These dictionaries can help learners to learn many more words contextually and use words appropriately.

#### **4.3.5 Being aware of using American or British spellings in writing.**

Generally, both American and British spellings are used in our context. But if we talk particularly then British is more preferred than American, for instance; words which end

with -our like honour & colour and in American these words end with -or, are also acceptable. Similarly, it happens in words which end with -er/re, just like theater/theatre and center/centre. In our context mostly British -re is preferred, but the American one (er) is also acceptable. On other hand, mostly American is preferred when we talk about the words ending with -ize/-ise. In this case American -ize is preferred rather than British -ise as like theorize or hypothesize, but -ise is acceptable too. Major matter is to be consistent of using these choices while writing any document. Writer should not mix both -ize and -ise / -er/re in a single document.

#### 4.3.6 Morphemic spelling strategies

Morphemic strategies are based on the awareness of how the spelling affects the meaning of a word. Several words have Greek and Latin origins, while other words have other variants.

Children need to know how to attach prefixes and suffixes to the base words, and how to construct compound terms and abbreviations. Morphemic strategies allow good speller to spell difficult words.

#### 4.3.7 To learn the actual pronunciation of words

The pronunciation imparts a vital role in writing the spellings of any words, such researches have shown that such words which are commonly misspelled, it is not derived from difficult combination of letters, but it actually happens because of wrong pronunciation which doesn't assert the actual spelling of word. For instance, word "mischievous" is often written as mischeevos/misseevous, it happens because of the wrong pronunciation of words like it "miss cheevy us", the actual pronunciation "misschivus" leads us to write proper spelling of the words.

#### 4.3.8 Chunking

Occasionally words are hard to spell simply because they're long. You may use the chunking approach in these situations. Chunking is when you break the word into bits, or shorter sections. You don't memorize the spelling for a long word this way, but just a few short ones! For Example: The word (Information) can be chunked like this

In  
for  
ma  
tion

The word (Establishment) can be chunked in this way

Es  
tab  
lish  
ment

Only recall the spelling for all these short "words," and each time you spell (Information) and (Establishment) correctly. This strategy will make it very easy to remember long words.

### 5. Discussion

Benyo (2014) had an investigation about errors in spelling committed by students of first



year at Dongola University for knowing the guidance behind these problems. Findings revealed that mostly students face the difficulties while using the vowels and identifying the sounds which are not found in Arabic. Study also resulted that being unaware and insufficient information about the rules of spellings in English of students might be also the cause of their errors in spelling.

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## **6. Conclusion**

In general, the second-language learning process is challenging task where learners are expected to commit errors. The whole investigation investigates the spelling errors committed by students or learners at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sanghar Campus. The spelling errors are classified according to the Cook's classification of spelling errors (1999). According to Cook, writing exact or accurate spelling is counted in the qualities of a good writer. Major purpose of conducting this research was to know the major errors of spellings, which most of the students commit while writing and to know the appropriate strategies to overcome these spelling errors. According to this research, the omission and substitution are the major areas, in which areas students are suffered while writing. The findings of this study will be very beneficial for the EFL or ESL learners because this study show the effective strategies through which learners can improve their spelling errors.

## 6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended that frequent feedback by teachers and awareness about spelling rules and strategies can overcome English spelling errors.

This study suggests that by conscious reading and writing students can improve spelling errors.

This study also suggests to students that for overcoming these problems students must have command over phonology.

The study suggests that there must be spelling Bee competition in the institutes as the students would be able to know their errors and also to overcome those errors.

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