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A secondary analysis of grade 4 English spelling errors committed by Isizulu home language speaking children

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2024
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/37330

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ABSTRACT

It has emerged in the last decade that the South African schooling system is not producing adequate numbers of children who can read adequately for meaning. In the analysis that is emerging, we are beginning to understand not just the scale of the problem but the underlying causes of the problem. One of the ways the problem manifest itself is by understanding the difficulty children have in decoding words, which is evident when they attempt to spell words in English.

This study sets out to contribute to better understanding how spelling errors made by English second language speakers reveal some of the challenge's children face when learning new words. The analysis of the pattern of spelling errors might reveal the specific challenges and or problems that second language learners are having in learning to decode and encode in English. The study builds on the Reading Catch-Up Programme study, and the research undertaken by Fleisch et al., (2017) who analysed three-letter words from the same datasets emanating from the Reading Catch-Up Programme study. The three-letter words were limited as they did not provide enough insights into the challenges that the children have with blends and different versions of the vowel sounds.

This study is a secondary analysis that uses both qualitative and quantitative method, the study builds on the earlier research of the Reading Catch-up programme using the sub-sample of the datasets of 585 children's scripts out of a total of 2823 scripts. The analysis of the scripts required word segmentation and analysis of the errors in an attempt at making sense of the children's errors.

Building on the earlier research by Fleisch et al., (2017), the findings suggested that a significant portion of children are struggling with blends and different versions of vowel sounds, one of the possible interpretations of these patterns of spelling errors is that some children are non-alphabetic as their spelling errors do not make sense. While a large proportion of children are struggling with blends, diagraphs and more complex versions of the vowel sounds and there is a strong indication that was signalled in the earlier research by Fleisch et al., (2017) and is confirmed in this study; which is that the patterns of errors committed by the children indicate that they are struggling to understand the alphabet system used in IsiZulu which is their home language and the one used in English resulting in the errors the children are making.

Keywords

Spelling; Decoding; Encoding; Home Language; First Additional Language; Incidental learning; Spelling errors