



Research

Investigate spelling errors in writing composition of engineering students (A case study of MUET)

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Abstract: This research aims to determine the factors related to causes impacts of spelling errors along with implications to help first semester students of engineering to overcome their spelling errors in writing composition. It was done in Mehran University of Engineering and Technology academic year 2022/ 2023. The researcher finds some causes, impacts of spelling errors. This problem is caused by some factors such as: English language has more sounds than letters, it has many spellings rule it makes the researcher interested in conducting research. This research focuses on students' spelling error as main component of writing skill. This research was mixed in nature; however, data collection technique was done through writing composition, online survey, semi structured interviews. The research subject was first year Engineering students enrolled during Functional English and teachers teaching them this course, the number of students were 205 and 4 teachers. The data was collected from students and teachers in which types of errors from writing composition were analyzed through Cook's model and pie chart while online survey related to causes and impacts was analyzed through SPSS, lastly interviews were analyzed with the help of Clark's model of thematic analysis. The results of this research show English orthography is based on irregular patterns and there is no correspondence between sounds and letters which leads to spelling errors. Meanwhile, spelling errors leave negative impact of student on examiner.

Keywards: Writing skills, spelling errors, mixed method.

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Introduction

English is the official language of Pakistan and growing language around the world. Most of Pakistani students suffer from inferiority complex due to lack of competence in this language. At present, English has become social overtone, which shows connection of English with social status and key to success in all walks of life. All communications around the world has been done in English language (UNESCO, 2009). English serves as a gateway to success in Pakistan. It is not only the language of home in upper strata of society but it is language of Higher education and wider education for the people of Pakistan. (Ghani, 2003:105). Writing is a productive skill and a major component of language therefore it is considered one of the important indicators of language learning. The competency to write down something in a

productive form is a sign of success during the learning process (Geiser & Studly, 2001). Writing is considered as trickiest skill of English language for learners to learn. Coffrey (1987) stated that writing plays important role in communication to express ideas, hopes, intentions, and findings and putting them in readable form is most difficult task to achieve. However, learning key elements of writing plays important role in developing communication proficiency of a learner to compose ideas, opinions clearly. Alexander (2008) asserts that writing is an essential element of language learning therefore strong ability of writing can enhance students' chances for success. English language causes a major hindrance for students throughout their educational stages. Hildreth (1962) explains that spelling is a sort of draft horse of written expression without which the load of work in writing cannot be done easily. Thus good spelling competence helps learners to concentrate on the ideas without being conscious of the mechanics of writing skills. There have been much researches conducted in different contexts to find out the types of mistakes, causes and their implications but many areas related to it yet to explored. Spelling errors has been shown to have negative effects in the writing skills of students and is becoming an area of concern in many contexts. Addressing this problem will have practical benefits for Engineering Students of Mehran University of Engineering and Technology in their writing skill. It will contribute to understanding of this widespread phenomenon.

These students have not any direct link with English language teaching and learning but they are being taught English subjects as compulsory courses because university officially has medium of instruction is English language therefore, students are supposed to be good at all the English language skills, especially the writing skills are the essential part of their undergraduate because their all the mid and semester papers are being conducted in the English language. However, students need to master all the levels of language in order to reach on their targets of achieving degrees in good numbers. Meanwhile, this has been observed, investigated, seen, felt teachers that engineering students face lot of problems while writing and attempting their compulsory papers. Hence, writing skills of the engineering students are quite weak and not satisfactory. Though, these students very good in their own respective subjects but due to the poor writing skills, especially the spelling issues put them down while explaining and writing their answers.

Research Methodology

In this research, the researcher used mixed methodology with a case study, mixed methodology research means using a method more than one type, a method may be mix of quantitative and qualitative or qualitative and quantitative. Bryman (2011) states that mixed method research is a multi strategy research that includes complex range or research questions and research design. **Primary Data source:** The instruments of the present study include writing samples. In other words, essays were used to be the data of the study. These essays were the students' writing task on three topics which includes:

- 1. Online Education
- 2. Pollution due to Urbanization
- 3. Technology

Students were instructed to write around 200 words in 30 minutes. The topics in these writings are diverse and the students do not know their essays will be samples of a research. Therefore, they are all free productions that provide the best research materials. Cook's model is used to identify the types of spelling errors committed by Engineering students in essay writing.

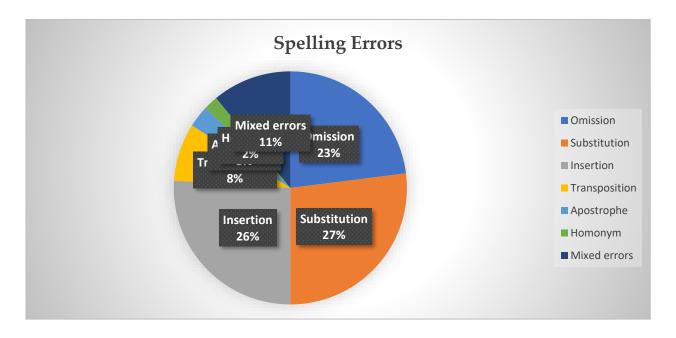
Second instrument of this study is adopted questionnaire from "Impacts of spelling problems on EFL students writing skills at Kandhara University, Kandhara Afghanistan" (2021) by Abdul Nafi Himat. This questionnaire is composed of two parts 1. Causes of spelling errors, 2. Impacts of spelling errors. Population in this research was the 1st semester students of Mehran University of Engineering and Technology which consists of 7 departments with the total number are 270. In this research convenient sampling has been used to collect data, Convenient Sampling is a type of

nonprobability sampling where people are selected because they are easily available the primary criteria of this sampling is the ease of obtaining sample. The participants to the present study included 100 students from two B.E departments (Civil engineering and Electrical engineering) in first year at main campus of Mehran university of Engineering and Technology. The participants 'age range from 18-22 years old. They were all enrolled in Functional English course of the academic year 2022. To select sample is very important part of research study in which part of population is selected then analyze, select a sample in such a way so that it must be representative of population and so that one can generalize the result with confidence. As population was huge in this research so researcher determines the participants of this study by convenient sampling. According to Creswell Convenient sampling is when the researcher selects those participants who are ready and available to be studied. The participants of this study are 1st semester 205 Engineering students enrolled in subject Functional English course.

Results and Discussion

The researcher conducted test of written composition from 1st semester Engineering students in April 2022, this written composition was analyzed with the help of Cook's model to find and analyze the types of spelling errors committed by Engineering students. Secondly online survey was conducted from same sample of population in which 2 section were given, section1 was related to the causes based on 10 items while section 2 was related to the impacts based on 9 items. Thirdly semi structured interviews were conducted from 4 teachers teaching to 1st semester students enrolled in Functional English course.

In the present research study, the researcher while conducting data from the participants who are studying in various engineering departments at Mehran University of Engineering & Technology Jamshoro that the frequent spelling errors the students are doing of omission, insertion, and substitution. The results concluded that the 27% substitution while 26% insertion and 23% omission spelling errors were found and noted. Moreover, mixed spelling errors including homonym, transposition, and apostrophe were only revealed the 11%. Overall, the results reflect that substitution spelling error is one of the very weak areas that the learners experience while writing because in substitution, the learners become unable to properly write the alphabetical letters and then they unconsciously and unknowingly replace the letters and, in this way, they carry out substitution error. Insertion type of spelling errors which is most frequently done by the learners is happening because in that the learners add some extra alphabetical letters because of not having surety of any word and in the omission spelling error, the learners leave out letters while writing. To overcome these spelling errors, the learners must read because reading fills the gap of knowing the correct word and consistent reading makes the learners sure, confident, absolute seeker of using error free writing. Furthermore, language instructors should provide the learners easy ways, proper guidance, to the points methods, right rules, practicing material, clear tools, appropriate approaches, suitable procedures, specific means, maximum inputs, fitting techniques to overcome these types of spelling errors which completely hinder the overall writing of the learners and ultimately becomes problems of all sorts.



The Data Description

The data description of Research question two which is about the causes and impacts of spelling errors was conducted through online survey. Second instrument of this study is adopted questionnaire from "Impacts of spelling problems on EFL students writing skills at Kandhara University, Kandhara Afghanistan" (2021) by Abdul Nafi Himat.

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	150	73.2
	Female	55	26.8
Age	18	105	51.2
	19	66	32.2
	20	14	6.8
	21	20	9.8
Faculty	Civil Engineering	26	12.7
	Electrical Engineering	15	7.3
	Electronics	30	14.6
	Software Engineering	41	20.0
	IPG	21	10.2
	Mechatronics	26	12.7
	Telecommunication	43	21.0
Level of Education	Undergraduate	205	100

Table:1 shows the demographic information. It includes different categories such as gender, age, faculty, and level of education. The first category shows there were 205 respondents in which 150 were male (73.2%) and 55 were female (26.8%). The second category reveals age between 18-21 years. 18 years old were 105 (51.2%), 19 years old were 66 (32.2%), 20 years old 14 (6.8%) and 21 years old were 20 (9.8%). According to the faculty 26 (12.7%) were from Civil Engineering department, 15 (7.3%) were from Electrical Engineering, 30 (14.6%) were from Electronics, 41 (20.05) were from Software Engineering, 21 (10.2%) were from Institute if Petroleum and Natural Gas, 26 (12.7%) were from Mechatronics, and 43 (21.0%) were from Telecommunication. All participants were undergraduates.

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1. Causes of Spelling Errors

No	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
01	English language has more sounds than letters.	3.34	.745
02	English spelling system has many rules.	3.22	.801
03	Some sounds of English Language do not exist in local	3.12	.901
	languages		
04	Lack of time to practice the spelling of words.	3.10	.892
05	Interference of native language	3.08	.966
06	Lack of appropriate guidance regarding the spelling of	3.00	.993
	words.		
07	Poor reading skills.	2.94	.939
08	Classroom time devoted to spelling instruction is not	2.84	1.038
	adequate		
09	When I write, I do not care about spelling errors.	2.79	1.019
10	Lack of awareness of English spelling rules	2.75	.992

Table 2 reveals the causes of spelling problems among undergraduate students at Mehran University of Engineering and technologies Jamhoro. All items had the mean scores between the range of two to three. The first seven items have scored more than three and four items scored less than two. The first item shows that English language has many sounds more than letters (M=3.34, SD=.745). The second has (M=3.22, SD=.80) that confirms that spellings rules are myriad. In this way participants agree on some sounds do not exist in the native languages. (M=3.12, SD=.901). Item having (M=3.10, SD=.892) talk about the lack of time practicing spelling of words and other makes agreement on interference of native language (M=3.08, SD=.966). Moreover, they agreed on item Lack of appropriate guidance regarding the spelling of words (M=3.00, SD=.993), then Poor reading skills (M=2.94, SD=.939) were held one of the causes of spelling errors. Similarly, classroom time devoted to spelling instruction is not adequate (M=2.84, SD=1.038). When I write, I do not care about spelling errors (M=2.79, SD=1.019). Lack of awareness of English spelling rules (M=2.75, SD=.992)

Impacts of Spelling errors:

Item		
Mean Std. Deviation Standard De	viation	
Spelling errors destroy the structure of sentences as well as its quality.	3.24	.809
Spelling errors contribute to the poor writing of me in English language		.831
writing.		
Spelling problems make me to get fewer marks in the writing test.		.877
Spelling problems effect on the choices of my vocabulary when I am writ-		.896
ing		
Spelling mistakes have impact on the coherence of my writing.		.863
Spelling problems make my writing untidy.		.901
Spelling errors have impacts on my handwriting		.928
Spelling mistakes make me to spend more than the necessary time when I		.957
am writing		

Fear of spelling errors effect my interest in writing. 2.86	.969
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Table: 3 reveals first five items have scored three and others have scored two along with their Standard deviations. Most of the participants have shown 'strongly agreement' and 'Agreement' on Spelling errors destroy the structure of sentences as well as its quality having highest score (M=3.24, SD=.809). In this way, second item attributes that poor spellings affect the overall writing Spelling errors contribute to the poor writing of me in English language writing (M=3.19, SD=.831). The third item reveals Spelling problems make me to get fewer marks in the writing test (M=3.14, SD.877). The fourth item shows Spelling problems effect on the choices of my vocabulary when I am writing (M=3.07, SD=.896). The fifth item observes Spelling mistakes have impact on the coherence of my writing. (M=3.04, SD=. 863). The reaming four items fall under less than three mean score. Spelling problems make my writing untidy (M=2.99, SD=.901), Spelling errors have impacts on my handwriting (M=2.97, SD=.928), Spelling mistakes make me to spend more than the necessary time when I am writing (M=2.93, SD=.957) and Fear of spelling errors effect my interest in writing (M=2.86, SD=.969).

The data was gathered through semi structured interviews with the participants who are teaching Functional English course to first semester students. The data was analyzed with the help of Clark's model of thematic analysis. The findings revealed teachers' perceptions regarding spelling errors and what are their causes, impacts, and some implications. Apparently, due to the grave effects of spelling on students" language proficiency and language achievement, all teachers agreed that "Spelling is important, needs more attention, but they were of the view that "English spelling is the least of their worries. I focus on other important aspects of English." Only one teacher agreed with the statement while the rest of the teachers appeared to believe the opposite. It is a perspective that agrees with what many researchers call for which is that to help students become efficient users of a language, it is needed to help them attain proficiency in all language skills and sub-skills (e.g., Hildreth, 1962 and Smedley, 1983). Secondly, all participants were of the same view that they didn't receive any training related to teaching of spelling before and after graduation. Meanwhile when they never have taught spelling as a separate topic to students because this area of language learning has not given much importance at tertiary level of educations and students are not asked to focus on their spelling area while writing. However, all participants agreed to the degree which students' carelessness counted as the main cause this carelessness and the reason of this carelessness is highlighted and connected with the use of technology and Online communication where students use short forms and different informal abbreviations to communicate their ideas. This point was clarified in the interviews, as a teacher explained that most students" errors are a result of the fact that many students do not pay attention to the spelling of words and do not bother to study them. He added that some students write the same word once correctly and another time wrongly in the same paragraph.

Meanwhile, Linguistic difference is one of the main causes of spelling errors, which is actually a orthographic difference between two language and this orthographic difference between English language and the mother language of a learner causes confusion when words are spelled. Many researchers (e.g. Swan and Smith, 2001) pointed out that students find it difficult to learn the language aspects that are found in the target language, but are missing in their mother tongue. Meanwhile irregularity counted as one of the main cause and Corpus analysis revealed that the irregularity of English orthographic system causes most of students" spelling errors. Correspondingly, the surveyed teachers, agreeing with some researchers (Swan and Smith, Koda, 2005; Fender, 2008), believe that the irregularity of English spelling also influences students spelling, reading, writing proficiency. All the participants responded with this statement that the irregularity of English spelling system causes students to read with difficulty." One of the teachers explained when he was interviewed that "those students who read well are usually good spellers."

The main cause of this irregularity is that, as Henderson (1981) indicates, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the written word and its pronunciation. Hildreth (1962) also attributes many of the spelling difficulties that most learners of English have to the "inconsistencies in English word structure" (p. 4).

Majority of Participants reflected on the theme that misspelling doesn't have effect on marks of students, on the contrary one of the participants responded that yes, I do count spelling as major part of writing and count spelling errors while giving them marks. Another important theme found is misspelling hinders communication, because it causes to ambiguity of semantic and pragmatic meaning of a message. All participants strongly agreed with the statement that misspelling in students' writing make it difficult for them to understand the text and grasp the meaning. Meanwhile it reflects negative image of student no matter how good ideas are portrayed. Spelling correctly is not only a luxury. It is a sign of well-developed writing abilities, as spelling errors distort written production and hinder communication between the writer and the reader. Therefore, to produce more relevant teaching and eventually more confident learners and effective communication, more understanding of students" spelling errors and their causes need to be achieved. Teachers should ponder ways to make them aware about the importance of spelling rules and encourage them to become efficient readers. The task is usually easy for native speakers as they have internalized the phonetic rules of their language, but it is usually harder for nonnative speakers to understand the rules and apply them.

One of the teachers pointed out that as English orthographic system has irregular pattern likewise it has regular pattern also, when students learn how regular patterns work, there are more possibilities to spell words correctly because they have more information that they can make use to generate correct spelling. they recommend devoting part of English language classes to teaching some of the regular rules that govern English spelling which would help students not only develop their spelling performance but would also have a positive effect on learners" writing and reading abilities as spelling is directly connected with these two skills of English language.

The phonological differences between mother language and English are another important cause of spelling errors. Some pronunciation difficulties that might also extend to hindering the acquisition of spelling. So there should be complete pattern or amalgamation of different approaches to make students aware about the difference of sound system between their mother language and target language which would in return help them not only to improve spelling but in addition it would improve their pronunciation, reading and writing ability also.

Teachers should highlight Systematic errors and carve out strategies accordingly, teachers should play active role to make students fluent not only in four major skills of English language but these in these sub skills as well on which major skills depend. If teachers leave students to learn on their own that would not yield good results and eventually affect their writing skill at larger level.

Conclusion

Based on the result of research and discussion that has already been presented it can be concluded that: This study explores that Engineering students of first semester enrolled during Functional English at Mehran University of Engineering and Technology make more spelling errors in category of substitution and it occurs more frequently in vowels than consonants. Looking at spelling errors in relation with cook's model revealed that omission is second frequently occurring error in the writing composition of Engineering students at Mehran University.

However, the present study revealed that there are many causes of spelling errors that the students of engineering departments encounter but most frequent problems were being analyzed by the researcher by obtaining data from the respondents that poor reading skills, lack of practice of using new words, inadequate teaching and instruction of spelling topics by the teachers, lack of awareness of proper spelling rules and regulations, careless of the students while writing, intervention of first language, generalization of the sounds, mixing of sounds of the sounds and so on. The overall results of study revealed and demonstrated that spelling is the fundamental problem and spelling errors shake

the writing confidence of the engineering students. Therefore, spelling issue must be sort out by the instructors and taken it seriously in the class while teaching the writing skill because spelling errors spoil the whole writing system of the students and brought very negative impact on the results of students. There must be the proper guidance assured by the instructors while dealing and teaching language courses in the engineering class. Ultimately, it's a teacher job to catch attention of the learners towards the spelling because many of the students do not take spelling as the serious and important aspect in their writing and just glass over it. Resultantly, the learners encounter hundreds of thousands of obstacles to perfect their writing skills because error free spelling leads the error free writing.

This research reveals some impacts of spelling errors from students in online survey are: Spelling errors destroy the structure of sentences as well as its quality; Spelling errors contribute to the poor writing of me in English language writing. Spelling problems make me to get fewer marks in the writing test. In the meantime, semi structured interviews conducted from teachers revealed that when it comes to teaching a language spelling is not given much importance at university level however it hinders the communication between teacher and student when it comes to judge their writing scripts, and it reflects negative image of student no matter how good ideas are portrayed. Spelling is one of the crucial parts of English language learning without which leaners' writing skill can't be effective, the spelling errors badly damage and impact the overall appearance of answers of the learners which they write on the paper because it happens due to not having proper habit and practice of writing the on piece of papers. Now, this condition is found everywhere and every student, today, is the victim of this problem directly or indirectly. This looks very hasty and puts the natural system of writing on the brink of destruction. Therefore, the language teachers should train and motivate the learners to keep writing and practicing on the piece of paper to secure good grades in the graduate programs and enjoy the spelling error free writing skill which plays the key role in making writing best and perfect. It does not mean that the researcher violates the use and utilization of technological gadgets, but the learners and teachers must find the balance while dealing with such natural as well as modern process of teaching and learning English skills. However, lack of this sub skill to spell words correctly can affect other areas of language learning such as reading, writing, grammar, semantics, morphology and shows learner's lack of competence. Teachers need effective strategies and amalgamation of different approaches to teach spellings at university level where students are not expected to make errors in this area.

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