

## Early Childhood Education and Spelling Age

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**Key Words:** *Spelling difficulties, Reading difficulties, Spelling performance, Dyslexia, Learning disability.*

### **Abstract**

*Spelling is a challenging subject for many people. While some struggle with it life time, others do not take spelling seriously. While rote learning can help some children, most children soon forget how to spell difficult words once their school exams are over. If the children are not able to deal with the level of spellings at a particular age, their spelling age is considered to be lower as compared to the chronological age. Interest in learning new spellings start at young age, sometimes during early childhood, which prepares the children for basic formal school skills. If the children do not receive ECE their chances of coping with the further and formal education diminish. Keeping this hypothesis in mind that spelling age must be benefitted by ECE, the study aims to observe the difference between the students who received ECE as compared to those who did not. The present research focused on the study of the spelling performance of the students in Classes IV – VI who received ECE as compared to those who did not.*

*The research aimed to check out spelling performance through “Schonell Spelling Test” by Schonell and Goodacer (1971) which assesses the spelling age from 6 to 15+ years of age. The sample consisted of 60 students (30 boys and 30 girls) taken from the private schools of an urban slum, where 50% of the boys and girls came from the ECE background and the rest 50% of the boys and girls came from the non-ECE background. The data was collected through*

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convenient sampling, tabulated and t-test was applied to study the significant difference. The result revealed that the spelling performance of students in both the groups were different, the spelling age of children who attended early schooling was better as compared to those who did not. Also, girls had poor spelling age if they did not attend the early education as compared to boys because their education is not given attention at home in respect to the social norms.

### **Introduction**

Spelling is an important subject because it applies to many areas of life. Understanding the roots and origins of words is an important part of proper spelling. Rather than memorising unrelated words, children need to know the roots and sources of those words, which will give them the power to spell and to use other words with the same roots. The ability to spell gives a child the power to put their thoughts onto paper, and express themselves fully.

As Gentry (2007) shows, word-sorting is another extremely useful activity. Children can group words based on the way the words begin and end, or by similar letter clusters or vowels. Once children understand how to sort words, they can group them into columns and practice speed-sorting to help them automatically make the right connections.

There are two different types of spelling difficulties. The first type is a difficulty spelling phonetically regular words – words that children “sound out” – such as: fat, mat, bat, cat, rat, sat, hat or more complex words that include vowel combinations such as: stork, wound, repeat, claim, weather, hour (Friend, 2008).

If children have problems with phonetics, they will also have problems spelling in other languages (Treiman, 1993). The second type of spelling difficulty is a difficulty spelling words that children have to recognise by sight because they are hard to “sound out” - such as: wear, quay, island, Wednesday, know, yacht. Some people have both difficulties.

Most people with spelling difficulties try hard to learn their spelling words but then forget them almost instantly. Most people with spelling difficulties cover the fact that they can't spell by spelling the same word in several different ways on the same page. Most people with a spelling difficulty develop poor, or very small, handwriting to disguise the fact their spelling is not good or that they have spelled the same word in several ways on the same page. As spellers, children fall into three main categories:

- *Children who become competent readers and speller.* These children are able to integrate many different kinds of knowledge in their spelling as they do in their reading, and use sound, visual, meaning and structural knowledge to spell words. They

make links between their reading and spelling.

- **Children who are good readers but poor spellers.** These children draw on more limited visual information in reading; rely more heavily on phonological (early) strategies in spelling; don't make links between strategies for reading and those for spelling.
- **Children who are poor readers and poor spellers.** These children have limited information to draw on from reading; they have few effective strategies in spelling – either phonological or visual (Yang Shuang, Ning Ning, Liu Xiang-Ping, 2009).

In all cases however, children exhibit different strength and weakness and must therefore be considered as individuals. Children who experience difficulties need targeted support, often over several years of the primary school (O'Sullivan and Thomas, 2007).

The research aimed to check out spelling performance through "Schonell Spelling Test" by Schonell and Goodacer (1971) which assesses the spelling age from 6 to 15+ years of age. The sample consisted of 60 students (30 boys and 30 girls) taken from the private schools of an urban slum, where 50% of the boys and girls came from the ECE background and the rest 50% of the boys and girls came from the non-ECE background.

### Objectives

1. To assess the spelling age of the students (grade 4-6) who received

early childhood education as compared to those who did not.

2. To study the gender differences in spelling age of students in Grade 4-6.

### Hypothesis

The hypotheses are as follows:

**H<sub>0</sub>1** The spelling age of students who receive early childhood education would be better as compared to those who did not.

**H<sub>0</sub>2.** The spelling age of boys would be better as compared to the girls.

**H<sub>0</sub>3.** The spelling age of the girls who receive early childhood education would be better as compared to the girls who did not.

**H<sub>0</sub>4.** The spelling age of the boys who receive early childhood education would be better as compared to the boys who did not.

### Sample Size

The total sample consisted of 30 boys and 30 girls from the private schools of an urban slum, where 15 boys and girls came from the ECE background and the rest 15 boys and girls came from the non-ECE background.

### Locale of Study

Sample was collected from the private school of an urban slum of Jaipur city.

### Tools

Schonell Spelling Test by Schonell and Goodacer (1971) was used to test the spelling age of children. The tool assesses the spelling age from 6 to 15+ years of age. Schonell's spelling test which was written in Australia and first published in Britain 1950 and has been republished several times since. The tool is being rigorously used for diagnostic purpose.

### Statistical analysis

The data was tabulated and t-test was applied to study the significant difference.

### Results

The results were compiled in accords to the framed hypothesis:

**H<sub>0</sub>1** The spelling age of students who receive early childhood education would be better as compared to those who did not.

Table 1 shows that there is a significant difference between the spelling scores of students at 5% level of significance. The students who received ECE performed much better in spelling test as compared to the students who did not receive ECE, most probably because of better and regular educational facilities as well as good

phonetic practice given in ECE curriculum.

**H<sub>0</sub>2.** The spelling age of boys would be better as compared to the girls.

Table 2 shows no gender difference in the spelling age of children at 5% level of significance. They are equals to each other in spelling performance as school provides equal opportunities and facilities to children, whether girl or boy.

**H<sub>0</sub>3.** The spelling age of the girls who receive early childhood education would be better as compared to the girls who did not.

**H<sub>0</sub>4.** The spelling age of the boys who receive early childhood education would be better as compared to the boys who did not.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and t-value of Spelling Scores of Students**

	Mean	N	SD	t	P
Students who did not receive ECE	7.6968	31	.78761	-3.334	.002
Students who received ECE	8.4419	31	.70558		

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and t-value of Spelling Scores of Boys and Girls**

	Mean	N	SD	t	P
Boys	7.9781	32	.74563	1.932	.063
Girls	7.6188	32	.69209		

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics and t-value of Spelling Scores of Boys and Girls**

	Mean	N	SD	t	P
Boys who did not receive ECE	7.8500	16	.90037	-.872	.397
Boys who received ECE	8.1063	16	.55072		
Girls who received ECE	7.6187	16	.70353	-3.771	.002
Girls who did not received ECE	8.7563	16	.68893		

Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference in the spelling age of boys from the two groups at 5%. They are equally given good educational opportunity and facility, both at home and school.

On the other hand, it was observed that the strength of girls who did not receive ECE as compared to those who received ECE was much lower in spelling age. Although the government provides equal opportunities to girls, the implementation seems to be rather difficult. This might be because they have more responsibilities at home and are given lesser educational motivation from home to attend the school and study.

### **Conclusion**

The children do not go to the schools due to ignorance about importance of

ECE in early childhood years and lack of proper encouragement by the family. They do not understand that ECE fosters children to develop their skills and helps in better overall development. The spelling age of students who receive ECE differ from those who did not as ECE is observed to improve the spelling age in later stages of development. The boys who receive ECE or not, did not have difference in this aspect, while the girls spelling age was observed to be poor if they did not receive ECE. The society does not understand the importance of ECE and refrain girls from seeking their basic educational rights. Hence, it is still the need of the hour to make society understand that education benefits, both the sexes and no gender discrimination should be made.

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