

## STRATEGIES FOR SPELLING IMPROVEMENTS

**Mehwish Rashid**  
PAMS-Arid Agriculture  
University, Rawalpindi,  
PAKISTAN.  
[mehwishrashid786@gmail.com](mailto:mehwishrashid786@gmail.com)

**Dr. Muhammad Imran Yousuf**  
PMAS-Arid Agriculture  
University, Rawalpindi,  
PAKISTAN.  
[dr.imran@uaar.edu.pk](mailto:dr.imran@uaar.edu.pk)

**Dr. Muhammad Imran**  
Elementary Education Dept,  
IER, Punjab University,  
PAKISTAN.  
[Niazi\\_101@yahoo.com](mailto:Niazi_101@yahoo.com)

### ABSTRACT

*Learning disabilities can affect persons' listening, speaking, reading, writing and mathematical skills. Difficulty in writing correct spellings is a problem that comes under written expression. Mostly spelling problems are due to deficiency in perceiving, recalling and sound symbol integration. Observation and interview were used for data collection. After keen observations in classroom and at home, and interviews of teachers, parents and subjects were conducted. Main problems of subjects included the lacking confidence, facing difficulties to adjust in a new school, problems in reading and writing as well, to spell even simple words correctly along with other social and family related problems. Careful observations depicted that subjects had auditory sequential memory deficit. Children with this deficit have difficulty in sound association, hearing and remembering the sounds in correct order. Different spelling strategies were used for improvement of students' spellings. For example, phoneme grapheme relationship, letter clues, missing letters, mix up letters, highlighted words, spell the words by pictures, syllables, tactile exercise and continuous counseling and motivation. By using these strategies, significant progress was observed in spellings, to relate sounds with alphabets, to spell bit difficult words. The study suggests that students with learning deficits needed some extra attention, parents and teachers should give them quality time and treat with love, care, affection, value and friendship. Teachers and parents should work together for betterment of such children.*

**Keywords:** learning disabilities, spelling problem, improvement strategies.

### INTRODUCTION

Learning disabilities refers to variety of disorders that effect the acquisition, retention, understanding, organization or use of verbal and non-verbal information. These disorders are resulted from one or more physiological processes related to learning. These effects are quite individual, but it is generally accepted that these difficulties create a gap between a person's true capacity and his or her day to day performance and productivity. Learning disabilities may also cause difficulties with organizational skills, social perceptions, and social interactions. Learning disabilities can affect a person's ability in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, writing and arithmetic.

Some children develop and mature at a slower rate than the other in the same age group. As a result, they may not be able to do the expected school work. This kind of learning disability is called "maturational lag". Some children with normal vision may misinterpret every day sights and sounds because of some unexplained disorders of their nervous system. Injuries before birth or in early childhood probably account for some later learning problems. Children born prematurely and children having medical problems soon after birth, sometimes have learning disabilities. Learning disabilities tend to run in families, so some learning disabilities may be inherited. Some learning disabilities appear to be linked to the irregular spelling, pronunciations and structure of English language. The incidence of learning disabilities is lower in Spanish and Italian speaking countries.

Spelling is believed to be a more difficult task than reading. The ability to spell has been recognized as complex and multifaceted process. Lerner (1985) pointed out that the students may use a contextual, structural or configuration clues in reading. Whereas in spellings there is no opportunity to draw such clues in reproducing a word. There are four factors that greatly affect the spellings.

- The ability to spell words that are phonetic.
- The ability to spell words that involve roots, prefixes, suffixes and roles of combining.
- The ability to look at word and reproduce it later.
- The ability to spell demons.

Louise (2005) stated that students with learning disabilities in reading usually have problems in spellings. Spelling can be especially difficult for these students, for several reasons. First, the basic deficit in reading disability (RD) typically involves word decoding, and many of the same weaknesses that impact word decoding in individuals with RD such as poor phonemic awareness or poor knowledge of letter-sound relationships also influence spelling. Furthermore, spelling is affected by independent reading and exposure to text; avid readers see more words in print and have more opportunities to learn spellings of specific words. Because individuals with RD are rarely keen readers, lack of exposure to printed words may adversely influence their spelling. Finally, English spelling is complex, drawing upon several different kinds of knowledge. Effective teaching of this knowledge is especially crucial for students with RD.

Mason et al. (2012) conducted a mixed methods study to evaluate motivation among 20 fourth-grade students who struggled with reading and writing prior to and after receiving either self-regulated strategy development (SRS) instruction for expository reading comprehension or SRS instruction for expository reading comprehension plus informative writing. Results indicated that students' efficacy increased after instruction in both interventions; however, efficacy was more varied across interventions for interest, self-regulation (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation), and task perception. Findings indicated that social factors could be better developed in both interventions.

Spelling and reading build and rely on the same mental representation of a word. Knowing the spelling of a word makes the representation of it strong and accessible for fluent reading (Snow et al., 2005). Teachers who have been taught about phonics have typically received information about (spelling) as lists of rules about letter sequence constraints. Such lists are unmotivated, unappealing, and difficult to learn. Lists without a logical framework or set of principles must be learned by rote rather than reason. In fact, Ehri (1998) found that the ability to read words "by sight" (i.e. automatically) rests on the ability to map letters and letter combinations to sounds. Because words are not very visually distinctive (for example, car, can, cane), it is impossible for children to memorize more than a few dozen words unless they have developed insights into how letters and sounds correspond. Learning to spell requires instruction and gradual integration of information about print, speech sounds, and meaning these, in turn, support memory for whole words, which is used in both spelling and sight reading.

Graham and Free (1986) conducted a study that examined learning disabled students' spelling performance in response to strategy training and variation in study conditions. After training in the five steps study strategy, subjects studied spelling words under one of three conditions: (a) directed study; (b) student-controlled; and (c) teacher mentioned. Students assigned to a control group were given the choice to study the words in any manner they chose. Results indicated that students who were taught the five steps study strategy recalled the correct spelling of more words than controls who devised their own study method. However, the spelling performance of students who received strategy training was not differently affected by variations in the study conditions. Results were interpreted to suggest that learning disabled students' spelling difficulties are associated with problems in self-regulation of organized, strategic behavior.

Gerber (1997) conducted his study with eleven learning disabled elementary students, who were asked to attempt spellings of unknown words using a standard written dictation test and an imitation-modeling procedure to provide corrective feedback but minimal instruction. Dictations were repeated until 100% accuracy was achieved. A second list of words sharing the same orthographic features was then administered without specific instructions designed to promote generalization, followed by administration of a third list that included specific instructions to use information about previous spellings in attempting words on the new list. Results showed that all but one student reached mastery in fewer than 10 trials, subjects obtained more correct spellings on the first trial of each new list, subjects required fewer trials on each successive list to reach criterion, and subjects demonstrated

systematic improvements in quality of spelling attempts across both trials and lists. The data were interpreted to mean that when these LD students were permitted sufficient, though individually variable, exposure to minimal correction procedures, they were able to spontaneously generalize what had been learned about spelling features of one list to another.

## METHODOLOGY

Twelve subjects from six sections of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade within one elementary school at Rawalpindi city (Pakistan) were identified as LD. The case studies of these subjects explored their problems and then by observation their attitude towards teachers, siblings and other relationship indicators were also inquired through interview process.

### Tools for Collection of Information

The following tools were used for collection of information about students' problem.

#### Observation

The researchers observed subjects' behavior in classroom and also observed their teachers' attitude and expressions. Then the researchers observed their home atmosphere, relationship with siblings and mothers' attitude towards their studies and school.

#### Interview

Interviews were conducted with subjects, their teacher and mothers. Closed as well as open ended questions were asked in the interview. These interviews helped to take the case history of the subjects. These tools helped to identify their main academic problems.

### Background Problems Identified:

Some of the background problems related to them were as following:

Six of the subjects were elder in their siblings. Do not pay attention in class, remain passive and cannot fully understand the lesson. Feel problem in English reading, not able to spell even simple words correctly; don't know the sound of alphabets. Auditory sequential memory deficits were observed and feel difficulty in learning letters/ sounds association and hearing and remembering the sounds in the correct order. For example

- Lacking confidence.
- Unable to adjust herself in new school.
- Parents were not paying proper attention.
- Problem with reading 'have' as 'hand' or 'ear' as 'airs'
- Couldn't spell properly.

### Causes

Basic reasons behind their academic problems are the negative home environment, family having financial problems. They have shifted from separate home to a joint family system and have to change the school after class two. As the school was very expensive and parents could not afford the expenses of that schools. Now there is adjustment problem in new school. Parents remain busy to solve economic and domestic problems and the subjects feel to be neglected and such feelings have badly affected their studies. Some subjects showed carelessness in classroom and doing homework. Some mothers do not pay proper attention blame school for slow progress of their children. Heredity factor was also reported in three cases on the basis that reading and spelling problems among their blood relations. Main causes of academic problem were

- Shifting of school.
- Shifting from separate home to joint family.
- Lack of attention from parents and teacher.
- Financial problems for supporting education of children.

## Strategies for Spelling Improvement

Following Strategies were used for improvement of subjects.

### Phonemes grapheme relationship

First strategy used was alphabets and their sounds. Subjects were taught to sound the alphabets and how to relate these sounds with their symbols. In auditory perception of letter sounds, knowledge of phonics and structural analysis was given to develop their skills in applying the phonic generalization.

### Missing letters

Different words with missing letters were written on the paper. It was asked to recognize the correct word, to see the missing word and then to fill the blanks by recognizing its sound.

### Letter clues

The entire word was covered up and then gradually exposing each successive letter until the subjects could guess the correct word. For example garden, beautiful, mother, uncle, sparrow, carrot etc.

### Spell the word by pictures

Pictures were pasted on charts and Subjects were asked to spell the name of that thing by using learned skills of how to spell.

### Mixed up letters

Words with no sequence were given to Subjects and were asked to write these words in order. For example fish as fshi, kite as ekti, flag as glaf etc.

### Highlight words

Highlight words strategy was used by highlighting the difficult part of the word. Then Subjects were asked to make a mental picture of that word, read the word aloud and spell it aloud. For example, "SepArate" then were asked to think how the difficult part looks or sounds. So, while writing 'separate' they might be thinking "sep A rate" and thinking of that bold 'red A'.

### Tactile exercises

The tactile exercise was provided by sand tray, felt or wooden letters. The revisualization of specific letters was strengthening by having the child trace the letter in various media, such as clay, salt and sand.

### Syllables

The syllables of the words were taught to the subjects for example Pakistan as pak-is-tan. They have to say the word syllable by syllable, spell the word orally and then trace the word in air or over the word itself with the finger.

### Counseling and motivation

Counseling and motivation is very important for students. While using all above mentioned strategies, continuous counseling and motivation was provided. It was realized to Subjects that if school has changed that's not a big problem; it can done well in this school. Sincerity and motivation of teachers was also recognized before subjects.

### Impact of strategies

By using these strategies, remarkable improvements were noticed in the spelling. Post assessment indicated improvements:

- Relate sounds with symbols, subjects were well aware of phoneme grapheme relationship.
- By understanding the sounds subjects were able to recognize missing alphabet in the word.
- They were able to encode the words.
- They were able to spell a bit difficult word through exercise of highlight words.
- Tactile exercise helped to develop concrete concepts about spelling.

- Reorganization of syllables helped to memorize the spelling.
- After counseling and motivation, felt confident, happy, takes interest in class and the impression toward school were felt improved.

## ANALYSIS

It was analyzed by the interviews of subjects, mothers and teachers, that they were not slow learners from childhood. They were facing problem in studies from few years and it was due to the negative home environment and financial problems of family. So the proper attention and guideline were needed. In first session, case histories were collected by interviewing teachers and mothers. Then different spelling strategies were made. In second session, they were taught sounds of alphabets and how to relate these sounds with other symbols. In third session, sand tray, letter clues and missing letters strategies were used. In fourth session, they were taught to spell by highlighting confusing alphabets in words, spell the whole word, mix up letters and complete the sentence by help of pictures. Along with all above mentioned strategies, motivation was applied to generate good results. By using such strategies, significant progress was observed in their spellings.

## CONCLUSION

Home and school environment has very strong impact in student's personality. Students want intensive care and attention from parents. Parents should give proper attention to their children even they face any type of difficulties. Teachers should also take care of LD student. They should make strategies for them and give them extra time for completion of tasks. Parents should cooperate with teachers and teachers should help parents to understand children problem and tell them ways by which parents can help their children.

To conclude, the work with the student who had spelling problem, it is stated that we can bring lot of improvement in the behaviors of LD students by recognizing their actual problem and treat them accordingly. Students with learning deficits want some extra attention. So parents and teachers should not take them as a burden. LD student needs treatment of love, care, affection, value and friendship. Teachers and parents should work together for betterment of such children.

## SUGGESTIONS

After doing this research, we give following suggestions to teachers

- Teachers should give more attention to LD students.
- Teachers should show lenient attitude towards LD students.
- Teachers should give extra time for completion of work.
- Teachers should give them activities according to their mental level.
- Teachers should motivate them by involving them in different activities in class.
- Don't give students abstract information and they should relate teaching to daily experience of life.

Parents have very strong effect on their child's academic behavior. So there are some suggestions for parents.

- Parents should never feel that their slow learner child as a burden.
- Parents should give proper attention and quality time to their children.
- Parents should involve them in social activities.
- Parents should cooperate with teachers.
- Parents should find out ways, for their child to apply those skills at home, which their child learnt at school.

**REFERENCES**

- Ehri, L. C. (1998). Learning to read and learning to spell are one and the same, almost. In C. Perfetti, L. Rieben, & M. Fayol (Eds.), *Learning to spell: Research, theory and practice across languages*. 237-269.
- Graham, S. & Free, M. (1986). Strategy Training and Teacher- vs. Student-Controlled Study Conditions: Effects on LD Students' Spelling Performance. *Learning Disability, Quarterly*. 9(1): 15-22.
- Louisa C. (2005). How Spelling Supports Reading. *American Educator*, 12-43.
- Mason, L. H., Meadan, H., Hedin, Laura R., Cramer, A. M. (2012). Avoiding the Struggle: Instruction That Supports Students' Motivation in Reading and Writing about Content Material. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, 28(1): 70-96.
- Gerber, M. (1997). Generalization of Spelling Strategies by LD Students as a Result of Contingent Imitation/Modeling and Mastery Criteria. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*. 19(9): 530-537.
- Moats, L. C. (1995). *Spelling: Development, disability, and instruction*. Timonium, MD: York Press.
- Snow, C. E., Griffin, P., & Burns, M. S. (Eds.) (2005). *Knowledge to Support the Teaching of Reading: Preparing Teachers for a Changing World*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.