

# The Efficacy of Word Study Strategy in Improving the Spelling Skills

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the efficacy of the Word Study Strategy in enhancing the spelling skills of Grade 7 students at Manolo Fortich National High School, Bukidnon. Employing a quasi-experimental research design, the study compared the performance of a controlled group, which underwent traditional spelling instruction, and an experimental group, which was exposed to the Word Study Strategy. The study utilized quantitative and qualitative methods, including pretests, posttests, and in-depth interviews, to assess spelling proficiency before and after the intervention. Findings revealed that while both groups initially performed at a Did Not Meet Expectation level in spelling, only the experimental group demonstrated significant improvement, achieving a Very Satisfactory rating in the posttest. Moreover, the study found no significant correlation between gender and spelling performance but a moderate correlation between parents' educational background and students' spelling proficiency. The research underscores the effectiveness of the Word Study Strategy in fostering long-term retention and a deeper understanding of spelling patterns, as opposed to rote memorization. It recommends that spelling instruction be introduced systematically at an early stage, treated as a separate subject, and assessed through diagnostic tools before implementation. This study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for innovative, engaging, and developmentally appropriate spelling interventions to improve language learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** Word Study Strategy, Spelling Skills, Quasi-Experimental Research, Educational Intervention, Language Learning

## INTRODUCTION

Spelling is a fundamental component of written communication, playing a critical role in literacy development and academic success. Errors in spelling can lead to misunderstandings in written discourse, making it imperative for educators to implement effective instructional strategies (Ehri, 2020). The English language presents unique challenges in spelling due to its complex phoneme-grapheme relationships, which often result in unpredictable spelling patterns (Treiman & Kessler, 2014). These challenges are exacerbated by the increasing influence of digital communication, where alternative spellings and informal linguistic structures have become prevalent among students (Wood et al., 2022). As a result, traditional approaches to spelling instruction, which primarily focus on rote memorization, have proven insufficient in equipping students with long-term spelling proficiency (Joshi et al., 2019).

To address these limitations, the Word Study Strategy has emerged as a promising pedagogical approach that emphasizes pattern recognition, word sorting, and active engagement in spelling instruction (Bear et al., 2020). Unlike conventional spelling instruction, which often isolates spelling from reading and writing, the Word Study Strategy integrates spelling into a broader linguistic framework, allowing students to explore orthographic patterns and word structures in a meaningful context (Templeton & Bear, 2019). This approach shifts the focus from memorization to cognitive understanding, enabling students to develop transferable spelling skills that extend beyond weekly spelling tests (Apel & Masterson, 2018).

Research has demonstrated that the Word Study Strategy significantly enhances students' spelling skills by fostering morphological and phonemic awareness (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013). Additionally, studies indicate that students who engage in word study activities show greater retention and application of spelling patterns in their writing compared to those who follow traditional spelling methods (Perfetti et al., 2017). Given these

promising findings, it is essential to further examine the efficacy of this instructional approach, particularly among non-native English speakers who may encounter additional challenges in mastering English spelling rules (Bowers & Cooke, 2012).

This study investigated the impact of the Word Study Strategy on the spelling proficiency of Grade 7 students at Manolo Fortich National High School in the Philippines. Specifically, it compared the effectiveness of this approach against traditional spelling instruction by assessing pretest and posttest performance outcomes. The findings of this study will contribute to the growing body of research on evidence-based spelling interventions and provide practical insights for educators seeking to enhance spelling instruction in diverse linguistic contexts. By fostering a deeper understanding of word structures and spelling patterns, this research aspires to improve literacy outcomes and promote long-term retention of spelling skills among students.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a quasi-experimental design, specifically the pretest-posttest control group design, to assess the efficacy of the Word Study Strategy in improving students' spelling skills. A quasi-experimental approach was selected to compare the effectiveness of the intervention with that of the traditional spelling instruction method.

### **Research Locale**

The study was conducted at Manolo Fortich National High School, Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon, Philippines. The school caters to a diverse student population and provides an ideal setting for evaluating spelling interventions among Grade 7 students.

### **Respondents and Sampling Design**

The study involved 70 Grade 7 students from two sections—Cattleya (experimental group) and Orchid (control group). The selection was based on purposive sampling, ensuring both groups had comparable demographic characteristics. The experimental group was exposed to the Word Study Strategy, while the control group continued with traditional spelling instruction.

### **Research Instrument**

The primary instrument used for data collection was the Upper-Level Spelling Inventory (USI) from Words Their Way (Pearson Education Inc., 2008). This standardized tool assessed students' spelling proficiency before and after the intervention. Additionally, a researcher-developed questionnaire was administered to collect demographic information.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

**Pretest Administration:** All participants completed the Upper-Level Spelling Inventory to determine their initial spelling proficiency levels.

**Intervention Implementation:** The experimental group received instruction using the Word Study Strategy, which involved word sorting, pattern recognition, and morphological analysis over eight weeks.

The control group continued with traditional spelling instruction, including rote memorization and repetitive spelling tests.

**Posttest Administration:** After the intervention, both groups again completed the Upper-Level Spelling Inventory to assess spelling skill improvement.

Qualitative Data Collection: To gain insights into the students' learning experiences with the Word Study Strategy, selected students from the experimental group were interviewed in depth.

### **Statistical Treatment**

Descriptive Statistics (mean, standard deviation) to summarize pretest and posttest results.

Pearson Correlation Coefficient to examine the relationship between students' demographic profiles and spelling performance.

Paired Sample Z-Test to determine the significance of pretest and posttest differences within each group.

Finally, a T-test to compare the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Before conducting the study, approval was obtained from the school administration. Informed consent was secured from students and their guardians. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were strictly maintained.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of this study revealed that the Word Study Strategy significantly improved the spelling skills of Grade 7 students at Manolo Fortich National High School. The pretest and post-test scores demonstrated that students in the experimental group, who were exposed to the Word Study Strategy, outperformed those in the controlled group, who followed the Traditional Spelling Approach.

### **Pretest and Posttest Performance**

Prior to the intervention, both groups performed at a "Did Not Meet Expectations" level, with all students scoring below the 75% proficiency threshold. The experimental group had a pretest mean score of 49.51, while the control group had a lower mean score of 20.51. This suggests that both groups exhibited spelling weaknesses before the intervention, aligning with studies highlighting spelling difficulties among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners (Allaith, 2021; Protopapas et al., 2013).

After the intervention, the experimental group showed a substantial increase in their mean score to 87.83, reaching a "Very Satisfactory" proficiency level. In contrast, while the controlled group also improved, their mean score of 73.94 remained at the "Did Not Meet Expectation" level. This difference indicates that the Word Study Strategy was significantly more effective than the Traditional Spelling Approach, corroborating previous findings that explicit phonological and morphological instruction enhances spelling proficiency (Bear et al., 2020; Templeton & Morris, 2019).

### **Influence of Parental Education on Spelling Performance**

Analysis of the relationship between students' socio-demographic profile and spelling performance revealed that gender had no significant correlation with spelling proficiency. This aligns with prior research suggesting that spelling ability is not inherently linked to gender but rather to exposure, practice, and instructional strategies (Rios, 2019; Jones, 2022).

However, a significant correlation was found between parental education and spelling performance, particularly in the experimental group. Students whose parents had higher educational attainment tended to perform better in spelling, as evidenced by a moderate to strong correlation ( $r = 0.474$ ,  $p = 0.004$  for mothers;  $r = 0.380$ ,  $p = 0.024$  for fathers). These findings support previous studies indicating that parental educational background plays a vital role in children's academic performance, particularly in literacy-related skills (Gooding, 2020; Prozanto, 2018).

## Impact of the Word Study Strategy on Spelling Development

The results of this study emphasize the importance of explicit, structured spelling instruction that goes beyond rote memorization. The Word Study Strategy allowed students to analyze, compare, and manipulate word families, leading to a deeper understanding of English orthographic patterns. Cook (2021) supports this finding, asserting that systematic phonemic and morphological instruction leads to better spelling knowledge retention and application.

Furthermore, studies have shown that word sorting, phoneme-grapheme mapping, and interactive spelling activities contribute to long-term spelling retention (Bear & Templeton, 2022; Wasowicz, 2020). The significant improvement observed in the experimental group reinforces the effectiveness of engaging, active learning approaches in spelling instruction.

### Pedagogical Implications

**Spelling Instruction Should Be Introduced Early:** Consistent with Westwood's (2022) Developmental Spelling Theory, spelling instruction should begin early in a learner's literacy journey to ensure progressive mastery of orthographic patterns.

**Integrating Word Study into Language Curricula:** Given its success in this study, the Word Study Strategy should be incorporated into English language curricula to enhance spelling proficiency among ESL learners.

**Parental Involvement in Literacy Development:** Schools should involve parents in spelling activities by providing them with strategies to support their children's learning at home.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant impact of the Word Study Strategy in enhancing the spelling skills of Grade 7 students. The findings reveal that while gender does not play a significant role in spelling performance, parental educational attainment influences students' initial spelling abilities. The experimental group, exposed to the Word Study Strategy, demonstrated a substantial improvement in spelling proficiency compared to the control group, which followed traditional spelling instruction. This aligns with recent research emphasizing that structured and engaging spelling interventions are more effective than rote memorization methods (Bear et al., 2020; Joshi & Moats, 2021).

Furthermore, the results support the growing body of literature advocating for developmentally appropriate spelling instruction that integrates phonological, morphological, and orthographic knowledge (Ehri, 2022; Treiman & Kessler, 2023). The success of the Word Study Strategy suggests that educators should prioritize active and meaningful word exploration over passive spelling drills. This pedagogical shift is particularly relevant in multilingual contexts like the Philippines, where linguistic interference can contribute to spelling difficulties (Pérez et al., 2022).

While the study provides valuable insights, its findings could be strengthened by addressing limitations related to sample size, potential bias, and the scope of the control group. Future research should explore the long-term retention effects of the Word Study Strategy and its adaptability across different grade levels and learning environments. Additionally, integrating digital tools and gamification into word study practices could further enhance student engagement and learning outcomes in the 21st-century classroom (Graham et al., 2023).

By embracing research-based spelling instruction, educators can equip students with essential literacy skills contributing to overall language proficiency and academic success.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the teaching and learning of spelling through the Word Study Strategy:

## Integration of Word Study in Language Instruction

Language teachers should integrate the Word Study Strategy into early literacy instruction. Research indicates that explicit spelling instruction, when combined with phonological awareness, enhances students' ability to decode and encode words effectively (Ehri, 2022).

## Contextualized and Differentiated Spelling Instruction

Spelling instruction should be conducted separately from general language instruction, utilizing structured and differentiated learning approaches. Studies suggest that word study activities, such as word sorting and morphological analysis, can significantly improve spelling and vocabulary acquisition, particularly for English language learners and struggling spellers (Ganske, 2021).

## Diagnostic and Formative Assessment for Spelling Development

Before implementing spelling interventions, teachers should assess students' spelling abilities using diagnostic tools like the Developmental Spelling Inventory. This ensures that instruction is tailored to students' developmental stages, as recommended by Invernizzi et al. (2023), who highlight the importance of assessing orthographic knowledge to inform instruction.

## Technology-Enhanced Word Study Activities

Given the advancements in educational technology, researchers and educators should explore digital platforms for word study interventions. Emerging evidence suggests that gamified spelling instruction and interactive learning applications can significantly enhance engagement and retention (Graham & Santangelo, 2022).

## Further Research on Spelling Pedagogy

Future researchers should investigate additional instructional strategies that complement the Word Study Strategy, such as multisensory approaches or cross-linguistic analysis. Moreover, longitudinal studies should examine the long-term impact of word study on literacy skills beyond spelling, including reading fluency and writing composition (Bowers & Kirby, 2022).

By implementing these recommendations, educators can optimize the Word Study Strategy to improve spelling proficiency and overall literacy development among learners.

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