The Most Common Spelling Errors Arab Students From Grades 6-9 Make in Their Learning of English

Ahmed Awad Amin Mahmoud

An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine

The study aims to investigate the most common spelling mistakes English learning students from Grades 6-9 in Nablus and Jenin UNRWA schools make in light of gender and grade variables. For this purpose, the researcher dictates texts from the school textbooks of these grades to a sample of 241 students (107 males and 134 females). The results showed the following: (1) The most common mistakes UNRWA students from Grades 6-9 make are: frequent letters, dropping letters, putting letters before others, dropping the letter "e", and the unpronounced letters respectively; (2) there are significant statistical differences in means of spelling errors among students from Grades 6-9 due to gender variable in favor of males, who show a high level of errors in comparison of females; and (3) there are no significant statistical differences in means of spelling errors among students from Grades 6-9 due to grade. In the light of the study findings, the researcher suggested some recommendations, such as dictation exercises which focus on the common errors, pinpointing the differences in spelling systems between the mother tongue and its English counterpart in order to avoid interference from the spelling system.

Keywords: common spelling errors, Arab Palestinian learners, 6-9 graders

Introduction

Spelling accurately is a basic and an essential skill for every student of English, which enables writers to express their thoughts and feelings in a standard manner. Poor spelling hinders pupils from better communication.

Learners in the school setting need to become proficient spellers. Pupils need to perceive purpose in learning to spell any given set of words. Learners need to attach meaning to ongoing activities and experiences, and appropriate learning experiences must be provided by the teacher to assist each pupil to acheive stated ends. Teachers need to emphasize that the English language has numerous irregularly spelled words.

Although English spelling is basically alphabetical, the disimilarities between sounds and letters are annoying. It is noticed that these numerous disimilarities are governed by arbitrariness.

English spelling is notoriously difficult, and foreigners learning English are bewildered by the lack of correlation between spelling and pronunciation. Those whose native language is English have been for so long accustomed to the vagaries of English spelling that they take them for granted, but it is not uncommon to find

Ahmed Awad Amin Mahmoud, associate professor, Ph.D., Curriculum and Instruction/TEFL Section, An-Najah National University.

even well-educated Englishmen who will admit cheerfully, or even with a touch of prides, that they cannot spell. In a perfectly consistent system of spelling, there would be one symbol for each phoneme. It is immediately obvious that present-day English is very far from this state. For example, the central vowel [∂] is represented in many different ways, some of which may be illustrated by the words "about, father, neighbor, pleasure, the, theatre". On the other hand, the letter "a" is used to represent several entirely distinct sound, such as those in "about, gate, cat, father, talk" (Brooks, 1984, p. 100).

Through the analysis of several types of the spelling errors which occur in the writing of many students, the study seeks to suggest that the most of the spelling errors are systematic errors observed over a period of three years of teaching English to Arab students at the university level. They are the type of errors that persist from time to time, class to class, and which recur from one year to the next with any group of Arab learners the author has taught. Such errors cannot be explained as more failures to memorize a segment of language, or as occasional lapses in performance due to memory limitations, fatigue, and the like (Yorkey, 1982).

Theoretical Background

When dealing with spelling errors, it is sometimes useful if the teacher understands the source of the error. There are several possible causes of spelling difficulties among non-native learners:

(1) Among learners whose native language use the Roman alphabet, as English does, problems may be caused by confusion between the sound value of a particular letter in the native language and its value in English. For example, in German, the letter "v" represents the sound /f/ as in "fun"; in English, it represents the sound /v/ as in "vision". So, a German-speaking learner may read the word "drive" to rhyme with "life". The strategy learners are using could be put some thing like this: "When a learner is not sure what the sound/spelling correspondence is in English, he/she assumes that it is the same as that in my native language". Very often, learners seem to resort to this strategy when they are "under pressure", for example, when they are asked to read aloud before the class or into tape, or when the text they are dealing with contains a very large number of words which are unfamiliar to them, or (in the situation of writer) when they are doing a dictation or a written test. In many cases, it is very likely that learners are all too aware of the "danger", and therefore never experience any cross-spelling-system confusion, but sometimes some very odd things happen. For example, German learners of English quickly realize as soon as they meet written English forms that the letter "w" which in German stands for /v/ as in "very" (examples: wenn, weil, wollen), has a different value in English. It corresponds to /w/ as in "weather", 'will', and "wet". Now this is a new sound for the learners (it does not occur in German), so they will be very careful to pronounce words like "will" and "weather" correctly. The desire to avoid making a mistake may actually cause an "over-reaction" and some learners begin to pronounce English words beginning with "v" with the new sound /w/ as well. So "very" and "value" become "wery" and "walue".

(2) Learners whose native language uses a non alphabetic system will have to adjust to alphabetic conventions. Japanese uses a system in which a symbol represents a syllable, not an individual sound. In Arabic script, the representation of vowels is variable and they can be represented in the writing system, but may be omitted in certain styles and types of script.

(3) Another source of difficulty is the English spelling system itself. As soon as learners are exposed to

written English, they start to make generalizations about how the system works. Since English is an alphabetic system, this means basically sorting out which letter corresponds to which sound, but it is seen, English spelling is not a strictly regular alphabetic system in which one letter always stands for one sound and one sound only. Learners whose native languages do work in this way (Spanish and Italian are the two best example) may find this more difficult to adjust to than learners who are aware that their own language's spelling is not strictly "phonetic" as, for example, French speakers may be. Because of some of the irregularities of English spelling, the errors that non-native learners make will very often be the same as the errors made by native speakers, especially English children who are learning to write their language. These errors are due to incorrect guesses about the nature of the system, and sometimes are aggravated by the fact that some very common, high-frequently words have exceptional spellings. For example, the rule that "gh" at the end of a word is silent is broken by only seven words, but one of these is "enough".

(4) Finally, there is the pronunciation of the learner. If a learner has difficulty in distinguishing English /p/ as in "pet" from English /b/ as in "bet", then, in doing a dictation, he or she may spell "pill" as "bill". Here is another example, in a dictation given to a class, the surname "Rogers" occurred. A Japanese learner wrote this as "largerse". The misspelling of the first letter is surely due to the problem Japanese learners have in distinguishing /r/ as in "run" from /l/ as in "love" (Kenworthy, 1987).

Brooks (1984) shows in his research why English spelling is misleading, here are some of the reasons:

One reason why English spelling is misleading is that learners over work the alphabet. There are more phonemes than letters in present-day English, and learners waste three letters of the alphabet (c, g, and x) by using them to represent sounds which can be represented in other ways. It is inevitable, therefore, that some symbols have to be used to represent more than one sound.

An even more important reason for the unreliability of English spelling as a guide to contemporary pronunciation is that for the last three centuries or more English spelling has changed little whereas pronunciation is constantly as it used to be rather than as it is today. It provides evidence for which the student of the history of the language has reason to be grateful although the user of the language has reason to despair.

A third reason why English spelling does not always present a true picture of the pronunciation is that forms from various provincial dialects have passed into standard English pronunciation although the dialectal pronunciation is not always recorded in spelling. Thus, it should be expected that "one" to be pronounced with the diphthong is found in the related word "only"; the initial "w" that occurs in the pronunciation of "one" is borrowed from some local dialect. In standard English, "y" has become "i", but in the South-East it became "e" in late Old English and in the South-West it remained spelt "u" as the result of French influence, until the end of the Middle English period.

Another contributory cause of the confusion of Modern English spelling is to be found in what are called inverted spellings, which are liable to occur whenever a sound-change has taken place. When a sound-change takes place, the change is sometimes, but not always, recorded in spelling. Hence, after a sound-change has taken place there often occur side by side two different forms of the same word, one with a spelling representing the old pronunciation and one with a more phonetic spelling representing the new pronunciation (Brooks, 1984).

Some researchers try to solve the problem of spelling or at least try to show the types of spelling errors and

reasons behind these errors.

Aqel (1993) says errors appear in some words or phonemes:

(1) Replacing the phoneme /p/ by the phoneme /p/, e.g., *barty for party and *beable for people.

Misspelled words are found because English has two bilabial stops [p] and [b], in contrast with Arabic which has only one. Since Arabic students may not always perceive the distinction between the sounds [p] and [b], they replace [p] by [b] when they write words that have the former.

(2) Deleting silent letters, as in *tak for talk and *forein for foreign.

(3) Deleting the phoneme /e/ at the end of words, such as *hid for hide and *culturs for cultures.

Errors above may be attributed to the discrepancy between English orthography and pronunciation. However, this tendency is reinforced due to the influence of the Arabic system in which the spelling pattern follows the pronunciation pattern. So, students delete any English letter that is not pronounced.

(4) Forming the plural from in irregular manner, e.g., *countrys for countries and *mans for men.

The above errors may be due to overgeneralization of the rule which states that the plural (regular) is formed by adding "s" to the singular, without taking into account the rule restrictions (Aqel, 1993).

Also Yorkey (1982) conducted a study on spelling errors and he said about the common spelling problems, many foreign students of English, as well as native speakers, have found the following words difficult to spell correctly (They are spelled correctly here).

all right	disease	occurring
athletics	doesn't	occurred
author	embarrass	paid
beginning	engineer	pronunciation
believe	finally	receive
benefit	forty	relieve

Notice the differences in spelling, pronunciation, and meaning between the words in the following pair:

hear	here	
it's	its	
profit	prophet	
quiet	quite	
their	there	they're

Tirumalesh (1996) says that all learners have problems with the correct sequencing of "i" and "e" when they occur adjacently in words. Students are generally taught the following jingle (or some version of it) as a mnemonic device: Write (i) before (e) except after (c) or when sounded like A as in neighbor and weigh. This means that generally when the two letters occur together, the order is "i" before "e": for example, "grief" and "relieve". The two exceptions that the jingle mentions are first, when a "c" occurs in the immediately preceding position as in "receive" and "conceive"; second, when the sound is like an "a" as in the examples given in the jingle. Of course, as always, there are exceptions: If the "c" sounds like a "sh", as in the word "conscience", then "i" comes before "e" and the word "heifer" is spelt with an "e" before "i" although it does not sound like an "a". Exceptions apart (which are always a problem anyway), a jingle is just a jingle: It does not capture the complete situation. However, if students look at the noun forms of verbs like "conceive" formed by the addition

of -tion, they notice that in all of them the second of the two letters disappears. As a result, they get the following set:

conceive   conception

receive   reception

EL-Hibir and Taha (1993) conducted a study on spelling errors, they said: The discrepancy between the writing system and the pronunciation of English makes orthography far from phonemic. A single phoneme may be represented by a number of spellings. For examble, /f/ may be represented by (fill), "ph" (philosophy), or "gh" (enough); /ʃ/ may be represented by "sh" (wash), "ti" (nation), or "si" (tension). Vowels can present even more of a problem.

It is found that spelling errors result not only from the inconsistencies in English spelling and pronunciation indicated above, but also from the influence of the student's mother tongue. A study shows that students employ their own strategies in spelling, i.e, they spell as they pronounce, over looking the difference between English spelling and pronunciation. This leads to a lack of recognition of standard English orthography, which allows down the student's reading speed and hinders their comprehension of English texts (El-Hibir & Taha, 1993).

Studies Conducted on Spelling Errors

A great deal of research examining the spelling errors made by students learning English has been conducted, some of these researches are exposed here.

Howard, Aerteagoitia, Louguit, Malabonga, and Kenyon (2006) described the development of an English spelling measure designed to assess the progress made by Spanish-English children from Grade 2 to Grade 5. The prepilot study had 179 native Spanish and native English speaking participants in Grades 1-5. Results revealed that students' spelling is developmental and can be improved by time through practice.

Pray (2004) made a research to investigate four aspects of spelling as development word knowledge. First, the research examined the third graders' performances on a standardized spelling test and qualitative word knowledge inventory, and indicated that students' spelling scores increased, so did their word knowledge scores. Next, the study ivestigated the relationship of word knowledge development across four reading and spelling tasks. An analysis of variance indicated that students' performances on the reading tasks were significantly better than their performances on the spelling tasks. A descriptive error analysis was employed to examine the developmental levels of the demonstrated errors across tasks and indicated that there was a significant task effect on the student's level of word knowledge. Further qualitative analysis of the reading and spelling errors of students revealed that the errors involved similar orthographic features across the tasks. Fainally, the investigation explored the third grade teachers' rating of their students' spelling achievement and word knowledge. The data indicated that the ratings were significantly related to the students' actual performances in spelling achievement and word knowledge, but not adequate for instructional decisions.

Dildine (2003): Based on results from research on children's spelling, it has been established that spelling errors produced by English as a second language (ESL) students of sixth grade students parallel the errors of native speakers of English in the same classroom. The ESL students are also impacted by cross-linguistic-influence of the phonology of their native tongue. Results of the study show English spelling

acquisition for ESL students is a development process similar to native speakers of English.

Berninger et al. (2002) found out that treatments increased compositional fluency and spelling fluency. Combined spelling plus composing were most effective for word-specific spelling (taught words). Teaching alternations improved phonological decoding and transferred to spelling in composing. Composing and combined spelling plus composing were most effective for persuasive essay writing. Only combined spelling plus composing increased both spelling and composing. Results are related to the simple view of writing that integrates diverse theoretical traditions and instructional practices.

Graham and Harris (2002) examined the contribution of supplemental spelling instruction to spelling, writing, and reading. Second-grade children experiencing difficulties learning to spell participated in forty-eight 20-min sessions designed to improve their spelling skills. In comparison with peers in a contact control condition receiving mathematics instruction, students in the spelling condition made greater improvements on norm-referenced spelling measures, a writing-fluency test, and a reading word-attack measure following instruction. Six months later, students in the spelling treatment maintained their advantage in spelling but not on the writing-fluency and reading word-attack measures. However, spelling instruction had a positive effect at maintenance on the reading word-recognition skills of children who scored lowest on this measure at pretest.

Garrott (2002): Two studies investigated the instruct and contextual difficulties of English spelling for native Haitian Creole-speaking children (NHCSs), and the effect of phonemic awareness on the achievement of beginning spellers. Each study had 20 NHCS kindergarten children as subjects. In the first, the subjects were trained in English phonemics (blending, isolation, segmentation, deletion), then tested for phonemic awareness. Results showed the children made errors in increasing order of severity in segmentation, deletion, blending, and isolation, and made significant errors in cluster onsets and cluster coda. The second study had an experimental group of 10 students and a control group of similar size. The experimental group was trained in the same aspects of phonemics and also in pronunciation of syllables illustrating onset time, vowel coda, cluster onset, and cluster coda, cooperating instruction addressing error patterns found in the first study. Results indicated a significant experimental effect of phonemic training on student's spelling.

Heling's (1996) study aimed to investigate spelling and orthographic knowledge development in elementary Chinese-speaking children from Grades 1-6. Twelve hundred writing samples were collected in which 7,486 spelling errors were observed. These errors were sorted into 15 types according to emerging patterns. Thirteen out of the 15 types were further subsumed into three general categories phonologically based spelling errors, graphemic spelling errors, and semantic spelling errors. Next, qualitative analysis was applied to interpret the possible relationship between each type of spelling error within the three categories and children's orthographic knowledge. Last, regression analysis was applied to examine the relationship between the types of spelling errors and children's learning grade in order to determine possible developmental trends in children's invented spelling. The result shows that children's invented spellings in Chinese are not random. Later, they reflect development in children's orthographic knowledge. The analysis of data reveals a developmental trend in using spelling strategies through the grades: As grade level increases, the use of the phonological strategy decreases while the use of graphemic and semantic strategies increases.

Sikrat's (1995) study aimed to investigate the cognitively and linguistically predictable spelling errors that Spanish-speaking children who are literate in Spanish make when learning to spell in English. The subjects

were 135 students in Grades 2-5 who were divided into three language groups: Spanish-speaking, English-speaking, and bilingual. All of the students were given a list of 60 organized words to spell. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to see whether the predicted hypotheses would be upheld. The first hypothesis about the language effect was upheld. The second hypothesis about the monotonic decline in the number of predicted and non-predicted errors was upheld. Finally, the third hypothesis predicting a two-way interaction between grade and language was also upheld.

Aqel (1993) made a research about spelling which aimed at looking into the grammatical and spelling errors of Palestinian students at An-Najah National University in Nablus who studied four university requirement courses consisting of: 101 reading, 102 grammar, 111 reading comprehension, and 112 writing. All students came to the university after finishing eight years of English language instruction in public schools from age 11-18. He concluded that the spelling errors committed by Palestinian students learning English are almost the same as those errors committed by other Arab learners of English, which can be attributed to Arabic influence which is evident in the replacement of the "b" for "p", deletion of silent consonants, and vowel deletion finally. Other reasons are attributed to iterlanguage errors resulting from overgeneralization of L2 rules and ignorance of L2 rules.

Limitations of the Study

The present study is limited to:

(1) The sample, which was randomly selected from 6, 7, 8, and 9 grades students in Nablus and Jenin UNRWA schools;

(2) The instruments: The study results are determined through spelling texts from the 6-9 grades curricula which are fixed later in the Appendix;

(3) Study time and place dimensions.

Problem of the Study

The present study aimed at investigation of the common mistakes in spelling, to examine the differences between spelling errors in the light of gender and grade variables, among students learning English in the sixth to ninth grade in Nablus and Jenin UNRWA schools.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study runs from the importance of spelling in learning. The findings of this study will try to shed light on the common spelling mistakes in order to determine the causes of these mistakes. In addition, the findings should give teachers some useful insights to adopt suitable strategies and develop effective practices in order to solve the problems of spelling mistakes and to increase the student competence in spelling.

Questions of the Study

This study aims at answering the following questions:

(1) What are the most common mistakes among students of 6-9 grades in Nablus and Jenin UNRWA

schools?

(2) Are there significant statistical differences in means of spelling errors among students of 6-9 grades in Nablus and Jenin UNRWA schools due to gender variable?

(3) Are there significant statistical differences in means of spelling errors among students of 6-9 grades in Nablus and Jenin UNRWA schools due to grade variable?

Methodology and Design

Method

Cross-sectional method is used in this study by using survey research, to investigate the kind of spelling mistakes among 6-9 grades students.

The Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all male and female students from UNRWA schools in Nablus and Jenin areas.

The Sample

The study subjects consisted of 241 students from UNRWA schools in Nablus and Jenin distributed due to gender and grade variables as follows in Table 1.

Table 1

The Distribution of the Sample Study Due to Gender and Grade Variables

Grade	Gender		Total
	male	female	
6th	33	36	69
7th	22	31	53
8th	23	28	51
9th	29	39	68
Total	107	134	241

Procedure

First, the researcher selected the sample subjects from 6-9 grades students in UNRWA schools, then texts are chosen from the curricula of these grades and dictated on study sample; dictation is corrected to know the common spelling mistakes then they are analyzed and classified. Finally, means and standard deviations are found, then T-test and ANOVA were used to answer the questions of the study.

Variables of the Study

The study consists of the following variables:

(1) Independent variables: Gender (male/female), and grade (6th/7th/8th/9th);

(2) Dependent variables: spelling errors which were computed by using frequencies and percentages.

Results

All the participants' responses were tabulated and summarized by using frequencies and percentages, then means and standard deviations were calculated along with T-test and One-way ANOVA in order to answer the questions of the study.

What Are the Most Common Errors Among Students of 6-9 Grades in Nablus and Jenin UNRWA Schools?

In order to find out the most common spelling errors the students make in their writings, the researcher collected their responses, classified them and then arranged them in regard to gender and grade variables. Tables 2 and 3 show the results.

Table 2

The Frequencies and Percentages of the Spelling Errors Made by the Participants' Responses in Regard to Gender

No.	Mistakes	Male (N = 107)		Female (N = 134)		Total (N = 241)	
		freq	%	freq	%	freq	%
1	Frequent letters	104	6.6	88	5.5	192	12.1
2	Dropping some letters	99	6.2	90	5.6	189	11.8
3	Putting letters befor others	86	5.4	74	4.7	160	10.1
4	The last (e)	79	5.0	74	4.6	153	9.6
5	Unpronounced letters	71	4.5	72	4.5	143	9.0
6	Increasing letters	68	4.3	73	4.6	141	8.9
7	Exchanging the (x, c, and S) letters	66	4.2	58	3.6	124	7.8
8	Exchanging the (o) with (a)	54	3.4	44	2.8	98	6.2
9	Exchanging the (i) with (a)	39	2.4	44	2.8	83	5.2
10	Exchanging the (e) with (i)	43	2.7	35	2.2	78	4.9
11	Exchanging the (g) with (k)	34	2.1	31	1.9	65	4.1
12	Exchanging the (g) with (j)	27	1.7	16	1.0	43	2.7
13	Plural forms	20	1.3	19	1.1	39	2.4
14	Exchanging the (v) with (f)	17	1.1	14	0.8	31	1.9
15	Exchanging the (e) with (y)	11	0.6	12	0.8	23	1.4
16	Exchanging the (y, w, and u) letters	9	0.5	10	0.6	19	1.2
17	Exchanging the (b) with (p)	5	0.3	6	0.4	11	0.7
Total		832	52.3	760	47.7	1592	100

Table 3

The Frequencies and Percentages of Spelling Errors Made by the Participants' Responses in Regard to Grade Variable

No.	Mistakes	6th (N = 69)		7th (N = 53)		8th (N = 51)		9th (N = 68)		Total (N = 241)	
		freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%
1	Frequent letters	49	3.1	47	2.9	44	2.7	52	3.3	192	12.1
2	Dropping some letters	50	3.1	48	3.0	47	2.9	44	2.7	189	11.8
3	Putting letters befor others	48	3.1	45	2.8	36	2.3	31	1.9	160	10.1
4	The last (e)	44	2.7	40	2.5	33	2.1	36	2.3	153	9.6
5	Unpronounced letters	43	2.7	36	2.3	30	1.9	34	2.1	143	9.0
6	Increasing letters	40	2.5	40	2.5	33	2.1	28	1.8	141	8.9
7	Exchanging the (x, c, and S) letters	34	2.1	32	2.0	37	2.3	21	1.3	124	7.8
8	Exchanging the (o) with (a)	31	1.9	24	1.5	20	1.2	23	1.4	98	6.2
9	Exchanging the (c) with (k)	24	1.5	19	1.2	19	1.2	21	1.3	83	5.2
10	Exchanging the (e) with (i)	20	1.2	21	1.3	20	1.2	17	1.1	78	4.9
11	Exchanging the (g) with (k)	18	1.1	17	1.1	16	1.0	14	0.9	65	4.1
12	Exchangin g the (g) with (j)	12	0.8	11	0.7	11	0.7	9	0.5	43	2.7

(Table 3 continued)

13	Plural forms	10	0.6	10	0.6	10	0.6	9	0.5	39	2.4
14	Exchanging the (v) with (f)	9	0.5	9	0.5	7	0.4	6	0.4	31	1.9
15	Exchanging the (e) with (y)	7	0.4	7	0.4	4	0.3	5	0.3	23	1.4
16	Exchanging the (y, w, and u) letters	4	0.3	6	0.4	5	0.3	4	0.3	19	1.2
17	Exchanging the (b) with (p)	3	0.2	3	0.2	2	0.1	3	0.2	11	0.7
Total		446	28	415	26.1	374	23.5	357	22.4	1592	100

Tables 2 and 3 show that the most common mistakes in spelling are the first five types respectively regardless gender and grade variables:

(1) Frequent letters: e.g., "winer" instead of "wi**n**ner", "atack" insted of "a**t**tack", and "kil" instead of "kil**l**".

(2) Dropping letters: e.g., "exn" instead of "ox**e**n", "seprate" instead of "sep**a**rate", and "strng" instead of "str**o**ng".

(3) Putting letters befor others: e.g., "tow" instead of "**tw**o", "theif" instead of "th**ie**f", and "brian" instead of "b**ra**in".

(4) The last (e): e.g., "troubl" instead of "troubl**e**", "los" instead of "los**e**", and "nam" instead of "nam**e**".

(5) Unpronounced letters: e.g., "wich" instead of "w**h**ich", "lisen" instead of "lis**t**en", and "ofen" instead of "often".

Are There Statistical Significant Differences in Means of Spelling Errors Among Students of 6-9 Grades in Nablus and Jenin UNRWA Schools Due to Gender Variable?

To answer this question, means and standard deviations in spelling mistakes among students of 6-9 grades were found and T-test is used. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and Results of T-test of Spelling Errors Among Sample Responses Due to Gender Variable

Gender	No.	Mean	*SD*	*t*	Sig.
Males	107	6.7	2.5	4.55	σ = 01*
Females	134	5.2	2.7		

Note. *sig. at *df* = 241 and σ = 2.358.

Table 4 shows that there are statestical significant differences in means of spelling mistakes among students from Grades 6-9 in UNRWA schools due to gender variable in favor of males.

Are There Statistical Significant Differences in Means of Spelling Errors Among Students of 6-9 Grades in Nablus and Jenin UNRWA Schools Due to Grade Variable?

To answer this question the means and standared deviations of spelling mistakes among students of 6-9 grades were found and ANOVA is used. Table 5 shows the results.

Results show in Table 5 that there are differences in the means of spelling errors in light of grade variable, so the ANOVA test is used to examine the differences between means of spelling errors on light of grade variables, among students in Grades 6-9 as follows in Table 6.

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations of Spelling Errors Among Sample Responses Due to Grade Variable

Grade	No.	Mean	SD
6th	69	6.9	2.7
7th	53	7.1	3.2
8th	51	6.6	2.9
9th	68	5.7	2.8
Sum	241	6.6	3.2

Table 6

Results of ANOVA Test Between Means of Spelling Errors Due to Grade Variable

Source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig.
Between Groups	39.6	3	13.2	1.65	No Sig.
Within Groups	1896.8	237	8.0		
Total	1936.4	240			

Table 6 above shows that there are no statistical significant differences in means of spelling mistakes among students from Grades 6-9 in UNRWA schools due to grade variable.

Results Discussion

Discussion of the Results of the First Question

Results of the present study shows that the most common mistakes among students from Grades 6-9 are: frequent letters, dropping letters, putting letters before others, dropping the lettere (e), and the unpronounced letters on arrangment.

After examining these mistakes, it is found that the reasons behind them are:

(1) The articulation of words, which includes:

(a) The silent vowels and letters (some letters and vowels) are written but not pronounced. In some cases, these silent letters are deleted in pronunciation and so students delete them in writting, e.g., "gams" for "games", "fayt" for "fight", and "lisen" for "listen".

(b) Some sounds have more than one graphemic representation, e.g., "rase" for "race", "attak" for "attack", "oll" for "all", and "gamez" for "games").

(c) Weak vowels which may be represented by many vowel symbols in pronunciation and writing are reduced in spelling, e.g., "ther" for "their", "winnar" for "winner", and "kell" for "kill".

(d) The existence of many graphs which stands for single consonants or vowels, e.g., "attak" for "attack", and "carefuly" for "carefully".

(e) The replacement of the "b" for "p", e.g., "coby" for "copy", "sebarate" for "separate", and "olymbic" for "olympic").

(2) The influences of the mother tongue.

(3) Some letters are not found in Arabic and so students find difficulty in using them, e.g., "G" in "games", "V" in "olive", and "CH" in "which".

Discussion of the Results of the Second Question

Results of the present study shows that there are significant statistical differences in means of spelling

errors among students from Grades 6-9 due to gender variable in favor of males, who show a high level of errors in comparison of females who show a low level of errors. So, this result can be attributed through the basic of developmental psychology, in which researches show in this domain that there is a clear differences between the two genders especially the linguistic side, and this reinforces the distinction of females upon males in the competence at dictation (Miller, 1983; Statt, 1997).

Discussion of the Results of the Third Question

Results of the present study show that there are no significant statistical differences in means of spelling errors among students from Grades 6-9 due to grade variable. This result can be attributed to the similarity of the educational, social, economical, and cultural factors on circumstances of the study sample, and methods of teaching class activities, and the educational system of UNRWA are the same.

Some specialized researchers in linguistics presented suggestions for improving the students' competence on spelling in English language.

EL-Hibir and Taha (1993) suggested some useful tips for the nonnative students encounter in learning English. An approach may be adapted to meet the needs of EFL learners in different situations. It consists of the following suggestions:

(1) Make an inventory of the common orthographic errors committed by your students.

(2) Highlight the divergence between the pronunciation and the orthographic representation of a lexical item to focus on the inconsistencies in English spelling. The learner must be made conscious of the orthographic differences between words that are similar in pronunciation. To help the learner achieve a degree of orthographic systematizations, classify problematic words according to distinct spelling criteria before presenting them. For instance, on the basis of the proposed inventory, prepare a list of words that contain the sound /f/, classified into the "f", "gh", and "ph" categories. Then read out a word and ask the students to indicate in writing the category to which that word belongs.

(3) Deal with some other problematic items, too, as classifications. For example, homophones, i.e., words that are pronounced the same but differ in spelling: plain/plane, main/mane, pain/pane, lain/lane, right/write/rite, rain/rein, dear/deer, sum/some, etc.. Also, homographs, i.e., words that are spelled alike but are different in meaning and/or pronunciation: bear/bear, bow/bow, lead/lead, use/use, conduct/conduct, etc.. Reguler practice along these lines can result in dissociating spelling from pronunciation, a particularly desirable objective in a spelling remediation context.

(4) Highlight certain regularities and generalizations about English spelling and pronunciation, for example, the generalization that when "c" comes before "e", "i", or "y", it is pronounced /s/, and before "a", "o", and "u", it is pronounced /k/, e.g., cat vs. city, college vs. certain, cut vs. cycle, etc.. Another generalization that can be presented is the fact that a stressed vowel followed by a consonant and "silent e" is pronounced with the "long" or "name" sound of the vowel. For example, take, scene, time, note, and cure.

(5) Highlight the instrumental role of dictionaries in EFL learning. A dictionary should be a companion for any writing activity, enabling the student to produce the correct written form at the first try. The audiolingual principle that learners do not learn by making mistakes but by giving the right response seems relevant here. However, a dictionary should not be used to such an extreme that it slows down and disrupts the learning

process.

(6) Do not introduce new lexical items by pronunciation only. Teachers develop the habit of presenting the spoken form simultaneously with the visual form, thus enabling the students to establish the relationship between the word and its spelling, which in turn enables them to consciously and subconsciously souk up the English system of writing and spelling.

(7) Help your students learn the exceptions to each spelling rule along with the rule itself. For instance, if the students is ignorant of the exceptions to the general rule of plural formation in English which is realized by adding "s" to the singular, he will produce "mans" instead of "men", "childs" instead of "children", "criterions" for "criteria", "fishes" for "fish", etc..

(8) When introducing the alphabet, show the students that the digraphs "ch" and "sh" represent one phoneme each, because there is no single orthographic symbol in English to represent either of those phonemes.

(9) Make a list of any words occurring in the EFL texts used in your classes that sound un-English because they were borrowed from other language.

(10) Above all, EFL teachers should have a positve attitude toward the making of errors—orthographic, lexical, or grammatical. Instead of penalizing learners for making mistakes, what is more productive is finding away to remedy them (EL-Hibir & Taha, 1993).

Naser (1993) showed that teachers must first emphasize the fact that correct spelling is just as important in writing as correct pronunciation is in speaking. Also, just as in oral speech, the choice of words to be spelled must first be taken from the immediate environment of students. Following are some techniques that may be used in the actual process of teaching spelling:

(1) Start with monosyllabic words. This is exceedingly important, for, in the first place, Arab students have more difficulty with English vowels than with consonants, and by using monosyllabic words at first, students are made to concentrate on one vowel (sound) at a time. In the second place, syllabic spelling is very helpful to students in transferring to longer words. For example, the spelling of such words as "homework", "within", "friendship", etc. would cause no problem if the students have already mastered the monosyllabic words "home", "work", "with", "in", "friend", "ship", etc..

(2) Where ever possible, use patterns correlating spelling with pronunciation. For example, "a" can be uaed to correlate with the sounds /a/ and /a:/ as in "hat", "can", "car", "far"; "er" and "ee" can be used to correlate with the sound /iy/ as in "eat", "meat", "sheep", "sleep"; "f" can be used to correlate with the sound /f/ as in "fat", "life"; words such as "heart", "people", "cough", etc. (with no correlattion patterns between spelling and pronounciation) must be left until the basic correlation patterns have been mastered.

(3) Make it a point to associate the spelling of a word (as a whole) with its meaning—either its abstract meaning (as in "love") or its concrete, illustrated meaning (as in "dog"). This can be best accomplished by reading illustrated sentences and stories, for, ultimately, a student's spelling proficeincy depends, first, upon his familiarity with it in printed form.

(4) Give students ample opportunity to practice spelling. This can be accomplished directly by the use of dictation or indirectly by the use of other written exercises (Nasr, 1993).

Yorkey (1982) recommended learning and teaching the following spelling rules that are worth learning because they apply to so many words:

Rule 1: To add a suffix to a one-syllable word with a single vowel followed by a single consonant, double that final consonant such as: run + ing = running and sad + est = saddest.

Rule 2: To add a suffix to a word of more than one syllable, double the final consonant of last syllable if it ends in a single vowel followed by a single consonant and if the stress remains on the last syllable: begin + ing = beginning, occur + -ence = occurrence, and prefer + -ed = preferred.

Rule 3: Drop the final "e" before a suffix beginning with a vowel: writ + ing = writing and believe + -able = believable, but keep the "e" in order to keep the "soft" sound of "c" or "g" before suffixes beginning with "a", "e", or "o" such as: charge + -able = chargeable and notice + -able = noticeable.

Rule 4: In syllables with a long "e" second (as in "me"), "i" comes before "e" except after "c" such as "believe", "chief", "grief", "piece", "receive", "ceiling", exceptions: "seize", "weird", "leisure" (American pronunciation).

Rule 5: For words that end with "y" preceded by a consonant, change the "y" to "i" before adding a suffix (except those beginning with "i"). Examples: happy + -est = happiest and study + -ing = studying. However, for tense, change the "y" to "i" and add -es. Examples: sky + -s = skies and cry + -s = cries.

Rule 6: For words that end with "y" preceded by a vowel, keep the "y" before adding a suffix. Examples: gay + -est = gayest, boy + -ish = boyish, and enjoy + -ing = enjoying. Exeptions: day + -ly = daily, pay + -ed = paid (Yorkey, 1982, pp. 11-12).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The researcher noticed that errors are frequently occurred in clustures, e.g., "ch" in "which", "ck" in "attack", vowels like "ea" in "leaves", "i" in "olympic", "i" in "fight", "a" in "all", "e" in "wreath" and in "silent", "letters" and vowels like "t" in "listen", "e" in "separate".

Researchers put some suggestions and recommendations which may represent some guidlines for teachers of English to Arabic learners to improve their students' spelling, and these will be important for students to study:

(1) Teachers give the students dictation exercises with a clear focus on the common errors;

(2) They encourage their students to use dictionaries to see the correct spelling;

(3) Teachers make students aware of the abstract relationship between derivationally related words, such as quest/questions/questioned/questioning;

(4) Teachers encourage students to read properly;

(5) Teachers pinpoint the differences in spelling between the mother tongue and English in order to avoid interference from the spelling system of the native language.

Here are some suggestions for students:

(1) Pupils looking at words correctly;

(2) Pronouncing spelling words correctly;

(3) Practicing writing the word without looking at its correct spelling model;

(4) Engaging in a variety of writing activities.

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Appendix: Grades 6-9 Spelling Words or Text

6th Grade Spelling Words	7th Grade Spelling Words	7th Grade Spelling Words	9th Grade Spelling Text
Strong	Listen	Copy	The olympic games take their name from the Greek city of Olympia, where the games were first held more than 2,000 years ago. In first olympic games there was only one race and the winner was awarded a wreath of olive leaves.
Weak	Carefully	Brain	
Attack	Often	Trouble	
Fight	All	Who	
Kill	Sound	Dial	
Oxen	Student	Blame	
Separate	Short	Lose	
Lie		Thief	
		Thieves	
		Which	