

Improving Students' English Spelling Ability Through Activity-Based Teaching-Learning for Standard VII: An Action Research

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Abstract

This paper's problem is improving the spelling ability of Standard VII students of a selected Higher Secondary School in Pune. The primary reasons behind the low ability of spelling highlighted by teachers of the English language are 1. Irregularities in classes/guidance/practice during covid-19 related periods, 2. Lack of interest in practicing spelling due to online and limited classes, and 3. Lack of motivation to work on spelling at home. Studies on improving spelling include Language games, storytelling, activity-based learning, specialized guidance, and so forth. The research methodology consists of identifying an issue with spelling ability, planning activities to improve spelling, implementing/action, and checking the effectiveness of the activities by reflecting on the results. The researcher conducted activities with the help of school teachers. The researcher used activities like word breaks, word journals, personal dictionaries, and dictation with test scores to interpret results. For analyzing data, the researcher used test scores and compared them with two situations, pre-test and post-test conditions of an experiment. Activities implemented were found beneficial to increase interest in getting essential skills in English like spelling and confirmed by the results. Similarly, this study showed significant improvement in spelling using activity-based teaching-learning.

Keywords: Activity-based, Teaching-Learning, English spelling, Improving Spelling

Introduction

Though English is a secondary language, it is necessary to learn English at the secondary stage. English plays a crucial role in our educational system and national life (Salsibilla, 2021). There are various issues in developing essential skills in English, such as reading, writing, speaking, developing vocabulary, comprehension, and spelling ability. Spelling is a vital literacy skill and a critical language component that can significantly affect L2 students'

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future education and occupational status (Nahari and Alfadda, 2016). As English is not students' mother tongue or their first language, practicing English spellings must be taught using various techniques that encourage them to learn the language. Language skills need sufficient practice and motivation. Incorporating activities will boost students' confidence, and they will not feel that learning English is difficult but instead have fun. In contrast, they learn and apply the language in their daily life. Due to this, the researcher decided to use activity-based teaching-learning to improve English spelling. The use of activities would be an advantage for the students.

This study takes up the concept of activity-based learning as follows:

“Activity-based learning (ABL), as defined by Prince (2004), is a learning method in which students are engaged in the learning processes. Activity-based learning is indulging students in activities by stimulating their senses, such as sight, smell, vision, or feeling, and getting them involved in the subject.

There are several benefits of Activity Based Learning, such as: 1. Activity-based teaching-learning focuses on a student-centered approach by developing self-learning skills among the learners. 2. Activity-based learning is acquiring schematic concepts through activities involving the task or concept to be learned. 3. It provides a framework for the traditional concept of 'learning by doing.' 4. Activity-based learning environment prepares learners to be autonomous, critical thinkers and knowledge constructors (Ghufran, 2019).

The research is focused on the above advantages over the traditional methodologies to improve spelling ability. Several activities were investigated, including memorizing and visualizing spelling (Nahari and Alfadda, 2016), testing with feedback in improving adult spelling ability (Pan et al., 2015), breaking words up into parts, morning messages, personal dictionaries, word banks, word sorts, and word walls (Chase-Lockwood, R., & Masino, M. 2002). These were only chosen for use in this study.

Word breaks, word journals, personal dictionaries, and dictation are examples of these activities. The researcher also provided some worksheets and instructions to the students to practice spelling, along with the specified activities mentioned above. Some of the techniques using digital devices like computer, such as GraphoLearn technology (GL) (Juhani et al., 2021), is also useful in improving spelling ability but considering constraints of the learning environment, the researcher found easy way basic strategies like classroom activities are more beneficial.

Rationale of the Study

Spelling is the most critical aspect of writing in the English language. The ability to spell does not develop naturally; it needs to be taught explicitly, like reading and writing. Online classes, lack of good practice in developing spelling ability, and post-pandemic effects are the reasons for poor English spelling skills among Std. VII students of the selected Higher Secondary School in Pune. Since the Std. VII Students need to become more fluent in English; therefore, they are unfamiliar with lag in developing the necessary spellings of words included in the English language textbook. Hence, the researcher felt a need to practice some of the critical spelling of the words from the English language textbook, including its practice in written and oral form, as frequently as possible to familiarize them with English.

Objectives of the Study

The researcher focused following objectives to target improvement in English language spelling skills for Std. VII students.

1. Conduct activities to improve spelling in English, such as word bank journals, interactive word breaks, personalized dictionaries, etc.
2. Find out the effectiveness of Activity-based Teaching-Learning to improve the students' spelling skills in English.

Research Questions

The study followed the findings and answers to basic questions aimed at reaching conclusions, which are as follows.

1. What is the level of the spelling skills of the Std. VII students before and after conducting activities like breaking words, word journals, personal dictionary, and dictation?
2. Is there any significant difference between the student's performance in improving spelling skills before and after using breaking words, word journals, personal dictionaries, and dictation?

Research Methodology

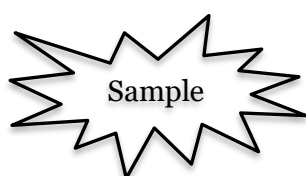
The research methodology is predefined to give information about the sample selected for the study, and the method used to collect data, the method of analyzing and interpreting data, etc. The researcher used the Quasi-Experimental Design to conduct this study. This study is action research undertaken to focus on and solve fundamental issues in classroom settings. It can be defined as:

Action research is a form of investigation designed for teachers to attempt to solve problems and improve professional classroom practices. It involves systematic observations and data collection, which the practitioner-researcher can use in reflection, decision-making, and developing more effective classroom strategies (Parsons and Brown, 2002).

This action research has some constraints over the actual study, such as – this is situation-based research (limited to the spelling ability and its improvement), small scale sample (30 students, that too from one class and one division), limited period (three-week duration).

Sample for this study

The sample used in this study was selected deliberately with a focus on the students who need help spelling English words correctly. The researcher selected students from Std. VII, Division – A of the selected Higher Secondary School in Pune. The total enrollment in the classroom was 50, out of which the researcher randomly selected 30 students for the test.



Purposive sampling—30 students of Std VII

Research Design

The researcher followed a simple study procedure: Planning, Action, Observation, and Reflection. The researcher spent three weeks on the study, which included testing the status of the selected students' spelling skills and then implementing activities like word breaks, work journals, personal dictionaries, and dictation. The post-test followed the intervention and analyzed the improvement of the students. This research design relied on collecting and analyzing numerical data and statistics.

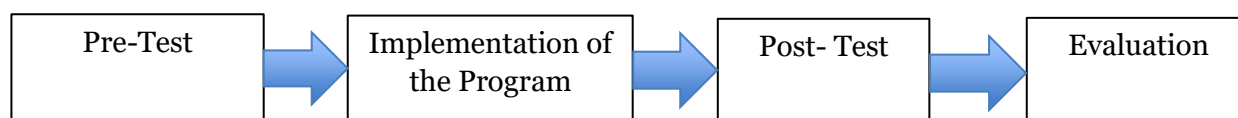


Fig 1: Research Design followed for this study

Procedure of Data Collection

The pre-test was conducted for the selected class to check the basic spelling skills, which helped to choose the participants for this study. The intervention program followed this process, which included activities-based teaching and learning. The classroom teacher helped collect data and assisted in conducting activities with the researcher in this study. Post-test was conducted to check the activities' effectiveness regarding improving spelling ability. The details of the activities undertaken to improve spelling ability are given in Table 1 below.

Activity	Details of the activity	Outcome of the activity
Word break	Students can break the given word into parts and try to memorize it through practice.	Understand difficult spelling. It helps to practice spelling through small portions.
Word journal	Maintain a journal where students can keep a record of words.	Record and practice essential words from the textbook. Add and retain the vocabulary.
Personal dictionary	Students create their personalized dictionary consisting of the words they have encountered and find difficulty understanding.	Understand the meaning and remember the spelling of the word and can use it in their daily conversation.
Dictation	Students were asked to write a story or paragraph the researcher would dictate.	Test the spelling and listening skills of the students and how attentive they were during the activity.

Table 1: Activities-based learning – program considered for a three-week duration

The above activities were implemented, and data were collected to check the results. This research was conducted during the academic session of 2021-2022. classes were engaged by considering their English language periods.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

Analysis of the data collected from the tests is done using essential statistical tools/calculations. The scores obtained from the pre-test and post-test were used to compare the effectiveness of the activities used to improve English language spelling ability. Scores were tabulated to get the frequency distribution and then calculated to get the Mean and Standard Deviation. The Mean of the scores gave an idea about the central tendency of the scores, which shows a specific pattern. Standard deviation helped to understand the deviation pattern of the scores from the mean. The researcher needed both mean and standard deviation to interpret the results. The scores were then used to draw the pie chart and bar graph for easy comparison and representation of the scores at a glance. The presentation of scores in the form of a pie chart concerning the pre-test and post-test is as follows: Figure 2 and Figure 3.

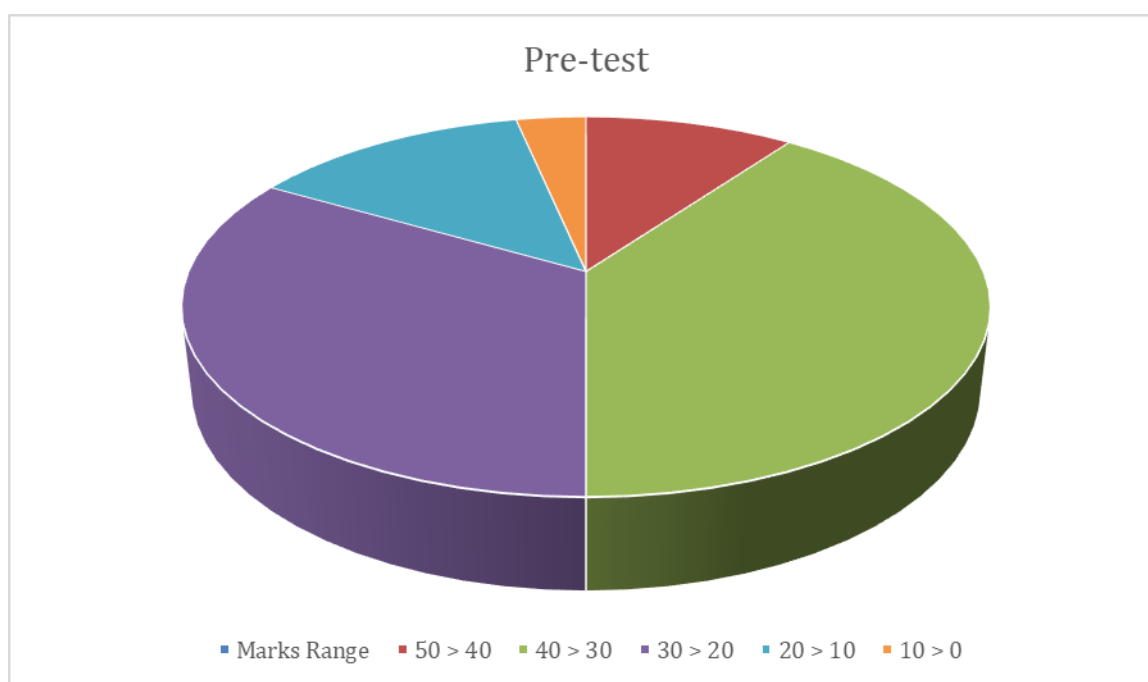


Figure 2: Pie chart showing the Pre-test range of Scores obtained from the study.

Pie charts are used to get the status of the students regarding spelling ability. This status check is done for both pre-test and post-test conditions.

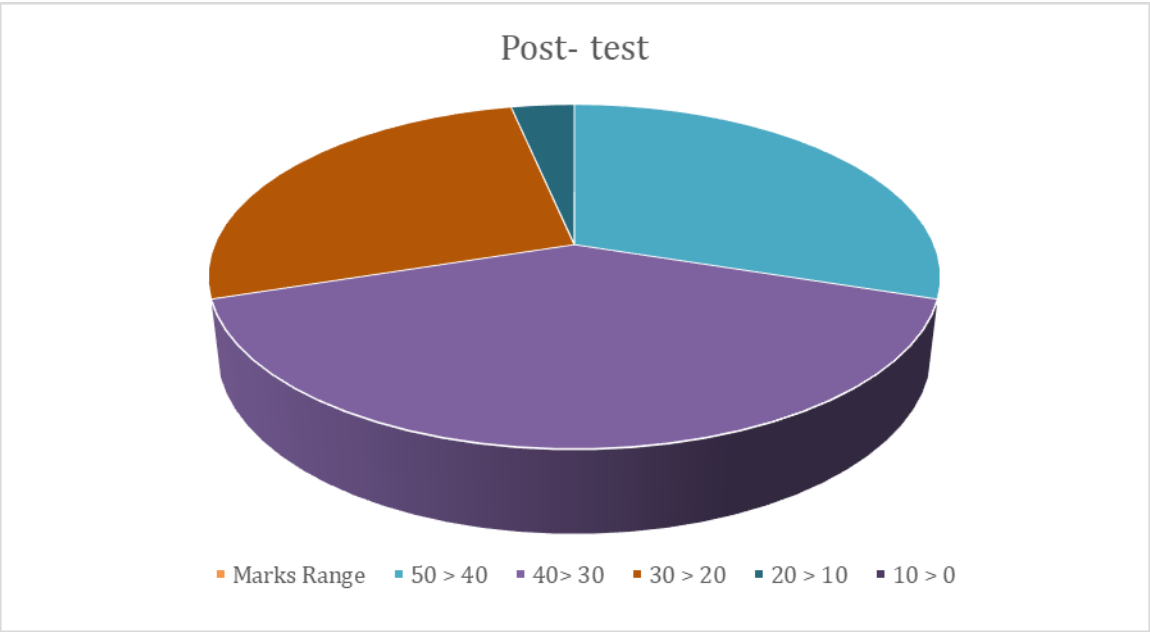


Figure 3: Pie chart showing the Post-test range of Scores obtained from the study.

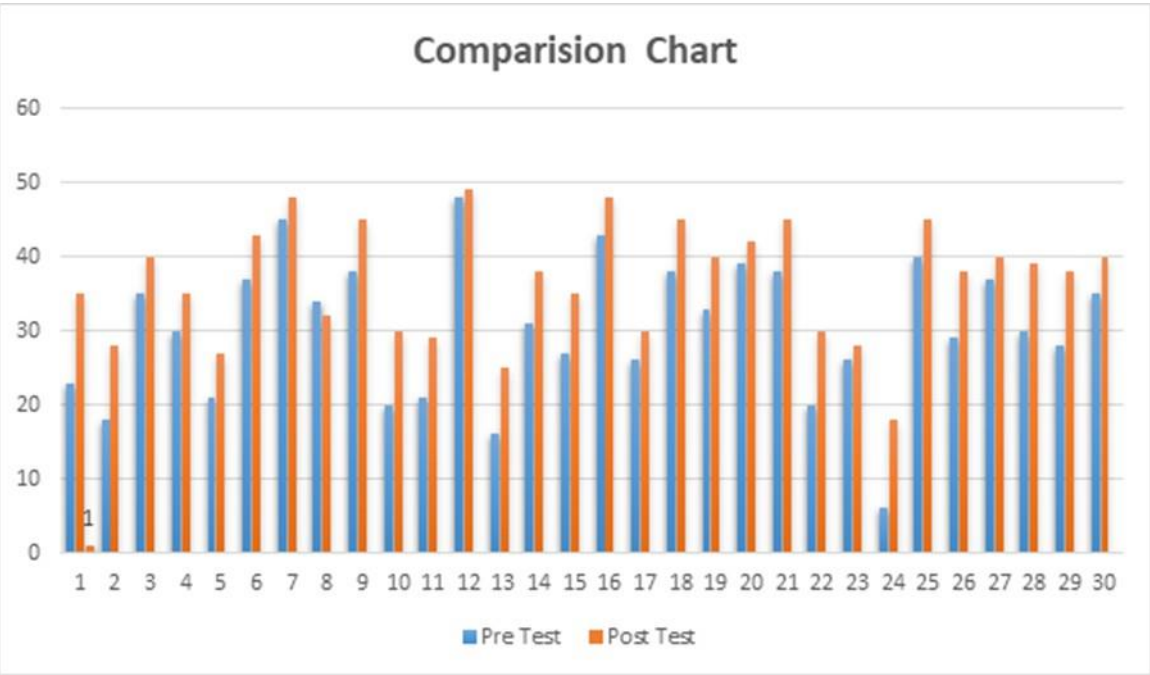


Figure 4: Comparison chart showing Pre-test and Post-test scores together

The presentation of scores in the form of a bar graph to compare the result pre-test against the post-test is shown in Figure 3. this bar graph indicates the significant difference between the pre-test conditions and treatment/activity provided for improving spelling ability.

Figure No. 4: Comparison chart showing Pre-test and Post-test scores together

Tests	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre-Test	30.4	9.5289034
Post-Test	36.83	7.790725403

Table 2. Pre-test and Post-test Data analysis

Table 2 represents the Mean and Standard deviation scores obtained through this study. The primary difference between mean scores of the pre-test and post-test shows improvement in spelling ability.

Pre-Test Findings

The answer to the first question raised at the start is given by pre-test findings where the status of students' spelling ability is checked. The question and its finding are as follows: 1. What is the level of the Spelling Skills of Standard VII before and after conducting Activities like Breaking Words, Word Journals, Personal Dictionary, and Dictation?"

- The pre-test helped the researcher understand the students' Spelling Skills/abilities; with the help of the pie chart, we can determine the percentage of students that need help with spelling and those who are good at spelling ability. 13.8% of the students scored 40 and above during the pre-test. 44.8% of the students scored between 30-40, 31% between 20-30, and the remaining 10.3% scored below 20 (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).

With the help of the pre-test, the researcher was able to understand the students' skills and was able to concentrate and help the students to increase their Spelling Skills.

Post-Test Finding

The answer to the second question raised at the start is given by post-test findings, where the effectiveness of activity-based learning is checked. The question and its finding are as follows: 2. Is there any significant difference between the student's performance in improving Spelling Skills before and after using Breaking Words, Word Journals, Personal Dictionary, and Dictation?"

- After conducting activity-based teaching-learning, the researcher could significantly improve the students' Spelling Skills. The students understood and followed the activities. After activity-based learning, there is confidence built in students to get spellings correctly and practice them and hence were able to see improvement in themselves. This has motivated them to continue learning in specified ways (Fig. 4 & Table. 2).

Discussion

NEP 2020 highlighted, "Student-focused teaching & learning method is going to be enforced rather than current teacher-focused teaching model" (Kumar, 2021). And it is critical to reframe educational settings to innovate ways of teaching to the needs of

students. Teachers can identify students' learning styles, and the demand for the content can be applied differently. This can address the issue posed in this study regarding English language spelling ability. Developing English spelling skills is an intricate process for children with or at risk of Specific Learning Disabilities and requires targeted interventions (Fragkauli et al., 2021). Several studies support the activity-based teaching-learning process over the traditional method of teaching.

Ericksen (1978) believes that "Effective learning in the classroom depends on the teacher's ability to maintain the interest that brings students to the course in the first place." Hence, selecting the method to improve spelling ability, i.e., 'Activity-based learning' for this study, is more effective than any other way. This study tried its best to choose a combination of activities according to the need of the students, such as word breaks, work journals, personal dictionaries, and dictation. And the results were found effective as well. Many activities help improve language skills.

The advantages of activity-based learning are highlighted by many different authors as follows: 1. Activity-based teaching stimulates a high degree of interest in the learners and gets the message delivered. 2. Churchill (2003) propagates that activity-based learning aids students and learners to construct mental models that allow for higher-order performance, such as applied problem-solving and transfer of information and skills. Further, it is appropriate for improving the learners' performance. 3. Use of activities that supplement the study material. It also helps the teachers to explain the subject matter easily (Noreen R. 2019). 4. Gallagher and Stepien (1996), Lieux (2001), and Zumbach et al. (2004) also emphasized the effectiveness of activity-based teaching. 5. Explicit and systematic instruction effectively improves spelling (Pittman, R. T., Joshi, R. M., & Carreker, S. (2014). 6. Some studies focused on gaming as an effective way to develop skills in specific subjects. The use of games provides a unique opportunity for the student to self-assess their progress in learning professional vocabulary and for a teacher to informally assess the student's progress without causing stress and anxiety (Kavaliauskiene, 2000; Lestariningsih, 2008). 7. On a similar note, research was conducted by Butyniec-Thomas, J., & Woloshyn, V. E. (1997) where they used (a) explicit instruction in the use of word building, syllabic segmentation, and imagery as spelling strategies and (b) information about each strategy for improving spelling ability. 8. An Article from a Blog – Oxford Royale states 19 practical ways to improve spelling in English in which some methods are matching with the methods which researcher has used for the study, these are Break in into syllables, writing spelling several times (dictation) through maintaining journals, etc. 9. Anwar Fizza (2019) worked on the effectiveness of Activity Based Learning with the Students Motivation and Achievement.

From the above discussion, it is evident that activities engage students in meaningful tasks and motivate them to learn things playfully. Activities create a spirit and invite a competitive mood to grace the performance. The secondary school stage of education demands an activity-based learning style, which is in line with NEP 2020 suggestions. NEP 2020 promotes Holistic, Integrated, Enjoyable, and Engaging learning (Saxena, A. 2020). However, NEP 2020 also focuses on student-led peer learning and community tutoring, which is not considered in this study. This study found that Activity-Based Teaching Learning is effective and used to improve English spelling.

Conclusion

The results of this study supported the hypothesis that there is a significant difference in the student's performance in improving their spelling ability before and after the implementation of Activity-based learning consisting of breaking words, word journals,

personal dictionary, and dictation.

It was also concluded that students taught through activity-based teaching have more substantial retention power. This study followed a Quasi-Experimental Design which shows significant results on a smaller scale (number of selected students 30) to understand that the activity-based teaching-learning process is effective in improving basic English spelling skills.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the school should provide a room for activities in language learning, at least for creating interest in the subject and developing basic language skills like listening, speaking, reading, and writing (consumption and production skills). There should be a language laboratory where students who are weak in any of the mentioned skills will spend more time and learn.

It is also recommended that developing language skills should be considered a significant communication tool/ medium in the early years of a student's life. Practicing, maintaining a diary, and using games (online and offline) can be effective in developing spelling skills in students is an essential part of their schooling.

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