

WORD SPELLING OF FIRST GRADE PUPILS

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviewed the influence of the research in action method in the learning process and teachers' professional development. Teaching process which encourages pupils to make questions and ask answers, to implement what they have learned in problem solving, to listen each other and debate ideas humanly and effectively, is the kind of teaching which is useful for pupils in life. The aim of this research is the need to improve the spelling of first grade pupils. With purpose to improve pupils in spelling, I have planned to cooperate with teachers, parents and Albanian language experts to develop this skill by using various modern strategies as well as for testing pupils involved in the research, EGRA test. Research was conducted in the period from 12 January until 12 February 2016. Initially a test of 20 words was drafted, 10 two-letter words and 10 three-letter words. Testing was conducted with 40 first grade pupils of PLSS "Emin Duraku", in Prizren. Collected results were not satisfactory and I drafted an action plan. I included in the action plan in total 17 techniques for the 5 weeks period, and every week I included new techniques. Techniques were very pleasant for children and a different teaching very positively influenced in the children's' mood for work and engagement. Work performed in the class was followed home with the assistance of parents and often children were asked together with parents to find such similar games and present them in front of the class. I received various ideas also from parents and this was a good signal for me as a teacher that children are continuing with their parent at home the work started in the class. Five weeks after the application of techniques, children were tested again and the results have changed for better.

Keywords: Action research, sound, letter, spelling, syllable.

INTRODUCTION

Albanian Language is a phonetic language, i.e. in Albanian language it is written as it is spoken. "Write as you speak, read as you write!"

Before learning to read the written letters, children should be aware that most of the words are composed of more than one sound unit, or *phoneme*, and that they influence the meaning of a word. For example, word "lord" is consisted of four sounds: /l/ /o/ /r/ /d/. If you change any of them, changes the meaning of the word. When we replace /l/ with /w/, we get "word". When we replace /d/ with /k/, we get word "work", and so on. This is the ability to listen, identify and use sounds that compose spoken words, which may change meaning.

Pupils should be able to identify sounds (i.e. phonemes), to divide words into component sounds and to combine them into words. This is an essential "pre-reading" skill; pupils who don't master this skill by the end of the pre-school level are risked to become poor readers. Key to this problematic may be the use of diverse techniques which have direct impact in learning spelling.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Action research

“Action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers to gather information about the ways that their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn. The information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment and on educational practices in general, and improving student outcomes.”(Mills, 2003, pg.4). Action research is often considered as a cooperation activity and focused in common creation of knowledges related to practices. It is a proper methodology since it enables teachers to be involved in common practical activities, and make changes in their practices and to review their teaching and students’ learning through descriptive report, purposeful conversation, review with colleagues and critical reflecting with the aim of improving practices in the classroom. (Miller and Pine, 1990, Wilson, 2009, McNiff and Whitehead (2010); Koshy, 2010).

According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) action research is represented through spiral circles, which are repeated. Every circle is consisted of four stages such as following: Planing – planning of change; Action and surveillance of the process and consequences of change, Reflecting of these processes and consequences; and then Re-planing of changes. Action research was considered as a form of “applied” research, which doesn’t serve only for teachers’ professional development, but also rising school performance and education in general.

Spelling and its importance

Regarding spelling and its importance we have various results. Here are some thoughts of researchers about spelling:

Young children using Creative spelling employ a considerably greater variety of words in their writing than those encouraged to use only the words they can spell USUALLY [PROPERLY], [CORRECTLY] (Gunderson & Shapiro, 1987, 1988; Clarke, 1988; Stice & Bertrand, 1990). By the end of first grade, children encouraged to use invented spellings typically score as well or better on standardized tests of spelling than children allowed to use only CORRECT, USUAL spellings in first (DRAFTS) works. (Clarke, 1988; Stice & Bertrand, 1990).

Young children encouraged to use CREATIVE spellings, seem to develop word recognition and phonics skills sooner than those not encouraged to spell the sounds they hear in words (Clarke, 1988). At least in grades 3-6, it is not clear that spelling instruction has much of an effect beyond what is learned through reading alone, if children are reading extensively (Krashen, 1991).

Methodology

Methodology of this research is action research.

Aim and research question

The aim of this research is improvement of spelling among the first grade pupils by employing a variety of teaching activities with direct impact in improvement of spelling.

Research question

What is the influence of use of variety of spelling techniques to the first grade pupils?

Hypothesis:

1. Use of variety of techniques, regular exercises on daily basis improve spelling of first grade pupils.

During this action research reading requires transformation of letters into sounds, sounds into words and words into meaning. Students have to understand that words are consisted of individual sounds and they shall learn to divide the words into sounds.

School context and participants

Research was conducted in the public school “Emin Duraku” in Prizren. School “Emin Duraku”, has a total of 1340 pupils and 63 teachers. This school has 4 first grader classes with 124 pupils. Research was conducted with pupils of class I/1 (10 pupils); I/2 (10 pupils); I/3 (10 pupils) and I/4 (10 pupils), research involved in total 40 first grade pupils of PLSS Emin Duraku, Prizren.

During these five weeks I have prepared various activities that I implemented during the additional classes which I was holding with first grade pupils involved in my research. Cooperation with parents of these pupils didn't lack. Besides meetings I had with parents, I used to forward them materials (exercises) by email.

Data were collected with the first grades with pupils (5-6-7 years old).

Planning of research

Methodology of this study is action research. I prepared plan for action research in order to initially identify mistakes in spelling to help them not to get stuck in spelling. Initially I reviewed the curriculum of Albanian language where I added some additional activities during the Albanian language classes for the improvement of spelling. All pupils were tested with EGRA test, as I have prepared a test consisted of 20 words. There were ten two-letter words and ten three-letter words.

Then, for five weeks I worked various techniques, strategies, and methods taken from EGRA. Upon the first testing of pupils respectfully identification of difficulties that students face while spelling, I have started with first action plan respectfully the use variety of techniques and strategies for spelling improvement.

First week

Some of the used techniques:

Spelling of name

Spelling exercises starting from the known words (e.g. pupil's name). Pupil spells his name.

Spelling game

Pupils are divided in two groups or they work in pairs, teacher or pupils pull out tags with a word written on it (tags with various words are prepared in advance) and pronounces it

whereas the other one spells it. The group or pupil, who spells more words correctly, wins. This game can be played without competition, as exercises in pairs or groups. During this activity I observed their work and kept notes to see how pupils spell words. In the coming classes I have noted down in “my diary” pupils’ achievements and difficulties.

Look and spell

Various drawings prepared by pupils or tags with photos are used to name and spell them. Pupils in groups or pairs take a tag with photo or drawing and spell it.

Second week

To improve pupils’ spelling, this week I used the following three activities.

Secret language

A list of words with at least 30 of them is prepared. The first ten should have only two phonemes (e.g. m-e = me, s-ee = see, etc.), whereas the remaining 20 should have three or four phonemes. Ten of the words with three or four phonemes are divided before the vowel, e.g. wind-ow = window, etc. Then teacher tells pupils that he will say several words in a “secret language” and starts to spell words. Pupils should guess which word teacher said, e.g.: g-i-r-l (girl), b-o-y (boy), etc.

Return to secret language

We ask from pupils’ the word they hear to say it in the secret language of sounds. E.g. I say word school and I ask pupils to spell sounds they hear s-c-h-o-o-l. They do the same with other words which I have in the list prepared in accordingly. Also pupils should continue the activity in pairs or groups.

Find the sound

We spell certain words and ask from pupils to find where is the certain sound, in the beginning, middle or in the end of the word. E.g. arti (a is in the beginning), luani (a is in the middle), něna (a is in the end).

Third week

To improve pupils’ spelling, this week I used the following three activities.

Remove the sound

I ask from pupils to remove the first sound from the word they hear and tell us how the word would sound, e.g. word stop will become top, word link will become ink, etc. Otherwise it may be required from pupils to find which sound is taken out from a certain word.

Remove sound of the name

I will request from pupils to say their name without his/her first sound and then tell me which sound they have taken out (e.g. iria instead of Liria, the sound taken out is L).

Change the sound

I will request the first sound of the name to replace with another sound (e.g. with B and then name Viona would sound Biona etc).

Fourth week

To improve pupils’ spelling, this week I used the following three activities.

Add sound

I ask pupils to add a certain sound in front of certain words and then they get a new word, e.g. word top if you add in the beginning sound s you will get word stop etc.

Game with dolls

Pupils are told that dolls would like to play with them, but they talk a weird language. They say words very slowly. E.g. instead of saying pupil, they say pu...pil. Then pupils should get which word it is and afterwards they are shown photo of that word. The activity is continued by dividing words into syllables, afterwards into phonemes as well.

Hit the desk

Pupils are seated in their desks. I say a word then pupils shall hit with their hands how many times as the word they heard has sounds. Pupils show how many phonemes has the word. Then teacher says aloud all the phonemes dividing them one by one. Pupils do the same with other words, a student says a word and the others hit the table for each phoneme. This drill can be exercised with claps, by foot hitting the floor or by hands hitting the feet.

Fifth week

To improve pupils' spelling, this week I used the following three activities.

Hidden object

Several different objects are put in a box. Pupil takes an object without showing to the others and divides it into phonemes, e.g. p-e-n. Other pupil should guess which object is combining phonemes. Then, they bring out the object and once more say its name.

Fast – slow

Teacher says a word, e.g. football, and tells them that is the fast way to say this word and afterwards shows the slow way, e.g. f-o-o-t-b-a-l-l. Each pupil can repeat the activity with other words.

Rhyme with order

We ask from pupil to say his/her name and then ask him/her to find a word that rhymes his/her name. Then he says friend's name and finds a word that rhymes to it. He/she says name of an items that sees in the classroom and finds a word that rhymes to it. He/she says the name of body part and says a word that rhymes to it. He/she says the name of favorite food and finds a word that rhymes. Then he/she says two random words that rhyme, then three etc.

Walking with words, syllables and sentences

Teacher calls a pupil to whom he says a word and he has to divide it into phonemes, and for each phoneme he makes a leap. He carries on like this until the end of the word and says at the end how many phonemes has the word. He may do the same by dividing the word into syllables, or sentence into words.

Rhyme words

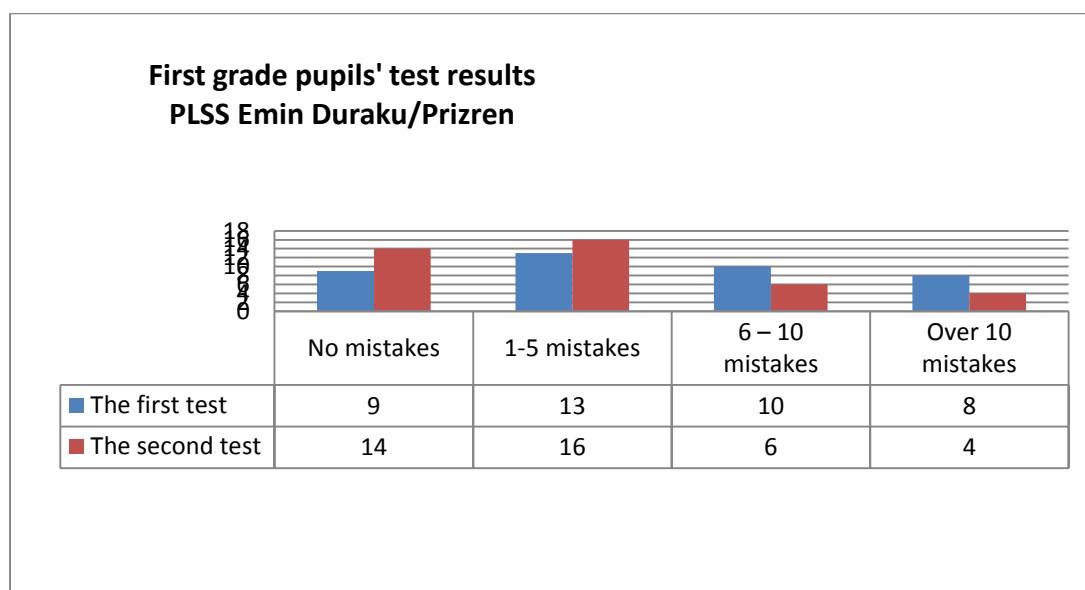
Teacher prepares a list of ordinary words which are in pair. Half of those words should rhyme and the other half not. E.g. soon – moon, book – cook (rhyme) and school – desk, book – door (don't rhyme). Teacher reads two words, whereas pupils should find if they rhyme or not. Afterwards pupils repeat words they have rhymed. Also pupils can find other words that rhyme.

Analysis, data interpretation

Since my research was action research, I was personally active in collection of data, cooperation with parents and colleagues, in order to achieve my aim.

With the use of EGRA subtest, measuring of the level of reading/spelling of pupil in the first grade is very easy, as this subtest shows exactly in which level the pupil and which level he has reached (test I and II). Also this subtest assists in increasing pupil's confidence, because pupils are tested individually and away from the eyes of their friends, which helps children to feel good and secure, without bothering that his peers will mock, taunt for not knowing certain letters, their spelling.

Below results will show differences or results of pupils tested in the beginning and end of research.



During the first test, from 40 pupils tested, 9 pupils made no mistakes, 13 pupils made 1-5 mistakes, 10 pupils made 6 – 10 mistakes and 8 pupils made over 10 mistakes.

During the second test, from 40 pupils tested, 14 pupils made no mistakes, 16 pupils made 1-5 mistakes, 6 pupils made 6 – 10 mistakes and 4 pupils made over 10 mistakes.

CONCLUSION

Action research managed to improve results of pupils in understanding spelling. This research suggests that usage of variety of sources of teaching and learning, proper activities and management of special intercessions in the Albanian language classes helps pupils in various fields of this nature. Teachers should be the ones searching always for more advanced practices which show results in explaining items. It is preferable to use variety of methods and strategies and at no time be totally dependable on explanations they find in the basic book. "Teachers should see the textbook as teaching resource and not as explanation object". (Vula, E. 2010).

Limitations of the study

Huge number of pupils, inadequate textbooks, and short time to develop teaching (short class) may be obstacles and limit this research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Variety of teaching strategies to be used.
- As much as possible to practice usage of spelling in early stages of education.
- Influence pupils to perform independent work at home assisted by parents.
- Encourage children to create similar activities for spelling.

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APPENDIX

Test	
Two-letter words	Three-letter words
Go	Tea
Be	Top
Do	She
No	Yes
So	Tea
We	You
Me	And
Am	Bee
He	Any
Up	Cow