AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CAUSES OF SPELLING ERRORS: A CASE STUDY OF ZJC PUPILS AT SOS HERMANN GMEINER HIGH SCHOOL, BINDURA.

BY

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<tr>
<th>STUDENT</th>
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<th>SUPERVISOR</th>
<th>DATE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<th>CHAIRPERSON</th>
<th>DATE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated to my beloved husband, children, friends and the rest of my family. Their support, understanding and most of all love made the completion of this dissertation to be possible. May the Most High God bless you all.
ABSTRACT

This research project assesses the causes of spelling errors with reference to ZJC pupils at SOS HERMANN GMEINER HIGH SCHOOL in Bindura. 50 ZJC pupils and 10 teachers were used as sample. The main research methodology used was a case study and other qualitative approaches. This study found out that the major causes of spelling errors are mother tongue interference, lack of interest on the part of the students and lack of resources. The researcher recommends that teachers should find ways of motivating pupils to like spelling by developing interesting teaching methods like the Old way/New way approach suggested in this study. The pupils should also give attention to learn spelling of words in order to avoid misunderstanding. Schools should source textbooks and learning materials in order to help both students and teachers in their learning and teaching process respectively.
I would like to give glory to our LORD for without His grace our existence would never have been. I thank Him for taking me this far in my studies providing the understanding, wisdom and guidance, may His name be glorified forever.

My modest appreciation goes to the Bindura University of Science Education for enrolling me, providing me with all the knowledge, advice and mentorship that has taken me this far. It is with intense pleasure to extend my gratitude to my supervisor Mr I. Muvindi for dedicating his valuable time, knowledge and for showing great interest throughout the course of my research so that this project becomes a success.

My final thanks and salutation goes to my husband, Frank, children, Tinotenda and Tanatswa for their spiritual and material support for without them this dissertation could have been bitter. My acknowledgement also goes to my friend Rumbidzai for her moral upgrading and encouragement.
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figures</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fig 1 Bar graph showing students’ response to attention to spelling words in their writing</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig 2 Bar graph showing students’ response to their feeling about learning correct spelling of English words</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig 3 Pie Chart showing teachers’ responses to the weakness of their Students in spelling correctly</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig 4 Pie Chart showing teachers’ response to the value they give students to the correctness of spelling in their writing</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig 5 Bar Graph showing marks obtained by students in the spelling test</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Request to conduct a research study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Student’s questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Teachers’ questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Interview Guide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**List of Tables**

Table 1 Students’ responses to attention they give to spelling words…………………. 20  
Table 2 Students’ response to their attitude to learning of English spelling……………… 22  
Table 3 Students’ responses to problems in learning English spelling…………………. 22  
Table 4 Students’ responses to how they spell a word when they face difficulty……… 23  
Table 5 Students’ responses to causes of their spelling errors……………………………. 23  
Table 6 Teachers’ responses to their students’ interest to learn spelling………………… 25  
Table 7 Teachers’ responses to the frequency of their students in spelling errors……….. 25  
Table 8 Teachers’ responses to the kind of errors they point out when they correct the Students written work……………………………………………………………………… 26  
Table 9 Analysis of the test from the words dictated by the teacher………………….. 28
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Background of study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Statement of the problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Justification of the study</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Research Objectives</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Research Questions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Assumptions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Delimitations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Limitations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 Definition of terms</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9.1 Summary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0 Introduction</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.0 Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1 Error Analysis</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2 Contrastive Analysis</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.3 Second Language Acquisition (L2 Acquisition)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.0 Causes of Error in spelling</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.0 Suggested ways to rectify the problem</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1 Old Way/ New Way of Teaching</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2 Six steps towards improving your spelling</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.0 Summary</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0 Introduction</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.0 Research Design</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1 Descriptive Research Design</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Subjects</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.0 Population</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1 Sample</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.2 Sample procedure</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.0 Research Instrumentation</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CHAPTER 4 DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction ............................................................................. 21
4.2 Analysis of the students’ questionnaire ........................................ 21
4.3 Analysis of the teachers’ questionnaire .......................................... 25
4.4 Focused Group Discussion .......................................................... 27
4.5 Summary .................................................................................. 29

### CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction ............................................................................. 30
5.2 Summary of research findings ...................................................... 30
5.3 Conclusions ............................................................................. 31
5.4 Recommendations ..................................................................... 31
5.4.1 To the teachers ..................................................................... 32
5.4.2 To the Students ..................................................................... 32
5.4.3 To the School ......................................................................... 32
5.5 Summary .................................................................................. 32
Reference ...................................................................................... 33
CHAPTER ONE

1.1 BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Through several years of teaching ZJCs’, the researcher observed that pupils were facing several challenges in writing spellings correctly. The researcher also observed that they were omitting some letters, for instance, feather was being written as fether. In some lessons, flashcards were placed on the board so as to enable pupils to conceptualise the spelling, however, errors still existed. The problem of poor word attack and pronunciation were clearly observed as pupils failed to write the words once flashcards were removed.

In written communication incorrect spelling could be easily detected as pupils failed to; construct meaningful sentences. Construction and sentence completion were quite a challenge as pupils wrote the wrong words following the pronunciation, for example, qaet was written instead of quiet. Some English words were written in Shona like wachi instead of watch hence writing wrong spellings. The insufficient knowledge of words or spellings resulted in the wrong choice of words which distorted the meaning of sentences.

The researcher also observed that learners lack the desire to learn how to spell English words correctly. Many pupils do not pay particular attention to the way they spell words, they simply write the way they feel rather than the way it is supposed to be written. Harry (1970) states that pupils commit spelling errors because they are not motivated to learn correct spelling due to lack of desire to learn it. This may also be due to the fact that English is a second language for most pupils at SOS Hermann Gmeiner High School and they encounter it only at school.

The socio-economic situation prevailing in the country has also contributed to the poor performance of pupils in spellings. The brain drain in the education sector led to the recruitment of unqualified teachers. Combu in (Bishop 1989:40) asserts that “More education has come to mean worse education. The youngsters are not getting a good education they used to as reflected by, for example, high proportion of poorly qualified teachers, bulging enrolments, shortage of textbooks and teaching material.”

This has affected the overall performance of pupils in general. Gallow and Morisson (2012) allude that “correct spelling is important because it allows you to communicate your thoughts and ideas clearly in writing.” If a writer makes a lot of spelling errors he or she distorts the
meaning of communication and good ideas are sometimes ignored. Gallow and Morisson (2012) further state that “poor spelling makes the reader think that you have nothing important to say,” therefore spelling errors make pupils’ work less appealing to the reader.

After having observed those indicators, the researcher decided to carry out a research to help pupils write correct spellings. This is because the use of correct spellings brings good communication between the writer and the reader. Almost all subjects here in Zimbabwe except Shona and Ndebele are taught in English, hence, the need for pupils to learn spelling skills.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As an English teacher, the researcher observed that students commit spelling errors in most of their written work. The researcher realised that colleagues who teach other subjects were also complaining that most students seem to have problems of spelling in their writing. This initiated the researcher to find out the reasons why pupils tend to make spelling errors in their writing and how she can effectively help them write correct spellings.

1.3 JUSTIFICATION OF STUDY/PURPOSE OF STUDY

The researcher aims to analyse the problem of spelling errors in writing with reference to ZJC pupils at SOS Hermann Gmeiner High School. The researcher observed that even students who are good at spoken English sometimes commit spelling errors when they write what they speak or what others say to them.

Also from the researcher’s long years of teaching experience and observation, she has realised that most colleagues who teach different subjects in English complained that most of their students seem to have spelling problems. A Pupil who is a good speller finds teach other subjects easier than one who cannot. The study seeks to provide an insight into factors that affect learning of English spelling at ZJC level with the aim of influencing decision-makers to address a more relevant improved policy on English spelling in schools.

It is hoped that the information gained from the study could be used to provide a more qualitative approach to spelling in High Schools. It is also hoped that the suggestions and
recommendations made may help syllabus designers to make syllabi which guide teachers on how best they can teach English spelling at ZJC level.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate factors that contribute to the students’ spelling errors at SOS Hermann Gmeiner High School.
2. To establish the strategies that can be used to minimise spelling errors.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What problems are being faced by pupils which make them make errors when writing spellings?
- What kind of methods can be used to address the problem?

1.6 ASSUMPTIONS

- It was assumed that teachers who teach English spelling are qualified and use appropriate methods of teaching.
- It was also assumed that schools use approved syllabi and texts.

1.7 DELIMITATION

The study is confined to pupils’ performance in spelling at ZJC level and, as pointed out earlier on, SOS Hermann Gmeiner High School is the centre of the focus. Even at this High School, the research is confined to the performance of two form two classes. The reason is that the ZJC level is a foundational level towards attaining the Ordinary Level certificate and the researcher is currently teaching these classes and has been with them since form one. Therefore the researcher has a better understanding of these pupils.
1.8 LIMITATIONS

Due to financial, time and distance constraints, the study is only confined to form two pupils performance in spelling at SOS Hermann Gmeiner High School. The data and figures gathered and presented was carried out at one school. The statistics and figures at SOS Hermann Gmeiner High School cannot be representative of other schools in Zimbabwe. However, the underlying issues and solutions are universal.

1.9 DEFINITION OF TERMS

In this study there are a number of terms that are going to recur hence the need to define them

**Assessment**

It is the act of assessing, appraisal and evaluation.

**Errors**

These are mistakes made in trying to do something.

**Spelling**

This is the forming of words with letters in an accepted order.

**Phonic**

This is the sound made in speech as a result of an appropriate combination of letters with the appropriate speech sounds.

**Dictation**

This is the action of saying words aloud to be written.

**Investigate**

This is to make a detailed enquiry or systematic examination.

**Problem**

This is something that is difficult to deal with as it is a source of trouble.
**Vowel**

This is a sound in spoken language such as, e, i, o, u.

**Dyslexia**

This is a broad term defining a learning disability that impairs a person’s fluency or accuracy in being able to read, speak and spell.

**1.9.1 SUMMARY**

This introductory chapter has given the background to the study, defined the problem, stated the objectives and demarcated the study as a way of building a firm foundation of the research. The next chapter reviews related literature to identify scholarly contribution in the area of spelling, at the same time establishing any knowledge gaps that this study could probably fill.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter looked at the background to study, purpose of study, research objectives and questions. This chapter discusses, explains and analyses the selected relevant literature to the study concerning the causes of spelling errors. This chapter also focuses on theoretical framework and previous research findings of the subject under study.

2.1.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Collins English dictionary defines spelling as,” the act or process of writing words by using the letters conventionally accepted for their formation; orthography.” The use of correct spelling is important in order for effective communication to take place.

2.1.1 Error Analysis

According to Corder (1974), “the study of error is part of the investigation of the process of language learning.” This means that error analysis is an important part in language learning as it may help syllabus designers, textbook writers and teachers in revealing the problem areas like that of spelling.

2.1.2 Contrastive Analysis

Lado (1957) defines contrastive analysis as the study of two languages with the aim of identifying their structural differences and similarities. When students are spelling words they are sometimes confused by the differences in their mother tongue and the target language. Therefore they end up spelling words in the target language using rules of their mother language.

2.1.3 Second Language Acquisition (L2 Acquisition)

Gass and Selinker (2008) defines a second language as a language that is learned in addition to a person’s first language (L1). L2 acquisition is the process by which a person learn a
second language. Second language learning is divided into different stages which are pre-
production, early production, speech emergence, intermediate fluency and advanced fluency.
A learner needs to go through these stages in order for him to know the L2 rules so that they
can be able to spell words correctly.

2.3.0 CAUSES OF ERROR IN SPELLING

Many schools of thought agree on the fact that the first main cause of spelling errors are the
irregularities of the English spelling system (Smith, 1973; Bahloul, 2007; Al Hassan, 2011;
Jayousi, 2011). What this means is that the way English words are spelt is complex and
inconsistent. Lounsbury (1990), cited in Susan (2011) is of the view that English spelling is
consistent in consistency. This means that sounds can be spelt in several ways, letters can
represent several sounds and most spelling rules have many exceptions.

Anthony (2011) and Kemmer (2009) are of the view that the sounds of English language
lagged behind those for pronunciation thus providing a source of divergence of the written
form from the spoken one. They are of the view that pronunciation changed drastically over
the last centuries while spelling has remained the same. In the past about 300 to 500 years
ago, the now silent letters in knife recognise were pronounced. The ‘gh’ in light and a
guttural sound is no longer used in English. Therefore, pupils are confused when it comes to
spelling these words.

Kemmer (2009) goes on to say that the lack of consistent norms for written representations
and changes that happened over time in English language sound system were some of the
forces that led to greater divergence of the written forms and the spoken forms of the
language. This reason makes English spelling difficult for Zimbabwean students to write
English words in line with pronunciation.

The second possible reason could be the origin of English language. The origin of English
language comes from different languages which include Greek, Latin, and French. This
makes the words to lack uniformity in their spelling rules. English language was originally
written phonetically but with time (during the 11-15th century) French influence played a
significant role in the altering of the English language. Babkoff (2005) points out that the
developments which later occurred in sciences whereby terms were created using Greek and
Latin. Cummings (1988) therefore says, the spelling system has a phonetic demand (the consistent spelling of sounds among words) with a semantic demand (the consistent spelling of morphemes among words) according to Cummings (1988).

English language comes from a variety of language spelling therefore English words have also been affected because the vocabulary of English language is a mixture of the Anglo-Saxon, Roman and Norman-French, Latin and Greek. To highlight this issue English speakers throughout history have freely borrowed words from a dozen of languages and to show the origin of these words, English kept the original spellings. Bell (2004) comments that the Latin alphabet, which was adopted for writing English, did not fit in. The reason is that it had fewer letters than the English sounds have. Bell (ibid) also says that the existing English spelling conventions provide adequate solution for forty two out of forty three English phonemes. The twenty six letters of the Roman alphabet can cater for all English spelling.

The third reason which causes spelling errors in writing is the differences between the English language and the Shona language, $L_1$ and $L_2$ languages respectively. A study on the positive impact of $L_1$ and $L_2$ literacy shows that $L_1$ aids $L_2$ leaners with basic knowledge of written letters and their corresponding sounds. (Lesson-Hurley (1990) cited in (Roberts, 1994). Results obtained by Berkel (2005) on the Dutch learners learning English as a second language also supports this. The results showed that Dutch learners could learn English spelling because they were familiar with the Dutch writing system. Muvindi (2013) articulates that it is difficult for Shona speakers to spell or pronounce at phonological level the consonant sound which is non-existent in Shona. Therefore a leaner is likely to spell words like, “parallel” as “pararrel.”

The interference of the mother tongue has a lot of influence on the spelling. Students try to write English words as they are pronounced and commit errors in the process. This kind of error is committed due to transfer which refers to the effect of $L_1$ on the learning of $L_2$. According to Al-Jarf (2010) students borrow the patterns of $L_1$ from the mother tongue to the target language they learn. Therefore, they may end up writing other English words in Shona.

Furthermore $L_2$ learners of foreign language learners make errors which can be divided into interlingual and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors are those stated above which are
caused by the learner’s native language or L1. According to Darus and Hein (2009) interlingual errors are caused by the interference of the learner’s L1. In other words patterns from L1 are borrowed and used in L2.

On the other hand, intralingual errors may occur due to inadequate learning or difficulties in the target language itself, confused thinking or lack of contrast of both languages. Those type of errors may be as a result of student’s inability to separate L1 from L2. Al-Jarf (2010) quoting Collin (1989) states that several processes cause student’s errors in L2 such as overgeneralisation. Al Jarf (ibid) goes on to say that in overgeneralisation, we extend the patterns of L2 by analogy, which is a common process to both L1 and L2. This means that pupils should be able to separate the first language from the target language in order to learn spelling correctly.

Richard, (1974) explains that the overgeneralisation covers instances where the learners create deviant structures in the target language. A student may extend the use of a grammatical rule of linguistic item beyond its accepted uses, generally by making words, or structures following a more regular pattern. For instance, a student after having read or heard sentences such as “He reached the courtyard at 9:00am” may produce, “He leaved the courtyard at 1:00pm”. Also a learner may write, “The woman walked fastly to catch the 5pm bus,” because he already knows, “the woman walked quickly to catch the morning train.” Insufficient exposure to the target language causes overgeneralisation. Therefore, to avoid this, students should read more written materials in English.

Another possible cause of spelling errors among pupils can be attributed to phonological problems. Carney (1994) articulates that this type of inaccurate spelling is categorized as articulation or interference error which occurs as a result of spellers’ use of particular pronunciation. This study will look at four problems that are associated with sound. Cook (2004) explains that there are 44 phonemones as compared to 26 letters in English. This means that the sounds are more than letters, so a grapheme can correspond to many phonemes in English. For example, the grapheme (th) that corresponds to phonemes /f/ in “graph” and /g/ in gh depending on their initial or final positions in words. This shows the irregularities or inconsistence of correspondence between letters and sounds. One sound can be written or pronounced differently such as in : “reign”, “rein”, “rain”, “sin”, “scene”. Pupils therefore make spelling mistakes in writing because of these irregularities mentioned above.
Still on the issue of phonemes, Venezky (1970, cited in Cook, 2004) points out how writing systems can show a relationship between a letter and many different sounds. He gave 4 rules for /c/ which are /e/ in “change”, /s/ in cyclone”, /K/ in ‘come` and 1 0 1 in ´czar”. However a phoneme can also correspond to many graphemes, for example, the phoneme /s/ corresponds to (c) in “cellular”, (s) in “sell” and (sc) in ‘scenery” and the phoneme /w/ corresponds to (w) in “wink” and (wh) in “whether”. This is bound to cause confusion among pupils hence errors in spelling emerge.

Carney (ibid) mentions that pupils also have phonological problems called lexical or malapropism. This type of error [according (to Carney (ibid)] takes place when learners are confused with similar sounds or words. For instance we have vowel sounds which can be spelt in many ways such as, words like, “hut”, and “heart”, hat and hurt, “see”, “sea”, “bed”, and “bad”. These words can be pronounced in the same way but are spelt differently. In trying to spell these words students may employ the same consonant or vowel sound to substitute the correct spelling.

Furthermore, a pupil may be unable to distinguish similar sounds leading to mispronunciations. Wasawicz (2007) articulates that learners who have problems of phoneme distinction usually spell many vowel sounds with the same letter. For example “bitter” and “better” sound similar and as such some pupils may fail to distinguish the sounds and think that both words are spelt the same.

Also if a pupil cannot differentiate between long and short vowel sounds he is bound to make mistakes in spelling. For example, “rein” and “reign” are pronounced the same and a pupil may think that since they have the same pronunciation they are spelt the same However, the words have different spelling or orthography because rein has a short vowel sound and reign has a long vowel sound.

Another problem associated with sound is consonant cluster reduction. Wasowicz (ibid) give two possible explanations for this circumstance. He says that poor phonological awareness of students is predictable and that most students tend to delete letters and syllables especially those that are unstressed. In words like “gnaw” and “knowledge” pupils tend to ignore the unstressed letters and write them as “naw” and “nowlege”. Halle (1968, cited in Cook, 2004) explains that what is shown in spelling may not be shown in sound. Therefore, pupils may have problems with spellings of such words because they would have memorized how these
words are pronounced. The effect of silent sounds will therefore make them unaware of the correct orthography of words.

Lack of morphological knowledge is also a reason why pupils make spelling errors in writing. According to Shedd (2008) morphology is the study of the structure and form of words. A morpheme, according to Payne (1997) is a part of morphology which refers to the smallest meaningful grammatical units of language. Sometimes pupils make spelling errors on inflectional endings and these are categorized as morphological spelling errors because suffixes ed, -s and –ing are meaningful as they give different meanings to words.

However, it cannot be denied that for one to add inflected words accurately without linguistic or grammatical knowledge is impossible. Hence, it can be concluded that the reason why students make this kind of error is to be found not their possessing consolidated knowledge of English grammatical rules which are part of morphology. Pupils usually make mistakes by adding wrong inflectional endings of the third singular person, plural nouns and continuous verbs. Because of this reason Chomsky (1970 cited in Cook 2004) reinforces that knowing language on a surface level of sound correspondence is not enough. He goes on to say that it is important to also know the grammar of a language.

In a study conducted by Juul (2005) with Danish students. He support the fact that a strong relationship exists between grammatical awareness and inflectional spelling competence. Hence pupils have a mandate to know inflections that are closely related to grammatical knowledge. There are certain rules which need to be followed before adding suffices to words that end with a vowel. For instance in the word “prepare” to add a suffix “-ing” the last letter “e” has to be removed so that the word becomes “preparing” not “prepareing”. Pupils usually make this spelling mistake because they would have applied rules inaccurately.

Furthermore, pupils make another type of mistake when it comes to rules of third singular verbs like in “shoutes” and in plural nouns ending with –s like in “thiefs” and “girls”. Generally suffix –s can be added to most nouns and verbs but there are exceptions in some nouns ending with “F” changes to –ves such that “thief” becomes “thieves” plurally. This shows that without a strong base of morphological knowledge a pupil may make several spelling errors in writing.

According to Fowley (1926 cited in Carney, 1994) it is very common to see consonant letter doubling as the most frequently occurring type of English and misspelling. This type of error can be said to be limited knowledge of orthography. Carney (1994) comments that this
problem can cause difficulties to learners of English. When double consonants occur in words they show that the preceding vowels are either long or short. Double consonants’ do not occur within a morpheme such as “emphasise” but it can occur in morpheme boundaries within a word such as “de-emphasise”. This is because in the word de-emphasise there are two morphemes. “de” and “emphasis”. However, because pupils are aware of the most commonly 15 consonants which are frequently double in some contexts they continuously misspell words.

Spelling errors may also arise due to letter reversals which Carney (1994) termed as analogy errors which are as a result of “confusion between elements of words,” (1994:84). In words like “languages” pupils may write it as “langages” reversing the letters ‘u’ and ‘a’.

Vowel omissions is another common cause for spelling error. This is because students may sometimes know two different words which sound the same but are spelt differently. For instance in words like “by” and “buy” a student may construct a sentence like “The woman always ‘by’ milk at the supermarket,” instead of, “The woman always ‘buys’ milk at the supermarket”. From the context it is easier to recognize ’by’ as ‘buy’ although the spelling is wrong. Therefore it can be seen that knowledge of orthography alone is not enough. Wasowicz (2007) supports this assertion when he explains that the knowledge of spelling does not only consist of orthographic knowledge but phonological and vocabulary knowledge are also essential.

Student spelling errors can also be ascribed to dyslexia. According to Smythe, et al (2004) dyslexia is a broad term defining a learning disability. This disability impairs a person’s fluency or accuracy in being able to read, speak and spell. Symthe, et al (2004) goes on to say that the common characteristics among children with dyslexia are difficulty with spelling phonological processing and or rapid visual or verbal responding. With this information it can be concluded that maybe some pupils at SOS Hermann Gmeinner High are dyslexic hence the poor performance in spelling. The evidence is that that some of the students have difficulty with associating sounds with the letters that represent them an essential element in writing correct spelling. However dyslexia is said to occur in about 4 to 8% of the population according to a website on parents with children with dyslexia.

What this implies is that some errors that pupils are making reveal the existence of an underlying logical though incorrect, reasoning. Therefore once a child learns the wrong
spelling of a word the first time and is not corrected but allowed to repeat the misspelling several times that error will develop into a learned error. The error will then become a habit which is difficult to eradicate.

The socio-economic situation prevailing in Zimbabwe may has also contributed to the poor performance of pupils in spelling. The country has experienced and is continually experiencing a brain drain of its qualified personal to other countries. This has led to the recruitment of unqualified teachers.

Combu (in Bishop 1989:40) asserts that, “More education has come to mean worse education. The youngsters are not getting a good education they used to as reflected by, for example, high proportion of poorly qualified teachers, bulging enrolments shortage of textbooks and teaching material.”

This may affect the overall performance of pupils as they would lack basic proper guidance as some teachers may write incorrect spellings on the whiteboard.

Fuller (1995) alludes that lack of resources leads to poor performance. Every subject requires textbooks as support to learning and shortage tends to affect pupils’ performance. At SOS Hermann Gmeiner High ZJC pupils have one textbook that they focus on, the one donated under the Education Transition Fund (ETF). Pupils have no access to other textbooks hence their research tends to be shallow. The textbook in question only has two spelling exercises although spelling is important in part of the syllabus. This simply shows that spelling is one of the most neglected parts of English Lesson in the Zimbabwean curriculum and in the student’s textbook.

Another important factor which contribute to pupils making spelling errors is the lack of pupil’s interest to learn spelling and their lack of appreciation for dictation. Pupils do not pay particular attention and take them for granted. This, coupled with sometimes lack of feedback from teachers and resources, makes spelling a difficult and boring task.

The ZJC pupils at SOS Hermann Gmeinner high school have at one time or another exhibited spelling errors which are a result of the causes highlighted in this chapter. The errors, have many a time, miscommunicated the pupils’ thoughts and, in many cases, have caused pupils to earn low marks in their examinations.

2.3.0 SUGGESTED WAYS TO RECTIFY THE PROBLEM
2.3.1 Old Way/New Way of Teaching

Richards (1971) conducted a study on how best students can be taught spelling and he came up with the Old Way/ New Way of teaching. According to Richards (ibid) this teaching method emphasis on what the learner can do, not what the learner cannot do. In a normal teaching class the teacher can say, “She cannot spell properly, in the Old Way/ New Way teaching a teacher would say, “ She always spells it “believe”, she should be spelling it “believe”. This helps the learner to feel motivated to learn to correct spelling since the teacher would have written her off as someone who is not capable of spelling.

The Old Way/New Way has the following steps.

1) Identify and analyse the performance error.
2) Identify and demonstrate the substitute action required.
3) Describe, and elicit from the student, the essential physical and psychological differences between the right and wrong ways of spelling the word.

2.3.2 Six steps towards improving your spelling

Students are also recommended to find ways that can help them improve their spelling. One such way suggested by Langan (2011) who highlighted six steps that can be taken by pupils as a way of improving their spelling. These are;

1) Use dictionary
2) Keep a personal spelling list.
3) Master commonly confused words.
4) Learn key words in major subjects.
5) Study a basic word list.
6) Use electronic aids.

2.4 SUMMARY

The chapter looked at schools of thoughts on causes of spelling error in English. It also provided the theoretical framework as well as causes of spelling errors and recommendations on how to minimise spelling errors. The next chapter will look at research methodology.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reviewed several schools of thought on causes of spelling errors as well as ways of alleviating them. This chapter outlines the research design, population, sample size and sampling procedure. It also explains the reliability and validity of instruments used in the research, and the data collection and data presentation and analysis procedures. It specifies the various stages that followed from data collection to analysis of data collected. Methodology can be defined as a description of process, concepts or ideas as they relate to particular discipline or field of inquiry. This chapter looks into various methods the researcher used to present the gathered data in a way that makes clear the findings. It looks at the analysis of the presented data and interpretation of the same data. The explanation of the methods and steps used and procedures taken to arrive at conclusions are also done.

3.1.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Yin (2003) a research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that connects theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and methods for collecting empirical material. Research design provides the glue that holds the research project together. Research design is the plan and structure of an investigation used to obtain answers from research questions. It provides the procedures for collection, analysis and interpretation of data so that the research problem can be solved. The researcher basically used a descriptive research design so as to highlight the causes of spelling errors in writing. The design was chosen for this research because it has the ability to establish further and dig deep into the composition, functionality and characteristics of the variable under study.
3.1.1 Descriptive research design

A descriptive study is one in which information is collected without changing the environment (i.e., nothing is manipulated). Sometimes these are referred to as “correlational” or “observational” studies. Descriptive studies are also conducted to demonstrate associations or relationships between things in the world around you.

In descriptive studies, the researcher interacts with the participant, and involves surveys or interviews to collect the necessary information. Descriptive studies in which the researcher does not interact with the participant include observational studies of people in an environment and studies involving data collection using existing records (e.g., medical record review). Descriptive studies are usually the best methods for collecting information that will demonstrate relationships and describe the world as it exists. Bickman and Rog (1998) suggest that descriptive studies can answer questions such as “what is” or “what was.” Experiments can typically answer “why” or “how.”

3.2 SUBJECTS

These are the items to be involved within the study or research. These subjects include the population and the sample of the participants in the research. All the targeted participants all form the population but practically it is virtually impossible to include every item in the study hence the need to use a sample which is relatively smaller number of participants that is more or less a representation of the whole population.

3.2.0 POPULATION

Leedy (1997) views population as a group of individuals that have one or more common characteristics that is of interest to the researcher. The set of all items from which we want to gather data is the population, and a sub set of that population is a sample. The population will be one hundred ZJC (form 2) pupils at SOS Hermann Gmeiner High School.
3.2.1 Sample

Haralambos (1995) defined a sample as a part of the large population that is selected to represent the target population. The sample of 50 participants, which is fifty percent of the total population will be used. The sample will be selected using simple random sampling method from the population.

3.2.2 Sampling procedures

This refers to the techniques used in the selection of cases to be considered for the research and are divided into two classes namely probability and non-probability sampling. According to Saunders et al, (2003) probability sampling is whereby members have a known chance of being selected into a sample. Non- probability is whereby the chances of a member being selected are not known. The researcher will use simple random sampling (SRS) technique to select the participants. The researcher opted for the SRS because population element in SRS has a known and equal chance of selection. However SRS requires larger sample size which may be costly to the researcher.

3.3.0 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTATION

These are tools that are used for the collection of data that is relevant for finding solutions to the research problem. Creswell (2003) defines research instruments as tools or devices used to make measurement of responses. The researcher will use both qualitative and quantitative research methods in trying to elicit for information. This includes the use of students and teachers ’questionnaires, focus group discussions using unstructured interviews, observations and oral test on spelling of selected English words.
3.3.1 Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a series of written questions that are given to respondents in order to obtain and elicit statistical information that is not available in documented record about a given topic. According to Best and Khan (1993) a questionnaire is a list of questions that are given to the respondent so that they may answer in written form and send back the questionnaire to the researcher. A list of versatile questions was given to the respondents allowing the collection of both subjective and objective data through the use of open or closed ended questions. Questionnaires are cost effective and give the person room to show or present what is correct. Some people may not return the questionnaires therefore there is need for regular follow ups. The way the researcher will asks questions will affect the respondents, therefore there is need to use simple and straight forward questions which can be easily understood. Self- administered questionnaires give freedom to the participants hence reduce bias.

3.3.2 Interviews

Saunders and Cornett (2004) defines an interview as two way conservation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research information. It is a purposeful discussion between the researcher and interviewee. Interviewing is a technique that is primarily used to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations for people’s attitudes, views and suggestions. In this research, the researcher undertook the interviews on a one-to-one basis using a convenience method.

In addition, focused interviewing was used to collect data. Interviews are essential because they have improved response rate. The interviewer helped by a way of clarification wherever the respondent found the question unclear.
3.3.3 Observations

Marshall and Rossman (1989; 79) define observation as “the systematic description of events, behaviours and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study”. Observations are relatively cheaper, less timely and allow independent views. However observation is limited to the duration of the event so history which may influence the problems or behaviour cannot be obtained. It is also time consuming.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The researcher had authority to conduct the research through the office of the Administration at the school. An introductory letter was given to the school head to clarify the intention of the study will. The data collected using questionnaires was hand-delivered to responsible persons and then collected after a period ranging from three working days to a week. All respondents had assurance on the confidentiality of their information. The researcher included a non-disclosure clause on the cover letter.

3.5.0 DATA PRESENTATION

This encompassed the use of, tables, graphs and narrative descriptions. Interpretation of those diagrams is also done. Tabular forms of presentations were used as they are easy to understand.

3.5.1 Bar Graph

Dictionary.com defines a bar graph as “a graph using parallel bars of varying lengths, as to illustrate comparative costs, exports, birth rates, etc” Meanings are drawn from the lengths of the bars.
3.5.2 Tables

This method of presentation was used to present results that tend to be more qualitative and other observations noted.

3.6 SUMMARY

The foregoing chapter looked at the research methodology used in the study. It has covered the research design used by the researcher and the populations understudy. The sample size and sampling techniques to be used in this research had also been discussed. It also touched on the research findings, presentation and the interpretation of the figures obtained using various methods of analysing data. The following chapter will focus on research findings.
CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter centred on discussing the research methodology, data collection, research techniques that were adopted in this study. This chapter focuses on the presentation, interpretation and analysis of research findings from questionnaires and interviews. Tables and a bar graph were used by the writer to present the findings of the research.

4.2 ANALYSES OF THE STUDENTS’ QUESTIONNAIRE

50 questionnaires were issued to fifty pupils and all were returned. The summary of the questionnaires’ responses are listed in tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and fig 1 and 2.

Table 1: Students’ responses to attention they give to spelling words in their writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you care about spelling of words when writing?</td>
<td>It is not important</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is important</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is very important</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 1: Students’ responses to frequency of errors they commit in their writing.
Table 2: Students’ responses to their attitude to learning of English spelling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much important is it to know the correct spelling of words</td>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To some extent</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 2: Students’ responses to their feeling about learning correct spelling of English words.

Table 3: Students’ responses to problems in learning English spellings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your main problem in learning spelling?</td>
<td>Lack of materials</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of interest to learn</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of good teachers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Students’ responses to how they spell a word when they face difficulty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you do if you do not know how to spell a word?</td>
<td>Write it as I feel</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ask my friends</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ask my teachers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Check it in the dictionary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Students’ responses to causes of their spelling errors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the causes for your spelling errors?</td>
<td>The difference between written and spoken English</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The origin of English words</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carelessness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Table 1, 25 (50%), the highest number of respondents stated that they do not care about the spelling when they write. The other half (50%) stated that spelling of words is important and very important. In Fig 1 the highest number of respondents 21 (42%) stated that they sometimes commit spelling errors when they write. Fifteen (30%) respondents said they commit spelling errors most often and 9 (18%) of the respondents said that they rarely commit spelling errors when they write. The rest 5 (10%) of the respondents reported that they never write wrong spellings.
As indicated in table 2, the majority of the respondents 34 (68%) reported that it is important to know the correct spelling of English words while 12 (24%) and 4 (8%) of the respondents said that knowing the correct spelling is important to some extent and not important at all respectively. Fig 2 indicates that there are different feelings towards the leaning of spellings of English words among learners for example, 34 representing 68% of the respondents acknowledged that it is important to learn the correct spelling of English words in order to communicate effectively. Twelve (24%) of the respondents claimed that it is important to learn the spelling of English words in order to communicate well. However, 8% of the respondents did not see the importance of learning the spelling of English words in order to communicate well.

Table 3 shows that the highest number of respondents that is 14 (28%) seem to think that the problem in the learning of spellings is due to lack of interest on their part. The other 24 respondents are of the view that the problem in learning spelling is a result of lack of materials and lack of good teachers respectively. The other 12 respondents blame all the above mentioned factors for the problem they face in learning English spellings.

As depicted in table 4, 50% of the respondents stated that when faced with a difficult word they spell it as it is whereas 16% and 24% of the respondents said they ask their friends and teachers respectively. The remaining 50% reported that they check the word in the dictionary.

In table 5 four variables were given being the difference between written and spoken English, the origin of English words, carelessness and all. The majority of respondents being 60% of the respondents reported that all the above mentioned variables are responsible for errors made in their spelling. Fourteen being 28% of the respondents blamed the differences between written and spoken English. The remaining 12% of the respondents said that the origin of English words and carelessness of the pupils were responsible for the errors in spelling. The distribution being 8% and 4% respectively.
4.3 ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS’ QUESTIONNAIRE

Ten questionnaires were issued to 10 teachers who teach using English as a medium. There was a 100% return rate on questionnaires. The summary responses are listed in the tables 6, 7, 8 and in fig 3 and 4.

Table 6: Teachers’ responses to their students’ interest to learn spellings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much are your students interested in learning spelling?</td>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interested</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Much</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Much interested</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 3: Teachers’ responses to the weakness of their students in spelling correctly.

Table 7: Teachers’ responses to frequency of their students’ spelling errors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often do your students commit spelling errors?</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8: Teachers’ responses to kind of errors they point out when they correct the students’ written work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What kind of errors do you point out</td>
<td>All, I consider major but not minor ones</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Only few major errors, not many of them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Only errors that interfere and hampers communication</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 4: Teachers’ responses to value they give students to the correctness of the spelling in their writing.

As depicted in table 6, 60% of the teachers claimed that their students are not interested in learning correct spelling of words. The other four teachers pointed out that their students are averagely interested and very much interested.

In fig 3, the majority of the teachers being 60% said that their students are very weak in their use of correct spelling. The other 40% reported that their pupils are to some extent weak in their use of correct spelling.
As shown in table 7, 20% of the teachers said that their students always commit spelling errors. The other 20% of the teachers said their students usually commit spelling errors. The remaining 60% pointed out that their students sometimes commit errors in writing.

In table 8, 60% of the teachers said that they correct only errors that hampers and interfere with communication. Three of the teachers reported that they correct errors that they feel are major while 10% of the teachers pointed out that they correct only a few major errors.

Results from fig 4 indicate that 70% of the teachers feel that their students do not care about their spelling errors. It also indicates that 20% of the teachers are of the view that their students care about spelling to some extent. However one of the teachers said that the students care very much about their spelling.

**4.4 FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION**

The researcher also carried out a focused group discussion with the ten teachers at the school using unstructured interview. The teachers admitted that their students have problems in spelling English words correctly. From the discussion it also emerged that the teachers almost agreed to the causes for students’ spelling errors. The causes include lack of adequate spelling material at different class level, mother tongue interference; Shona speaking pupils usually confuse the rules of Shona language with that of English.

From the discussion it was also noted that teachers from other subjects were not correcting spelling errors when they marked students’ written assignments. Only English teachers at the school stated that they correct their students’ spelling errors by indicating where they made the spelling errors. For instance, they expressed that they write ‘sp’ where they want their students to spell words correctly.

Lack of material at the school was also cited as a major cause for students’ errors in English spelling. The teachers expressed that there is hardly any material like work cards, charts with
list of commonly misspelt words that help the students learn spelling except for the few spelling exercises in the student textbook. Few of the English teachers have bought foreign books that teach a series of capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar and composition to help their students due to lack of funds.

The teachers seem to agree that spelling errors are committed because students lack interest in learning or knowing the correct spellings of the English words, the teachers’ attitude towards students’ errors and the way teachers give feedback to students’ written work.

Table 9. Analysis of the test from the words dictated by the teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark Range Earned</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The graph clearly reflects that 10 students got marks which were between 0-4 out of a possible 20 which represents 20% of the population. Fifteen students had marks ranging from 5-8 out of a possible 20, representing 30% of the population. For 9-12 there were 10 students which is 20% of the total population. Five students got marks ranging from 13-16 and the last five students had marks ranging from 17-20.

4.5 SUMMARY

This chapter has been largely about the presentation, analysis and discussion of the data obtained from the study undertaken by the researcher. The data was presented in the form of a bar graph, tables and narrative reports. Some of the major points derived were that the causes of spelling errors were due to the lack of commitment by students to learn spelling of new words, interference of mother tongue and lack of materials to use when teaching and learning. The next and final chapter will focus on summary, conclusion and recommendations.
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented, analysed and data obtained in this study. This chapter contains the summary, research based conclusions and recommendations generated by this study.

5.2 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This summary section condenses together the major findings of the research based on the data presented in the previous chapter on Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion. The results suggest that the major causes of spelling errors are lack of interest on the part of learners, lack of learning materials and resources and the interference of mother tongue. It also appears that pupils do not take the learning of spelling seriously as noted in some of responses from the questionnaires.

Furthermore, it was noted that lack of learning materials and resources also affected pupils’ performance in spelling. The school does not have adequate resources to help pupils learn spellings and they depend on one textbook.

The teachers are also to blame as some of them admitted that they do not pay particular attention to spelling when marking pupils’ work. The majority of the teachers attributed the cause of spelling errors to mother tongue interference as most pupils confuse Shona language rules to English language rules.
5.3 CONCLUSION

From the findings highlighted above, the researcher came up with the following conclusions.

English spelling is an area that is difficult to master, especially to second language speakers of English. This is due to the fact that English is derived from different languages and this has made it to lack a uniform rule to spell words.

From the analysis of the focused group discussion the researcher discovered that the teaching of spelling skills was mainly ignored in the teaching process. Teachers mainly focused on the teaching of language skills like reading, writing, speaking and listening. Also from the analysis of the teachers’ questionnaires the researcher drew the conclusion that teachers neglect the spelling errors of students in their written work.

Furthermore, the curriculum of the education system in the country does not encourage teaching spelling of English words in detail. Therefore, the most English textbooks give more attention for other skills and neglect practical spelling exercises.

The researcher also concluded that English is a complex language and this makes it difficult for students to spell words correctly. Some words are not spelt the way they sound and others have silent letters. This inconsistency misleads students to write words with many spellings coupled with the students’ lack of interest to learn spelling as shown in the pupils’ questionnaire.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research findings, the researcher would like to make recommendations to the teachers, pupils and the school.
5.4.1 To the Teachers

The teachers should develop and integrate spelling lessons into the language teaching in reading, listening, speaking, writing, grammar, and vocabulary and dictionary skills (Langan 2011). This helps students to develop their spelling skills. Also when teaching the teacher should keep spelling instruction focused on helping the pupil write correct spellings and develop pupils phonetic awareness as the pupil needs to be able to recognise and distinguish sounds. Teachers should encourage and motivate pupils to use correct spelling always.

5.4.2 To the students

The students should practice daily reading and writing as good readers tend to be good spellers (Gallow and Morrison 2012). They may learn and practice the common spelling patterns using games as groups. Students should also give attention to learn the spelling of words in order to avoid misunderstandings.

5.4.3 To the school

The school should try to source more textbooks and learning material. This will help both the students and the teachers to improve their learning and teaching methods as the textbook can be used as reference for exercises.

5.5 SUMMARY

This chapter is a summary of the research project undertaken by the researcher. It also highlighted the conclusions drawn from the research as well as give recommendations to the school, pupils and teachers.
REFERENCE

CONVENTIONAL SOURCES


**ONLINE SOURCES**


7. [http://www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)

APPENDIX
APPENDIX A: Request to conduct a research study

Bindura University of Science Education
Faculty of Science Education
P. Bag 1020
BINDURA
Zimbabwe

SOS Hermann Gmeiner High School
P. Bag 998
Bindura

Dear Mrs Masarira

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am Samantha Kanyepi, a final year student at Bindura University of Science Education pursuing a Post Graduate Diploma in Education. As part of the university policy students are supposed to carry out a research in this case my research seeks to assess the causes of spelling errors with reference to ZJC pupils at SOS Hermann Gmeiner High School.

I am kindly asking for permission to distribute questionnaires to students and teachers as well as interviewing some teachers to make this project a success. The views provided will be used only for
academic purposes and shall be treated with the greatest degree of confidentiality. Names, employee codes or job numbers are not required.

Yours Sincerely

S. Kanyepi

Email: skanyepi@gmail.com

Cell: +263773 847 367

Appendix B: Students' Questionnaire

Instructions
1) Do not write your name on the questionnaire.
2) Please indicate by ticking in the appropriate box.

Section A: Demographics

1) Could you please state your sex

M    F

Section B: General Questions

1) How often do you care about the spelling of words when you write?

Sometimes
Usually
Always
Never

2) How often do you commit spelling errors?

Sometimes
Rarely
Most often
Never
3) How much important is it to know the correct spelling of the words?

- Not important
- To some extent important
- Very important

4) How do you feel about learning the spelling of words?

- It is not important
- It is important
- It is very important

5) What is your main problem in learning spelling?

- Lack of materials
- Lack of interest to learn
- Lack of good teachers
- All

6) What do you do if you do not know how to spell a word correctly?

- Write it as I feel
- Ask my friends
- Ask my teachers
- Check it up in the dictionary

7) What are the causes for your spelling errors?

- The difference between written and spoken English
Appendix C: Teachers’ Questionnaire

Section A: Demographics

1) Could you please state your
i) Position .................................................................
ii) Department ...........................................................

2) Working experience
☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1-3 years
☐ 4-10 years ☐ More than 10 years

Section B: General Questions

3) How much are your students interested in learning spelling?
Not interested ☐ Interested ☐ Very much interested ☐

4) How weak are your students in their use of correct spelling?
Very weak ☐ To some extent weak ☐

5) How often do your students commit spelling errors?
Sometimes ☐ Usually ☐ Always ☐
6) What kind of errors do you point out?

All [ ] I consider major, but not minor ones [ ] Only few major errors that interfere and hampers communication [ ] Other [ ]

7) What do you think should be done to help students spell words correctly?

[THANK YOU]