

A Diagnostic Study on English Spelling Errors Among the Elementary School Children in India

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Abstract—Learning the four skills of the English language is a requirement for pupils to utilize the language effectively, given the importance of learning it for both school and profession. Spelling – an important part of writing skill – is considered to be fundamental for written texts. The real meaning of a piece of writing can be changed by spelling mistakes, making it more challenging to understand. In India, teaching spelling is frequently overlooked while teaching English as a second language. The research attempts to determine the current level of spelling proficiency among Indian primary school students as well as the gaps and issues they encounter when spelling English words. The research approach used for this investigation was a form of descriptive survey. Children attending Jalpaiguri Municipal Corporation's elementary school in West Bengal, India, served as the study's sample. Normal probability curves and Ogive were created to analyze the frequency distribution of the English Diagnostic Test results. Central tendencies of the sample and sub-samples were studied. According to the study, spelling proficiency among elementary school students differs significantly depending on whether they attend government or non-government schools, even though there is no statistically significant difference between them based on gender and the medium of instruction they receive.

Index Terms—EFL, ESL, language skills, writing skills, spelling errors

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language can be difficult for beginners because word pronunciation and spelling in their native language follow certain conventions. As the structures of a foreign language vary from those of their mother tongue, learning them might be challenging because they try to adapt the structures of their mother tongue to the foreign language (Nor & Rashid, 2018). The language intuition of students must be altered in several ways to fit the knowledge of the foreign language, which necessitates developmental phases and repeated exposure to the language (Kocatepe, 2017; Zuriyani & Mohamed Ismail, 2019). While learning, the individual encounters sounds that are dissimilar from the ones they already know intuitively, and is obligated to make assumptions about their function.

Given the significance of mastering English for both school and career, acquiring the four skills of the English language is a prerequisite for students to use the language appropriately. It may be said that the English written form (spelling) poses a challenge to the majority of students because it has to convey their concepts and thoughts, coupled with the detrimental repercussions of not being able to use it well and acquire linguistic skills. Therefore, the correct use of spelling is regarded as crucial for written texts. Spelling errors can alter the actual message of a piece of writing, making it difficult to comprehend. Therefore, it is crucial to spell words correctly to express the content's true meaning. According to Babayiit and Stainthorp (2010), grammatical and phonological abilities significantly affect spelling efficiency. Thus, it can be said that pupils need to be proficient in spelling, which is a fundamental talent. Correct spelling assists writers in conveying their concepts and ideas within a comprehensive method that is simple for readers to comprehend. Appropriate spelling is required for good writing skills.

A person who wants to communicate through writing should have adequate content and correct forms of English words that affect writing. Knowing these (spelling, grammar, etc.) helps readers to understand the writing material well. Thus, the writer must know how and what to say in his writing. When he writes, he must use the correct form. The use of correct spellings provides good communication between writers and readers. Wrong spelling causes communication breakdown. Readers who read wrongly spelt words may understand the words in a wrong way and he may be confused to understand the messages of the writers.

Therefore, knowing and using the correct spelling of words helps create good communication between readers and writers. It is important for people to know how to spell English words. A child who does not know how to spell English

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words commits spelling errors that can cause a communication breakdown. Poor spelling can impede educational achievement, employment, interpersonal relationships, and self-esteem. Even students who speak English sometimes commit spelling errors when they write what they say or what others say. Therefore, incorrect spelling in the students' test, class work, homework, assignments, and lecture notes seem to mislead teachers to understand the students' answers incorrectly. The absence of adequate reference materials on how to learn English spelling for practical use in our local context has also prompted researchers to sort out the reasons why students tend to make spelling errors in their writing.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A considerable number of researches have been carried out in 'spelling error in English' and in most of the cases it was found that the student's mastery over the skills was not up to the mark. Pressey (1965) conducted a statistical research and found that stringy sentences had the highest percentage of errors. It demonstrated that the areas of difficulty felt most by the students were agreement between subject and verb, usage of incorrect tense forms, etc. In his study, Wyatt (1973) demonstrated that the areas with the highest percentage of errors include sentence structure, punctuation, verb groups, and non-verb groupings. Paulose (1975) studied and concluded that lexical errors showed the highest percentage of incidence and that girls commit significantly less errors than boys. Carl James (2001) conducted a study on English errors committed by foreign learners and found out that native speakers of English committed more serious problem in English. Bakshi (1978) conducted a study on the Punjabi speaking learners of English and concluded that in error analysis inter language is a broader theory as it is the only hypothesis which can account for inter-lingual, intra-lingual and developmental errors. It was observed that the students over generalized the rules of English syntax owing to inter-lingual and intra-lingual interference. Apart from grammatical errors, the students also made errors in spelling. Amma (1986) conducted a study of the errors committed by secondary school pupils in written Hindi with reference to certain selected structure. The major finding was the minimum error was seen in the case of spelling (24.79%). Supriya (1986) made an analysis of spelling errors in the written English of secondary school Pupils. Urban and English medium subjects were found to be committing less errors in written English than their counterparts, and sex of the pupils is found to have no association with the incidence of errors. Ghosh (1976) carried out a study of backwardness in English in the secondary schools of West Bengal among the pupils of classes II to IX. The study concluded that 32% to 34% of children of West Bengal schools were backward in English. Backwardness in different aspects of English in order of their intensity were noted in the use of capital letters and punctuations, comprehension, usage, spelling, vocabulary and sentence construction. The results of an experimental study conducted by Baskran (1989) revealed that there was no appreciable difference between the experimental group and the controlled group's rates of orthographic errors. According to a research by Jayashree (1989), rural kids' comprehension and vocabulary skills lagged below those of their urban counterparts. Another conclusion was that sex has no bearing on one's ability to spell. Dey (1991) made an attempt at a study and discovered some linguistic factors to assess the students' proficiency in English in areas like vocabulary, spelling, stylistic transformation and alteration derivational structure, applied grammar, and contextual meaning with the goal of identifying significant mean differences in English attainment sex and location wise. In order to identify and describe the English writing errors made by Assamese language learners at the higher secondary level, Sharma (1991) concentrated his research on the challenges of learning English as a second language. It was discovered that roughly 73% of the sentences the students wrote contained one or more errors. The following areas saw the most frequent errors: spelling, verb tenses, passive voice, articles, and prepositions. Ramamoorthy (1992) examined the misspellings made by youngsters in middle school and discovered that word length, comparable sounds, words with silent letters, and words with consonant clusters were the most frequent causes. According to a research by Shankweiler (1996), students in private high schools have lower levels of spelling proficiency than students in public high schools. Boras (2003) discovered that the spelling growth of adult learners was the same as that of students in grade VII. Dua (2004) in his study found out that there did not exist any significant differences in the spelling performance of student's gender.

In a study, Pittman (2007) discovered a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups. The study also shown how crucially important phonology, morphology, and orthography are to spelling. Muriungi et al. (2011) in his study found the nature and typology of errors in primary school pupils. They concluded that the primary school pupils have a problem in the area of spelling and phonetics. In a group of young people who had been diagnosed with cognitive impairment, Venkatesan and Holla (2011) initiated a study with the aim of launching an investigation by survey for the creation and administration of a graded spelling list for identification of various aspects of spelling hardships. The significant conclusion was that, when it came to the gender variable, the results of the girls in this sample were practically equal to those of the boys. It can be decided that the impact of school reform on kids' spelling abilities does not show up as a statistically meaningful variable. Joye et al. (2020) conducted a study on children with Developmental Language Disorder and found that children with DLD have issues with morphological endings in English, which are challenges that were first seen in their early oral language and persist into late primary school. Khan (2011) carried out a study with the goal of examining the general level of spelling proficiency. The outcome revealed a significant deficiency in spelling errors. Tamang (2012) conducted a research project with the goal of identifying the typical errors students make when writing in English, particularly those related to spelling, grammar,

vocabulary, and syntax, as well as evaluating the serious errors caused by factors such as gender, location, and management. When comparing the mean scores of students from government and private schools, it was discovered that there was no discernible difference between the mean scores of boys and girls. In a study on youngsters who spoke Hindi, Lahiri (2015) discovered that the majority of the errors were phonologically comparable to the proper spelling. In a study by Arora and Vyas (2017) of standard III and IV pupils, the researchers discovered no appreciable gender differences in the students' abilities to spell words correctly in English.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

When teaching English, spelling corrections should be the major focus. Incorrect word pronunciation results from poor spelling, which also affects the English sentence structure. Regardless of the fact that spelling is crucial for creating effective writing, language schools often prioritize educating vocabulary acquisition, grammar, speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Spelling training is frequently neglected in these programmes. The researchers, therefore, contented that spelling in the Indian context has not received the attention it deserves. So, the main goals of the research are to address the following research questions –

- What is the present level of spelling ability among the children of elementary schools of India.
- What are the gaps and problems children face in spelling English words.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i) To study the existing level of spelling ability among the children of elementary school.
- ii) To study the spelling ability in English among elementary school children in relation to their gender.
- iii) To study the spelling ability in English among elementary school children in relation to their management of schools (government and non-government).
- iv) To study the spelling ability in English among elementary school children in relation to their medium of instructions in schools (Hindi and Bengali).

V. HYPOTHESES

On the basis of the objectives the following null hypotheses were formulated for the study:

- Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the spelling ability for written English of elementary school in case of boys and girls.
- Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the spelling ability for written English of elementary school children in relation to government and non- government schools.
- Ho₃: There is no significant difference in the spelling ability for written English of elementary school children in relation to medium of instruction variations.

VI. METHODOLOGY

The method of the study designed for the present investigation was descriptive survey type. Assuming the mastery of the students in language, a diagnostic test in English spelling was administered to the IV grade elementary school students of Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal, India, to ascertain the level of competency of the students, to determine their spelling ability, to identify their difficulties in spelling, and to determine whether the students differed in spelling abilities due to their gender, school management, and medium of instruction variation.

A descriptive study design was considered appropriate in the context of the nature and objectives of this study. The descriptive study collected three types of information: what exists, what we want, and how to achieve the goals. In the present study, neither a historical trend nor any manipulation of the independent variable was needed. Hence, the descriptive study was adopted on the principles of status-quo and this is ex-post facto study type as the study will concern itself only on “what is” i.e. what exists at the present has been considered.

A. Sample

The sample of the study was chosen from among elementary school children of the Jalpaiguri Municipal Corporation of West Bengal, India. First, the investigators determined the total number of elementary schools in the Jalpaiguri Municipal Corporation District, including government and private schools, from both Hindi and Bengali medium schools. In the municipal corporation, there are three medium Hindi schools, of which one is private and two are government schools. There are 16 Bengali medium schools, of which 7 are private schools and 9 are government schools. For the purpose of the present study, 4 schools were selected as samples. As there was only one Hindi medium private school, this school was taken as the sample. Three other schools - one government Hindi medium school, one government Bengali medium school, and one private Bengali medium school—were selected through stratified random sampling of equal size.

After the schools were selected, 30 students from each school, consisting of 15 girls and 15 boys, were selected again by stratified random sampling of equal size from among the students of class IV who scored within 50%-60% marks in

their last English test to maintain homogeneity of the sample. A detailed description of the samples is provided in the schematic design below.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHY OF THE POPULATION

Sl. No.	Name of the school	Medium	Management Type	No. of girls	No. of boys	Total sample
1	R.R Prathamik Vidyalaya	Bengali	Government	15	15	30
2	Jalpaiguri Maroari Hindi Higher Secondary School	Hindi	Government	15	15	30
3	Asalata Basu Vidyalaya	Bengali	Private	15	15	30
4	Ursuline Hindi School	Hindi	Private	15	15	30
				60	60	120

B. The Tools of the Study

For the present study a standardized test “Diagnostic Spelling Test” developed by Gupta and Narang (2005) and published by National Psychological Corporation, Agra, (India) was used. The test was standardized to assess the performance of a child’s spelling in English. The test comprised 35 items (words). Learning disabled children when are extremely deficient in spellings and make three kinds of errors (i) Dysphonetic (e.g. seid for side) (ii) Dyseidetic errors (e.g. Sid for side) (iii) Mixed type makes both type of error. Such similar errors would classify children who either need remediation through the visual modality or phonetic (vocal) mode. The reliability of the test was found to be 0.79, using the test-retest method, and the validity of the test was found by correlating the test scores with class test scores at 0.81.

C. Techniques of Data Analysis

The questionnaire for the English spelling test was used for data collection. The investigators used descriptive and inferential methods of data analysis. To assess the frequency distribution of the English Diagnostic Test scores, and normal probability curves were constructed. Measures of central tendencies of sample and sub-samples were studied. A study of normality was conducted to determine the extent to which the score distribution of the Diagnostic Test varied from a normal distribution. For graphical representation, a frequency polygon was used to study the normality. To study the effect of intervening variables, an analysis of the score distribution according to the intervening variables was performed with the help of Ogive.

VII. RESULTS

To interpret and make inferential decision, the investigators used frequency distribution table showing class intervals and frequencies of different sub-samples therein. Frequency polygon with smoothed frequency curve and Ogive were used for descriptive study. The ‘t’ test was used to find out the significant differences in contrasting inter variables like gender, management, and medium. With the help of this statistical measure, the obtained ‘t’ value and table value was compared and finally, it was concluded whether there exists a significant difference between the variables or not.

TABLE 2
STUDY OF THE SCORE DISTRIBUTION OF THE DIAGNOSTIC TEST

C-I	Gender		Management		Medium		Total
	Boys	Girls	Govt.	Non-govt.	Bengali	Hindi	
31-35	4	5	0	9	9	0	8
24-30	5	6	3	10	10	11	11
21-25	6	6	13	10	11	17	14
15-20	16	16	24	14	12	30	32
11-15	14	14	17	10	9	2	28
06-10	13	12	3	7	8	0	24
0-5	2	1	0	0	1	0	3
Total	60	60	60	60	60	60	120

The distribution of scores presented in table revealed that the diagnostic test scores range from 3 to 34. It was observed that maximum number of students (32) had the score range from 15-20 and there was a gradual decreasing of scores towards the upper and lower end of the distribution. It was also observed in case of all sub-samples. But maximum frequencies were clustered at the lower end of the model class interval indicating these by skewed distribution of the scores. The distribution of scores was put into a frequency polygon with a smoothed frequency curve superimposed on it as presented in the figure (i). The graphical representation of the scores on the diagnostic test in terms of cumulative frequency percentage has also been presented in figure (ii). From figure (i) it was inferred that the curve was positively skewed than the normal curve. This was caused due to the sampling error. From figure (ii) of ogive the percentage of students above and below mean score was obtained and it was observed that 16.45 % of students were above the mean and 15.28 % students were above the midpoint of the distribution. This also supported the earlier findings relating to the skewness of the curve.

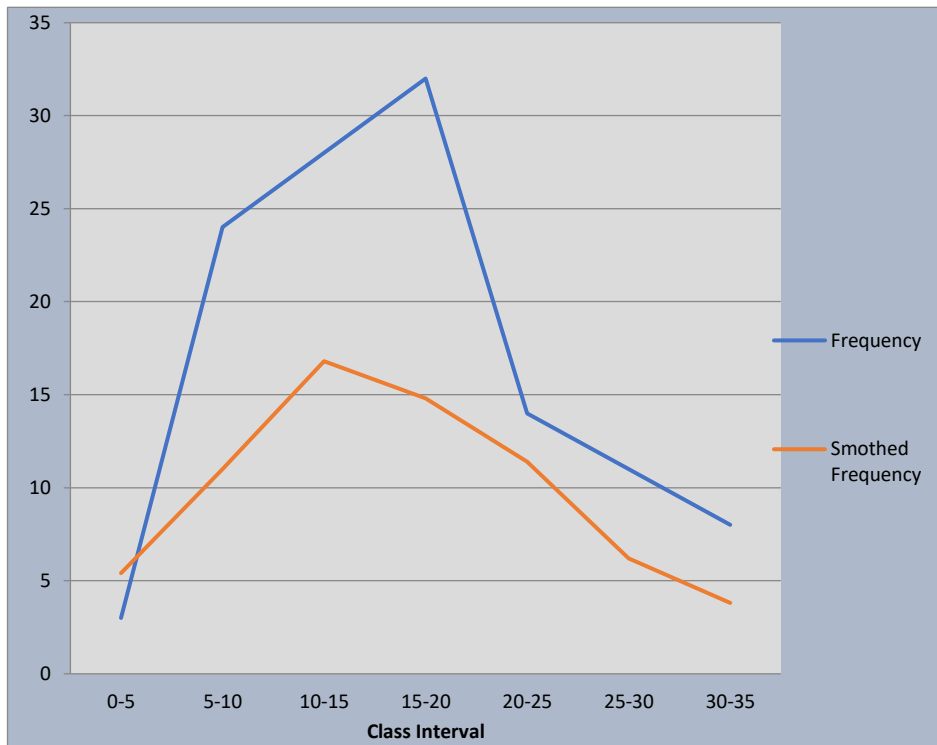


Figure 1. Frequency Polygon of the Scores of English Spelling Test With Smoothed Frequency Curve Super Imposed

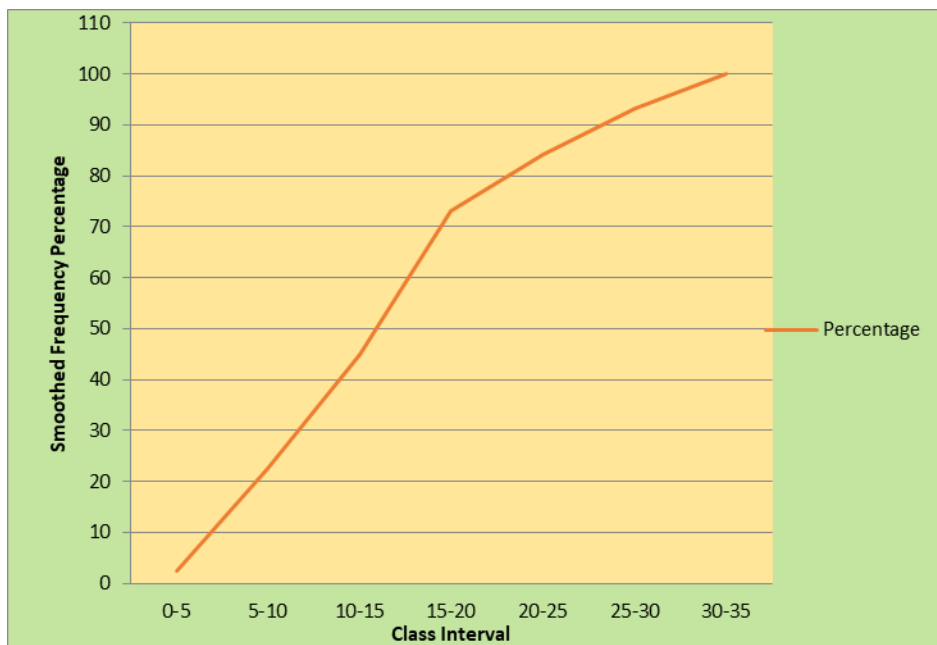


Figure 2. Ogive Showing the Scores in English Spelling Test With Regard to Total Students

A. Sub- Sample Analyses on the Scores

As stated earlier the sample was split into sub sample in relation to gender, management, and medium of school variations. Thus the following sub-sample were built into the study namely:

- Gender (Boys vs. Girls)
- Management (Govt. vs. non govt. schools)
- Medium (Bengali vs. Hindi medium schools)

Attempts were made to calculate significant difference into contrast by application of the test of significance of difference between two means of two independent paragraphs. The details of the result were presented in the following paragraphs.

B. Study of Spelling Ability in English Due to Gender Variation

One of the objectives of this investigation was to study the impact of gender differences on English spelling ability. As such, the hypothesis formulated in this respect was that “There is no significant difference in the spelling ability of elementary school children for written English in the case of boys and girls” was put to test, through the test of the significance of the difference between the means of the two groups as an application to two independent samples. The results are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
SUMMARY OF THE ‘T’ RATIO ON SPELLING ABILITY DUE TO GENDER VARIATION

Sample	Variables	N	M	SD	SE _D	‘t’	Remarks
Gender	Boys	60	16	3.35	0.51	1.78	Not significant
	Girls	60	16.91	2.43			

‘t’ for df 118 at 0.05= 1.98 and 0.01=2.62

The table value of ‘t’ for the df (118) was higher than the calculated value of ‘t’ (1.78). Hence, this result is not significant. Thus, the null hypothesis ‘There is no significant difference in the spelling ability of elementary school children for written English in the case of boys and girls’ could not be rejected. The null hypothesis was rather accepted, leading to the conclusion that the scores of the English diagnostic test for boys are equal to the scores of girls. Hence, it may be concluded that the variable of gender had no role in the English diagnostic test scores.

C. Study of Spelling Ability in English Due to Management of School Variation

Another objective of the investigation was to study the impact of management differences on the scores on the English spelling diagnostic test. As such, the null hypothesis formulated in this respect was that ‘There is no significant difference in the spelling ability of the children of govt. and non-govt. schools’ was put for the test. Mean scores of govt. school and non-govt. school children were put through the test of significance. The value of ‘t’ is listed in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4
SUMMARY OF THE ‘T’ RATIO OF SPELLING ABILITY IN ENGLISH DUE TO MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOL VARIATION

Sample	Variables	N	M	SD	SE _D	‘t’	Remarks
Management	Govt.	60	17.16	3.31	0.81	3.81	Significant at 0.01 level
	Non-Govt.	60	20.25	5.93			

‘t’ for df 118 at 0.05= 1.98 and 0.01=2.62

Table value of ‘t’ for df (118) for govt. school and non-govt. school children was less than the calculated value of ‘t’ (3.81). Therefore, the ‘t’ is significant at both 0.5 and 0.01 level. Hence, the null hypothesis ‘There is no significant difference in the spelling ability of the children of govt. and non-govt. schools’ is rejected. It is concluded that school management variation has a significant effect on the spelling ability of elementary school students in English. A higher mean score is in favour of non-govt. schools, thus showing non-govt. school children are better at spelling in English. Hence, it may be concluded that the management variable has a significant effect on spelling ability in English.

D. Study of Spelling Ability Due to Medium of Instruction Variation

The next objective was to study the effect of medium differences on English spelling ability. As such the null hypothesis formulated in this respect was that ‘There is no significant difference in the spelling ability for written English of children in relation to medium of instruction variations’ was put to test. The mean scores of the Bengali and Hindi medium schools were used to test for significance. The value of the ‘t’ is listed in the table below.

TABLE 5
SUMMARY OF THE ‘T’ RATIO ON DIAGNOSTIC TEST DUE TO MEDIUM OF SCHOOL VARIATION

Sample	Variables	N	M	SD	SE _D	‘t’	Remarks
Medium	Bengali	60	20	5.82	0.9	0.64	Not significant
	Hindi	60	20.58	3.9			

‘t’ for df 118 at 0.05= 1.98 and 0.01=2.62

The table value of ‘t’ for the df (118) in case of Bengali medium schools v/s Hindi medium school is less than the calculated value of ‘t’ (0.64). Hence, the null hypothesis could not be significant. Thus, the null hypothesis “There is no significant difference in the spelling ability for written English of children in relation to medium of instruction variations” could not be rejected. The null hypothesis was rather accepted coming to the conclusion that the scores of English diagnostic Test of Bengali medium are equal to the scores of Hindi medium school children. Hence, it may be concluded that the medium of school has no significant effect on spelling ability. The observed difference in the mean score of the two variables was due to sampling error only.

VIII. DISCUSSION

The study provides insight into the spelling ability of children, both boys and girls studying in government and non-government schools of Bengali and Hindi medium located in West Bengal State, India. The study revealed that the

spelling ability score of children gradually decreases from the peak to the upper and lower ends of the distribution and thus follows a normal distribution. With regard to gender and spelling ability, the study shows that there is no significant difference between the spelling abilities of boys and girls in elementary schools. This finding is in conformity with other researchers concluded by Paulose (1975), Dua (2004), Jayashree (1989), Dey (1991), Venkatesan and Holla (2011), Supriya (1986). The study also shows that the medium of instruction in the schools (Bengali and Hindi) does not have any impact on the spelling ability of children of elementary schools as in both cases the calculated table value for 't' are significantly less than the table value revealing that gender and medium of instruction have no impact on the spelling ability of the children of elementary schools. This finding is in conformity with other researchers conducted by Khan (2011), Supriya (1986), Bakshi (1976), Ghosh (1976), Amma (1986). However, the calculated 't' value for the spelling ability scores of children reading in government and non-government schools is significantly higher than the tabulated value, showing the difference in favour of children studying in non-government schools. This finding is in conformity with other researchers concluded by Tamang (2012) and Shankweiler (1996). Hence, we can infer that elementary school children studying in non-government schools have better English spelling than government-managed school children.

IX. CONCLUSION

It was observed from the study that spelling ability is normally distributed among elementary school children. At the same time, it is also found from the study that although there is no significant difference in spelling ability of elementary school children in relation to their gender and medium of instruction, there is a significant difference in spelling ability in relation to their type of school management, that is, govt. and non-govt. schools. As it is evident that although the spelling ability is normally distributed, but there is difference of spelling ability between govt. and non-govt. schoolchildren and govt. managed schools should give greater importance to this attribute. The govt. managed schools should train English language teachers more effectively and design activities for learning and practising English spelling in English classrooms and homes. The schools may also arrange different type of competition like 'Spelling Bee' for the improvement of spelling of students of the govt. managed schools. Writing is an important aspect of communication in human life, and correct spelling is of utmost importance in writing. Therefore, the govt. managed schools should take measures to improve the spelling ability of children.

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